

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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Tomorrow's Israel

Dear Brethren,

Many of you have traveled to places you never dreamed of because you keep the Festivals of God. It may be places in your own country, or in other countries around the world. That is one of those side benefits for obeying God's instructions. The day will come when people from all countries will travel to Jerusalem to keep the Feasts. It is not logical, due to logistics, that everyone on earth will do so every year, but to go to Jerusalem at least once in one's lifetime will no doubt be a desire for everyone. There will be hundreds of other sites around the world for people to keep the Feasts and learn to fear the Eternal God always, just as we do today (Deuteronomy 14:23).

Over the years, God has blessed me with the opportunity to travel to many countries, and I have come to appreciate the natural beauty and resources every country offers. Some have greater resources than others, but every country has wonderful potential. And the greatest resource is the people, especially as guided and blessed by their Creator.

Have you ever considered the reward you might be given? The pattern of rewards is instructive: Christ will be King over all the earth, David will be king over Israel, the Twelve Apostles will each rule over one of the tribes of Israel, and others will be given rulership over varying numbers of cities (Zechariah 14:9; Ezekiel 37:24; Matthew 19:28; Luke 19:11-19).

We might assume from this pyramidal pattern that some will be given a single city and report to someone over five or ten cities, and that others might have lesser positions within a single city. That, of course, is speculation. But where might these cities be that you will help govern for the King of kings?

I imagine that most people envision ruling somewhere close to where they came from, but Christ will not leave it up to

us to decide. We must be willing to go where we are sent if we want to be in His kingdom. Remember the example of Abraham, the father of the faithful, who responded to God's command to leave his home and family and go where he had never before traveled or lived.

One place where many may not want to go is the Middle East, but do you realize that is where much of the now-scattered human house of Israel will then be living? Jeremiah tells us that both Israel and Judah will be brought back to the Promised Land when Christ returns. "For behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "that I will bring back from captivity My people *Israel* and *Judah*," says the LORD. "And I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it" (Jeremiah 30:3).

Upon reading this, some consider the populations of the Israelite nations and wonder, *How will they all fit there?* Even if only 10 percent survive the tribulation and Day of the Lord, that is a number in the tens of millions.

Yesterday's Blessings

You can fit the modern state of Israel into Great Britain seven-and-a-half times, New Zealand more than nine times, California 15 times, Italy almost 16 times, France 23 times, and Iran 59 times—even Taiwan and Vancouver Island are larger ("Israel Size Comparison Maps," *IRIS.org*, accessed January 11, 2024). So, where will everyone fit?

Our vision of the Promised Land may be based on assumptions and misconceptions rather than on what God promised. "On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates" (Genesis

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15:18). The Euphrates River flows through the middle of Iraq, and this opens up far more territory than today's tiny state of Israel. Israel's exact border in the future is not fully known, as the description "from the Nile to the Euphrates" does not give us precise limits in every direction.

To most of us, the Middle East seems to be nothing but desolate, inhospitable desert land. Based on the pictures we've seen, that part of the world appears, frankly, unattractive. But has that always been the case? And will it be that way in the future?

It is well known among historians that climate has changed over the millennia. When God brought Israel out of Egypt into the "Promised Land," He called it "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:17; 33:3). The spies who searched out the land confirmed God's promise: "We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit" (Numbers 13:27). They even brought back evidence, as they "cut down a branch with one cluster of grapes; they carried it between two of them on a pole. They also brought some of the pomegranates and figs" (v. 23). And Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh were so pleased with the land east of the Jordan that they chose to settle there.

The land around the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, now within Iraq, was once considered the "cradle of civilization"—part of what was called the "Fertile Crescent." Lebanon was also part of that crescent, though today we find it "difficult to imagine, with all the exploitation, that the Lebanese rural landscape was once a giant mythical, biblical, and now historical forest" ("A Brief History of the Cedar Trees of Lebanon," *TheCultureTrip.com*, March 22, 2017).

Tomorrow's Beauty

People settled in the Middle East for a reason—and do we think that our Creator would choose an undesirable location for His earthly throne? Nay, my friends: Jerusalem and its surroundings will be the glory of the world! As climate has changed in the past, so we know that climate and topography will change in the future. "For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert" (Isaiah 35:6).

Whatever God has in mind, we must not let our thinking be limited by today's boundaries, topography, or climate. Nor should we think that the boundaries set at the beginning of the Millennium will be static over the full thousand years. Speaking of Israel, God tells us that "your waste and desolate places, and the land of your destruction, will even now be too small for the inhabitants; and those who swallowed you up will be far away. The children you will have, after you have lost the others, will say again in your ears, 'The place is too small for me; give me a place where I may dwell'" (Isaiah 49:19–20).

I have been impressed by the beauty I have seen in my travels to Asia, Africa, Australia, and Central and South America, and I have found the same in my trips throughout North America. God has created spectacularly beautiful places all over the earth. There are rich lands everywhere for all peoples. Clearly, there are more desirable places and less desirable places today, but the problem is not topography or climate, although these can pose challenges. The problem is mankind's sinful nature.

One fact is certain: The beauty of those imbued with God's Holy Spirit knows no bounds. God loves all people, and He will give special blessings to all. He will remove the great destroyer who has held the world captive and institute in his stead a government that truly administers righteousness and justice.

No longer will there be the "1 percent" who have vastly more wealth than they can use while much of the 99 percent lives in abject poverty. Human ingenuity, people living by the way of give, and God's abundant blessings will unlock prosperity for all. The transformation of our world will be astounding!

The Holy Days and Festivals reveal to us God's master plan for all humanity. When the last trumpet sounds, the promised restoration of all things will begin (Acts 3:19–21). No matter where we are assigned by our Savior and King, it is going to be exciting!



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Children and Their Example

We are thankful for the many young people who are growing up in the Church and are faithfully following in the footsteps of their parents. How different it is today than it was when many young people from “out in the world” flocked to the truth; many of us who went to Ambassador College in the 1960s had no family connection to anyone in the Church of God, though this changed rapidly in the years that followed. Yes, some still come along on their own, but the numbers are small.

Consider: Why are we seeing so few teens or young adults coming from the world, compared to what the Church experienced in previous decades? What has changed? Are young people no longer able to be inspired by God’s truth?

The answers to these questions are complex. Technologies have advanced dramatically in the last half century. In 1964, people were limited to the handful of television stations available in their area, and until the late ’60s, the Work was exclusively carried out on daily radio—but you could drive almost anywhere in North America and hear the penetrating voice of Mr. Herbert Armstrong or his son several times every evening.

Today, there are scores of television stations accessible to most people, and satellite radio is replacing more traditional broadcasting. But while satellite radio has hundreds of stations to choose from, religious programming is reserved for areas where “channel-surfers” would rarely go. The same is happening, though to a lesser degree, on cable and satellite television. The Internet allows us to go places we have never gone before, but the sheer volume of “clutter” makes it difficult for the Work to reach people through that medium.

Changes in Education

School systems have become far more hostile to biblical values. It has become popular to be anything but normal, as Mr. Wallace Smith pointed out in his telecast “The War Against Normal.” For too many, any mention of God or the Bible means it is time to “tune out.”

Herein lies another transition that has occurred over the last half-century. Many have come to the realization that anti-God agendas are being funneled into the minds of impressionable children. Many parents are understandably ditching public schools in favor of homeschooling. When I

was growing up, I did not know of anyone homeschooled; today, a very large percentage of teens attending our North American Living Youth Camps are homeschooled.

Public schools expose children to a greater variety of friends and ideas—not all of which are helpful. That is part of why parents want to protect their children, and this concern reflects the meaning of the Days of Unleavened Bread: “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” (1 Corinthians 5:6).

On the other hand, praying to His Father, Jesus said of His disciples, “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15). Balancing the two is difficult. Although leaven is most often used in a negative sense, Jesus said it can also spread positively: “To what shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened” (Luke 13:20–21).

Because of widespread homeschooling, many of our children—not all—have fewer contacts with those outside the Church. Homeschool associations, sports activities, and neighbors provide contact with outsiders, but are not the same as interacting with a large variety of peers in a setting where each class and activity has a different mix of students. For good or ill, even riding the bus introduces you to neighbors you might not otherwise interact with. That’s how I was introduced to the truth!

Whether from technological changes, hostility to biblical values, or limited interaction with those of differing beliefs, fewer young people are being attracted to the truth than in years past. So, we must ask: Is there anything we should do to attract more young people? I want to focus the remainder of this article on what we as individuals can do—and how we can help our youth.

Evangelism or Example?

A large percentage of Church members (both young and old) were initially introduced to the truth by a family member, friend, neighbor, or coworker. Yet this is hardly the whole story—I can assure you that, while I was *introduced* to the truth by the brother of a friend, I would never have *embraced* the truth had it not been for the resources the Church provided.

Sadly, the fact that many have been initially introduced to the truth by others has caused some to tout so-

called *personal evangelism*—an idea the Worldwide Church of God pushed onto God’s people while it was busy dismantling the Work. I remember one man telling me that there is no need for expensive television and magazines. After all, he suggested, if every member would bring in just one other person, it would double the size of the Church. That sounds simple enough, but it has never proven true in practice. More importantly, is that what Scripture says God wants us to do?

It is not for us to choose whom God calls. Our most persuasive arguments will not convert even one person. “For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, *as many as the Lord our God will call*” (Acts 2:39). “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (John 6:44). So, what to do?

Instead of becoming individual evangelists attempting to force-feed the truth to others, we are instructed, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). A light bulb does a good work of silently illuminating its surroundings—it is only when it is defective that it may emit an irritating buzz. We can have the same irritating effect on others when we try to force our beliefs on them.

Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God publicly, as He had been sent to do (Luke 4:43), but He also taught by example (John 13:15; 1 Peter 2:21). We never read of Him trying to convert even His family members, and it seems His brothers did not believe until He was resurrected (John 7:5; Acts 1:14). Likewise, Paul encouraged others to follow his example (1 Corinthians 11:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:9), and told Timothy, “Let no one despise your youth, but *be an example* to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12).

Do people recognize our example? It is clear that many do. Mr. Paul Shumway forwarded this report from the December family weekend in Trinidad: “Following our custom in God’s Church, we left the facility as clean as possible.... This apparently made quite an impression on management, with the caretaker’s wife making comments such as ‘We’ve never seen a group like yours!’ ‘Phenomenal’ and ‘One in a million!’ ... What a blessing to be able to let Christ’s light shine through our example!”

This illustrates how to apply what is often called the Golden Rule: “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12). Our example does not, of itself, bring someone to repentance—God must grant repentance, and the individual must respond to it of his own free will. However, example *is* noticed. Fruit from our example may not ripen in our personal timeline; some will remember during the Tribulation, and others when they are resurrected in the Great White Throne Judgment.

It is important for parents to teach their children the meaning of the Golden Rule and to do so by setting the example, themselves. Children must be taught in detail what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7. Young people will stand out from the crowd if they act courteously, are kind and polite, show compassion and respect for others, and live by the commandments. These characteristics cannot be hidden. Only God can call, but we can, by our example, facilitate His calling.

Be Confident in What You Believe

When we do set the right example, the need to explain ourselves will naturally arise. When it does, it is important that children—and adults, too—are confident and willing to speak the truth. For example, much of the angst that our children deal with is over the days we celebrate and those we do not. How do they explain why they don’t keep Christmas, Easter, Halloween, Valentine’s Day, and the like? How do they explain why they are taking off more than a week of school to keep the Feast of Tabernacles when the school year is only beginning?

The starting place is to know about the origins of this world’s holidays and why we must keep the biblical Holy Days. Our booklets on Christmas and Easter give abundant evidence that these days are not Christian. In response to a question, one does not need to give the history of these celebrations, but should be able to explain enough for the questioner to recognize a knowledgeable understanding. “I don’t observe Christmas because Jesus wasn’t born on December 25. Have you ever looked into the origins of the day? You might want to—you may be surprised.” That is merely one of a hundred appropriate answers. All one needs to do is keep it simple and honest. You don’t need to remember all the historical details, but you should know enough to show that there is a reason behind what you practice and don’t practice. If people want to know more, you can show them our website—the key is knowing when someone is opening that door and when someone is not.

The same is true about our observance of the biblical Festivals and Holy Days. One evening, several of our neighbors were sitting together with us, enjoying the end of the day, when one, out of the blue, asked about the Feast of Trumpets that she knew was coming up for us that week. I gave a short explanation of how the New Testament speaks of trumpets in reference to Christ’s return. One of the other neighbors surprised us with his biblical knowledge when he chimed in, “Oh yes, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven last plagues.”

Of course, no one was converted by my explanation, but it showed them that we have a biblical rationale behind what we believe and practice. (It is always good to use the New Testament when possible in answering these questions, as otherwise people see us as only “Old Covenant.”) Children need to have age-appropriate understanding of what we believe, as is

explained in Exodus 13:14–16 and elsewhere. And this brings us to a closely related point.

For the Hope That Is in You

We often refer to 1 Peter 3:15, highlighting the need to be able to answer others. But it is important that we understand the whole passage, as too often the first portion is passed over: “*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear...*”

That first part is important. Consider how we are surprised when someone who sits beside us on the Sabbath and Holy Days, observes the laws of clean and unclean meats, and by all outward appearance looks to be fully “with it,” suddenly leaves the Church. Peter’s admonition gives us a clue as to why this sometimes happens: It is possible to do the right things and still miss the mark.

Note what God reveals about one of Judah’s kings: “Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he became king.... And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, *but not with a loyal heart*” (2 Chronicles 25:1–2). He started well, but because his actions were not internalized truths, he eventually turned to idolatry (vv. 3–16).

Through His servant Peter, God tells us to set Him apart in our hearts. We know that only God can convert a carnal heart, but this tells us that we also have a part in the process. How can we sanctify God in our hearts? And how can we encourage our children to do so?

This is not something we can command. It is a process that must be *encouraged*, and it takes time. Have you ever seen a family with “perfect” young children who nevertheless rebelled once they were older and had a taste of freedom? They may have obeyed, but God’s ways were never in their hearts. Parents must allow their children to learn some lessons through experience. Yes, give instruction and punish when necessary—but give your children appropriate, age-specific freedom to make mistakes and learn that there are consequences for decisions, good or bad.

This process of setting God apart in our hearts involves teaching our children to know Him. We cannot assume they will believe in God and believe in His truth just because we say they should. We need to explain *why* God’s ways are sound. Parents can encourage their children to ask God to guide and correct them. This is best done through parental example of prayer at the dinner table and prayer before going to bed or after waking. Your example in prayer is crucial. And never forget the importance of eating meals together, as the table is where casual but important topics are often discussed. Mr. Rod McNair wrote of the importance of family meals in his May-June 2012 *Tomorrow’s World* article “Face Time,” which I encourage parents to read.

Peter next tells us to “always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15). This is at the heart of this article. Peter did *not* write that we have to give an answer for every question that arises, but that we need to know *why* we have chosen this way of life and be ready to *explain* why. Paul did this when he was before King Agrippa and Governor Festus (Acts 26:1–28). He was confident in the truth and not ashamed to speak it openly.

Jesus tells us that “whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38; cf. Luke 9:26). Children who perceive that their parents are ashamed of their beliefs will be reluctant to speak the truth boldly. For example, do we say, “We are going to a convention,” hoping that the questioner will not ask for specifics? Or do we boldly say instead, “We are going to keep the Feast of Tabernacles”? Are we secure within ourselves—not embarrassed by being out of step? There is a difference between “evangelizing” and responding truthfully. We are not to hide our lights under a basket (Matthew 5:14–16). And, of course, all of this will matter very little if our way of life does not match what we profess (Titus 1:16).

When a teen (or adult) is asked whether he is going to the football game Saturday afternoon, he can answer, “No, I am busy” or “No, I’ll be going to church.” Does he boldly stand for what he is, unafraid of rejection? Or is he hiding something because he is afraid of appearing different? This is when his whole way of life—the language he uses and the way he treats others—is vital. Do his actions match his words?

Circumstances—such as who is asking, and in what context the question arises—will dictate different answers, but a straightforward and sincere answer to a friend in private may generate questions that call on a young person to “give a defense... for the hope that is in you.”

Take Up the Challenge

This article only scratches the surface in considering why so few young people are coming to the Church—and it in no way places the blame on families and children. As stated earlier, many factors are in play. But our personal examples do make a difference—and those include our children’s examples.

It is important that parents teach children, by example, the importance of *their* example—and teach them *why* they should believe in God and His way of life. Fathers and mothers must work together with a goal of developing kind, confident, caring, and courageous children. By their own example, parents must encourage their children to have a personal relationship with their Creator—so that, when the occasion calls for them to do so, they are not afraid to speak the truth openly and boldly. (LH)

Our Passover Commitments



By **Richard F. Ames**

In 2024, the sunset of April 8 will mark the beginning of the first day of the sacred year, Nisan 1—the first day of the first month of the Hebrew calendar. This means that we will observe the annual Passover service on Sunday evening, April 21, followed by the seven Days of Unleavened Bread from sunset on April 22 through sunset on April 29. By the time you are reading this, I trust you will have already begun your pre-Passover preparations, spiritually if not physically.

Most of us will be observing the Passover in small congregations, but try to imagine what it was like in Jesus' day. The ancient Roman-Jewish historian Josephus mentions that more than two million people came into Jerusalem to keep the Old Testament Passover in his day, in the late first century AD (*The Wars of the Jews*, 6.9.3). Imagine what it would have been like to be there in AD 31. Scripture gives us a record of that Passover when Jesus transformed the old observance, instituting the New Covenant. "Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins'" (Matthew 26:27–28).

The Greek word for covenant here is *diateke*. Eating the bread and drinking the wine were confirmation of the disciples' acceptance of Christ's coming sacrifice and His shed blood. We as Christians today need to remember that, at each Passover, we are not making or renewing a covenant. We made our covenant—our agreement—with Him when we accepted baptism. Passover is not another baptism; it is for already-baptized Christians who are following His instruction by annually *confirming* our acceptance of Christ's sacrifice. We renew our *commitment* to our Savior, not our *covenant* with Him.

On that first New Covenant Passover evening, Christ warned His disciples that they would not keep their commitment to Him perfectly. The Apostle Peter boasted that he would never be unfaithful, so Christ rebuked him. "Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times'" (Matthew 26:34).

Peter did deny Christ three times, and only then did he repent of his earlier boast. We, too, sometimes fail to honor our commitment to our Savior. So, what can we do to help ensure that we are doing our best to remain faithful? In this article, we will review some of our most vital Passover commitments. For any of you readers who are not yet baptized, you can apply these as commitments to your life in general, but for baptized Christians each year at Passover, the confirmation of our commitments takes on a special meaning.

Maintain a Repentant Attitude

Perhaps you've heard the story of the dishonest painter. He would always submit the lowest bid for a job, but the reason was that he would always water down his paint. One day, it rained, and the paint washed off a church building he'd painted. So he prayed, and asked, "Lord, what shall I do?" Then a voice came from heaven and told him, "Repaint and thin no more!"

That's a humorous quip, but the point is serious. We must turn from sin. We must "repaint and thin no more." We must restore what we've taken and pay for damage we've done. And we should do so before others catch us in our sin. Criminals often proclaim "I'm sorry!" after they are caught. But they are sorry they were *caught*, not sorry for their sins. We as Christians must have a genuine godly sorrow for our sins. "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death" (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Instead of having a worldly sorrow, we should have an attitude like King David expressed. "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer" (Psalm 19:12–14).

God knows our secret faults, even more than we know them. In fact, not only must we repent of what we've done, but we must also repent of our carnal human nature: "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Romans 8:7).

Ultimately, we need to ask God to help us see ourselves as He sees us—to reveal the blind spots that prevent us from repenting and growing. I sometimes remember a line from *To a Louse*, a famous poem by the eighteenth-century Scottish poet Robert Burns: “*O wad some Pow’r the giftie gie us / To see oursel’s as others see us!*” In modern English, we would say, “Oh, that some Power would let us see ourselves as others see us!”

To do this isn’t always easy; some of you may remember seeing yourself on video for the first time, noticing all the little tics and mannerisms that get in your way. And the changes we need to make go much deeper than the superficial and physical, even if we can’t see them ourselves. Once a year, I muster the courage to ask my wife, “Honey, in preparation for the Passover, what one thing do you think I need to be changing in my life?” That’s sometimes hard for her, as she may think of two, three, or four changes, but I ask for just one “big one” to work on. And I am grateful for what she shares with me.

As Christians, we make mistakes, but year after year we strive to make fewer. We strive to learn from our mistakes,

We do not want to neglect God’s gifts. Though not many of us are mighty and noble, He still gives us spiritual power that He does not give to the influential people of our world. Yet that power comes with a responsibility.

and we should take those mistakes as lessons that bring us closer to Christ. Of course, while we should not be *practicing* sin as Christians, we do sin at times. But we don’t need to “beat ourselves up” for sins—we simply acknowledge them, and because we maintain a sincerely repentant attitude, we know God will extend His grace and forgiveness, knowing the sincerity of our hearts. That’s why the Apostle Paul was able to write, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

Forgive Others

In His model prayer, Jesus reminded us to ask the Father to “forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12). Just as God forgives us when we repent, we must be quick to forgive others. “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:31–32).

I’m sure you have known people who just can’t let go; they’ve been offended, and they want you to know they’ve

been offended. But it is even a physical principle that holding on to anger and offense hurts the offended person—sometimes as much as or more than the person who committed the offense. There’s a book titled *Don’t Let Jerks Get the Best of You*, in which Dr. Paul Meier discusses people who are stuck in deep depression because they cannot let go and forgive. “A patient can be depressed for many years, then forgive the one who caused his repressed anger and totally recover from the depression, because his serotonin has been restored naturally and the brain is able to work correctly” (p. 170). He writes that while “deep-seated anger can lower your serotonin level and cause clinical depression” (p. 152), forgiving others can produce peace of mind.

Now, forgiving doesn’t mean that you encourage or enable someone to sin again and again. For example, spousal abuse and child abuse are serious crimes, and victims should seek out the help and protection they need. You may need to distance yourself from an unrepentant sinner. But, like the old saying goes, often the best answer is, “Let go; let God.” Instead of building up your anger at someone’s unrepented sin, trust that the matter is in God’s hands and that He will do

what needs to be done. Especially when the offense is simply to your pride, or involves the other person’s selfishness or disrespect, the best response often is to let it be a matter between the sinner and God. “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). As Passover approaches, commit to maintaining an attitude of forgiveness.

Avoid Spiritual Weakness

Paul wrote to one of his protégés, the evangelist Timothy, “Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:6–7). Christ had promised His disciples great power: “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

We do not want to neglect God’s gifts. Though not many of us are mighty and noble, He still gives us spiritual power that He does not give to the influential people of our world. Yet that power comes with a responsibility. We read that “it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the

powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame” (Hebrews 6:4–6).

At baptism, we made a commitment to be faithful, to avoid spiritual weakness. We must not let our trials wear us down and weaken us. We know a famous passage in James that, while seeming counterintuitive, is a vital principle: “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 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 1:2–4).

It’s not that the trial itself is joyful. The idea is that we can endure any trial by keeping in mind that God is using the trial to make us both patient and complete. And we can take com-

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fort in reassurance from Paul: “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

No matter how severe our trial, we know our Savior is there for us. “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). We must commit to avoiding spiritual weakness.

Avoid Spiritual Bitterness

Sometimes, when we receive correction, we can feel deflated. And that deflation can turn into bitterness.

Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. 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 12:11–15).

When we turn inward and stew in our own private hurt, we are letting go of the cure for bitterness. It can be tempting to nurse our hurt and feel sorry for ourselves. I remember, many years ago, I was strongly corrected and my first impulse was to sort of fade into the wallpaper, to think, *I’m just going to be low-key*. But that’s not the best answer. We need to pursue peace with those around us, as Christ taught us:

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:43–48).

I remember that in Big Sandy, many years ago, one of our brethren had a garlic plant of some sort, and every time he dug it up he found more of the root, which kept on generating more of the plant each time. Eventually, he had a huge, huge pit, because he couldn’t dig out that literal root of bitterness. We need to do the same in our own lives and dig out roots of bitterness before they become huge and hard to remove.

Accept God’s Forgiveness

Sometimes, people try to make you feel guilty, and will try to put a guilt trip on you. Victims of abuse are sometimes “gaslighted” and made to feel guilty for the abuser’s crime. Satan wants us to doubt that we are forgiven, and to feel that we aren’t worthy of forgiveness. That’s a half-truth; Satan likes to distort God’s truth to discourage us. While it’s true that none of us are truly worthy of God’s forgiveness, it is a *lie* that He has not forgiven us. Paul reminded the brethren in Ephesus that “by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9).

We must never doubt God’s gift to us. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

That gift of forgiveness is awesome, and we must not despise it. “Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4). When we repent, God forgives us. When you look back on your life, notice those times when God could have judged you guilty right at the moment of your sin, for all sin is worthy of the death penalty. But God is merciful, patient, and longsuffering. He has promised to save us, and He saved us through grace and through faith. And we know that it is through the faith of Christ that we are saved: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20, *King James Version*).

He is our intercessor. “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25).

I will always remember pastoring the Cincinnati congregation, back in 1965. One of the ladies in the congregation was dying of cancer, and she had always had a kind of domineering attitude toward her husband and others. She had a hard time expressing tender emotions and showing her vulnerability. I counseled her to try to help her express her sorrow and pain, not just bottle it up. Later, some of the ladies in the congregation told me that, near her time of death, she asked her husband to raise her into a sitting position in bed, and that she looked him in the eyes and said, with tears, “I belong to you.”

It made me think about the Shulamite woman in the Song of Solomon. At first, pledging her life to her beloved—symbolically Jesus Christ—she says, “My beloved is mine, and I am his” (Song of Solomon 2:16). But later, the sequence is reversed: “I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine” (6:3).

Have you told your Savior that you belong to Him? Have you told that to God the Father? It’s the truth. “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit [which] is in you, [which] you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).

Christ died so you could be saved. That’s how much He loves you. And He bought you for that price. You belong to Him who has forgiven you, as each of us belongs to Him. At Passover, each year, we are reminded of His commitment to us and ours to Him.

Thank God Continually

Paul warns us that there will be an attitude of thanklessness in the last days. “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, head-

strong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!” (2 Timothy 3:1–5).

What should our attitude be, instead? “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18). In the parable of the persistent widow, Christ’s message was “that men always ought to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1).

Support God’s Work

God has a plan of salvation for every man, woman, and child who has ever lived and who ever will live. He wants us to become part of His Family forever. Yet only a few of those billions of people are being called to be His firstfruits. Who will be those firstfruits? Those who commit to enduring to the end (Matthew 24:13). Will you be one of them? I hope so!

Out of the more than eight billion people on planet Earth, only a relative few will be taking the Christian Passover in the evening of April 21 this year. The Passover is a memorial of God’s amazing love for each of us—what He did for us, is doing for us, and will do for us. And it reminds us of a future when the whole world will observe this sober but joyous occasion.

In this present age, however, God is doing His work through just a small handful of human beings. This has always been the case, as Christ reminded us: “Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest’” (Matthew 9:37–38).

So, as we approach the Passover, we must examine ourselves and our commitments. The Days of Unleavened Bread reveal our part in God’s plan of salvation. God instructs us to replace the leaven of malice and wickedness with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Corinthians 5:8). So, we must all be committed to being overcomers. In Revelation 2 and Revelation 3, Christ seven times speaks of those who overcome, as He states the various rewards for overcoming. And we read, “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be His God and he shall be My son” (Revelation 21:7). We must strive to overcome our carnal human nature and ask God to create in us His divine nature (2 Peter 1:2–4).

Brethren, let’s appreciate how God uses us to accomplish the Work, thankful for the opportunity and for what it will bring. “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:57–58).

Brethren, as you prepare to take the Passover, review and renew your commitments—so you will know you can tell your Savior and your Father in Heaven, “I belong to You!” ^(LN)

Attack of the Unleavened Tacos

By Wallace G. Smith

Every year, God commands us to remove leaven from our homes in preparation for the Days of Unleavened Bread—activity that pictures how we should be seeking to remove sin from our lives. The act of going through the house and the cars, cleaning and dusting, generally provides many moments every year to reflect on the process we are symbolically picturing. But we must remember that we’re not just avoiding the leavening of sin, but also daily taking in unleavened bread: Jesus Christ, the bread of life. And sometimes, the practical aspects of these observances can lead us to lessons that we may not commonly associate with the Spring Holy Days—but that are important to our growth nonetheless!

One such lesson was brought home to me many years ago. I had a trip out of town on ministerial business that saw me leaving rather hastily and not taking anything to eat with me, though the trip would end up keeping me out until far past dinner time. Because I didn’t want to lose any time on the road, I eventually visited the “drive thru” of a popular fast-food joint to grab some unleavened, corn flour, “hard shell” tacos

Well, it wasn’t long before I realized that eating “hard shell” tacos and driving my van didn’t mix well at all, no matter how unleavened they were. How I managed to eat them and drive at the same time, without making a total mess or colliding with any of my fellow highway travelers, is beyond me. (Yes, I have repented!) Those crunchy tacos may have provided a quick meal and may have been completely “legal” during the Days of Unleavened Bread, but it was readily apparent that they had been a bad idea.

Those crunchy tacos may have provided a quick meal and may have been completely “legal” during the Days of Unleavened Bread, but it was readily apparent that **they were a bad idea.**

At that moment of realization, a scripture leapt to mind: “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful” (1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23).

Now, some fall into the error 2 Peter 3:15–17 describes concerning these verses, acting as if Paul truly thought that the law was abolished and nothing is unlawful anymore. That’s just plain hogwash. The context of 1 Corinthians itself makes clear that Paul knew there are unlawful things—case in point, his

disfellowshipping in 1 Corinthians 5 of the fellow whose relationship was condemned in Leviticus 20:11. Paul was addressing the licentious attitude of the Corinthians and their abuse of proper Christian freedom. For example, while the Corinthians were certainly not to *stone* the fellow discussed in 1 Corinthians 5, they *were* expected to “put away from yourselves the evil person,” as Paul says at the end of that chapter, which is what the law describes in numerous places as the ultimate result of stoning (e.g., Deuteronomy 17:6–7).

That said, let’s not allow those who abuse these scriptures to distract us from what Paul *is* saying: There are times when the fact that something might be lawful does not change the fact that it is not helpful—it does not edify, or it represents a danger of bringing us under the power of another, as opposed to our being slaves of Christ alone. As I experienced eating perfectly “legal” crunchy tacos while trying to stay in my lane on the highway, keep my eyes on the road, and not coat my pants or the upholstery of my van in taco meat, some things that are technically lawful are definitely not helpful!

Beyond What Is Lawful

When we focus too much on simply what we are *allowed* or *not allowed* to do, we can often miss the mark on a whole host of very important issues, such as whether we *should* or *should not* do something. Paul understood this—and, what’s more, he lived it. Again, speaking to the Corinthians, he reminded them of the time he had spent with them while completely supporting himself financially, even though he *could* have received their tithes and offerings, to which he had a lawful right (1 Corinthians 9:6–11).

Why did he not exercise this right? “Nevertheless,” he writes, “we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ” (1 Corinthians 9:12). Winning and strengthening the Christians in Corinth was too important for Paul to risk putting a stumbling block in their way. There were “bigger fish to fry,” so to speak. As these confused people were groping for God, Paul saw the opportunity to help them, and he viewed that opportunity as more valuable than exercising his lawful right to collect their tithes and offerings in support of his work. While he saw that it was lawful for him to receive their financial support, he also saw that it would not be helpful.

So, while I don’t plan to repeat it, I am thankful for my crunchy-taco highway adventure. As we keep the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, and as we take their lessons with us on our journey to grow in grace and knowledge, may we all strive to make lawful *and* helpful choices. ^{LN}



The Message of the Stake

By **Josh Lyons**

In AD 31, six of the most consequential hours in history ticked slowly by as a man hung from a piece of wood, fastened to it with large nails through His hands and feet. That man was Jesus of Nazareth and, until a specific moment on that particular Wednesday, He had always been alive—because He was the Logos, the One whom the Old Testament calls *YHVH*, rendered in most English Bibles as “LORD” (John 1:1–14; Genesis 4:26).

What occurred during those momentous six hours was the crucifixion of the Ever-Living One. This monumental event was a key part of God’s plan “from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8).

The Apostle Paul wrote much about Christ’s crucifixion, revealing how His death allows Christians to be forgiven of their sins and be saved from the death penalty those sins merit. Paul described this aspect of God’s plan as a specific “message” in 1 Corinthians 1:18: “For the *message of the cross* is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is *the power of God*.” For those who are being saved, this message is nothing less than the very power of God.

The word translated here as “cross” is the Greek *stauros*—and while most professing Christians picture a T-shaped structure, the Greek word does not necessarily imply a crossbar, just an upright beam, or stake, to which a man could be nailed. And more than misunderstanding the stake itself, many misunderstand the message of that stake Paul was seeking to share. In this article, we’ll examine five commonly misunderstood or neglected points related to that message.

1: This Message Is Not About the Object on Which Christ Died

The cross might be the most popular religious symbol in the history of mankind, not only because Christianity has for centuries been the world’s largest religion, but also because it has for millennia been a popular symbol for *other* religions across many nations, even before Jesus’ lifetime. The cross is placed prominently on church buildings, set atop steeples, and used to decorate pulpits and homes. We find it emblazoned on Bibles, jewelry, art, clothing, tattoos, and more.

The most popular cross used in much of Christendom is called the Latin cross (or the *crux immissa*), shaped like a lowercase “t.” There are many other variations, including the Egyptian ankh, the Greek cross, the Byzantine cross, the papal cross, the Chi Rho (allegedly seen in a vision by Emperor Constantine), the tau cross, and St. Peter’s cross (an upside-down version). Some denominations commonly use a crucifix, which is a false depiction of Jesus dying on a cross. Yet the *Encyclopedia Britannica* acknowledges that the cross wasn’t used by early Christians:

The representation of Christ on the cross has been an important subject of Western art since the early Middle Ages. Concerned primarily with simple symbolic affirmations of salvation and eternal life, and repelled by the ignominy [public shame, disgrace] of the punishment, the early Christians did not represent the Crucifixion realistically before the 5th century; instead, the event was symbolized first by a lamb and, after the official recognition of Christianity by the Roman state in the early 4th century, by a jeweled cross. By the 6th century, however, representations of the Crucifixion became numerous (“Crucifixion,” *Britannica.com*, June 16, 2023).

For more detail on the history of cross symbols used in Christianity and other religions, you can read Mr. Wyatt Ciesielka’s article “The Crucifix—A Christian or Pagan Symbol?” at *TomorrowsWorld.org*. Though the cross is the primary symbol of nearly all mainstream Christian denominations, God’s Church has *never* used the cross as art, decoration, or an object of reverence, in obedience to the Second Commandment (Exodus 20:4–6). It’s also worth noting that Scripture does not describe in detail the actual object on which Jesus was crucified; it could have been any of a variety of shapes Roman executioners used to inflict extreme suffering and humiliation. Several scriptures describe Christ as crucified on a “tree” (e.g. Acts 5:30; 10:39).

Whatever the exact shape of the *stauros*, what is important is that, on a real Wednesday in AD 31, a real man was viciously hung on a real piece of wood with real nails. That

Man's true disciples do not hold in reverence the instrument used to torture Him. And while it is important to know what the message of the stake is *not* about, it is even more important to understand what it *is* about.

2: This Message Is About What Christ Endured and Gave When He Died

The stake Jesus carried was the literal object upon which He was crucified, and it also symbolically represented a vital reason why He came in the flesh. In the September–October 2005 issue of the *Living Church News*, Mr. John Ogwyn wrote,

The stake that Jesus took up at the end of His life, as he walked from the Governor's Palace to His place of execution, symbolized the purpose for which He had entered human flesh and come into the world. It was indeed the instrument of Christ's execution. However, it was by His death and shed blood that He paid the penalty for sin and made possible our reconciliation to God. Additionally, He triumphed over Satan and all his works, ensuring the ultimate victory of all those who would follow Him ("How Deeply Are You Committed?").

The gospels describe what happened to Jesus on that Passover day, sharing details regarding His torture in the early morning and His being ridiculed, scourged, beaten, spit on, stripped, and mockingly forced to wear a "crown" of thorns and scarlet robe (Matthew 27:26–31). Then, led to Golgotha, He was hoisted up on the stake at about 9:00 a.m. (Mark 15:25), where He endured more mocking as people said, "If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matthew 27:33–40), reminding us of Satan's words when tempting Jesus: "If You are the Son of God," *then do this or that to prove it* (Matthew 4:3–6).

From about 9:00 a.m. to noon, Jesus hung on the stake in bright daylight as several of His disciples watched, with His mother perhaps the onlooker suffering most (John 19:25). Then, around noon, a supernatural darkness came over the land. Around 3:00 p.m., His physical life ended when a soldier thrust a spear into His side (Matthew 27:45–50; John 19:34). The *Eternal One* was dead, and would remain so for the next three days and three nights.

What unsettling thoughts must have been going through the minds of the mob of His accusers—the Roman soldiers, the criminals next to Him, and others as they stood there in total darkness at the peak of the day? What were His disciples thinking? After hanging on the stake for six hours, Jesus Christ, the Eternal God of the Old Testament, took His last breath and died. The creation groaned at its Creator's death; the veil of the temple was ripped from top to bottom, an earthquake shook the land, and the graves of many deceased righteous people

were opened (Matthew 27:51–53). The enormity of these events moved some of the guards, who answered their own mockery from a few hours before by saying, "Truly this was the Son of God," as some of Christ's disciples continued to watch (vv. 54–56). Then Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus' body down from the stake, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb shortly before sunset (vv. 57–60).

This is a summary of what the Creator, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob endured while hanging on the instrument of His death. Paul later described that "being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the [*stauros*]" (Philippians 2:8). These details are a vital part of what Paul called the message of the stake.

3: This Message Is About Grace, Justification, Reconciliation, and Forgiveness

Jesus Christ didn't deserve to die—because He never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). He died to take what all other human beings deserve because of our sins. We've all sinned and therefore earned what is required in the law: death (Romans 6:23). By Christ's death, by His shed blood, all believers who repent and are baptized can have their sins completely removed. The grace, justification, and forgiveness we each require are all made possible by Christ's death.

We read that "we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7). Furthermore, "by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight" (Colossians 1:20–21). And we learn that "if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

Sin is the cause of human suffering, pain, and death. It is utterly horrific, separating the sinner from God. And there is only one way to bring cleansing, reconciliation, and forgiveness from the terrible, filthy, wretched state we enter into when we sin. Mr. Gerald Weston describes this core part of God's plan in his booklet *John 3:16: Hidden Truths of the Golden Verse*, freely available at TomorrowsWorld.org:

The wage we earn when we transgress God's law is death. But eternal life has been made possible because of God's free gift to us, given when Jesus gave His life in our stead (John 3:16; Romans 6:23). God purchased us back from death by sacrificing something far more valuable than silver or gold—the pre-

cious blood of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:18–19)! And this was not a rash decision; it was all determined from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). There is no more important message in John 3:16 than this. No greater act of love is known to mankind!

As Colossians 2:13–14, Galatians 3:13, and 1 Peter 2:24 explain, every Christian’s sins, the guilt of those sins, and the curse of those sins (the death penalty), were placed on Christ and nailed with Him to the stake. As Mr. Weston explains:

Justification is the forgiveness of our sins, and is the result of our faith in Jesus’ having given His life in exchange for ours.... Because our sins are forgiven, we are now reconciled with God.... We are reconciled to God by the death of His Son, by faith in His shed blood. We can never earn that reconciliation. It is God’s free gift, which we often describe as *grace*.

Much of the New Testament revolves around one of the most miraculous events in history—the death of the Creator, which occurred through His agonizing execution. The love, grace, and mercy shown by God the Father and Jesus Christ in Their plan for Christ’s sacrifice allows Christians to be justified, reconciled, and forgiven—essential elements of the message of the stake.

4: This Message Is Vital to the New Covenant and the Gospel

In Lesson Nine of the *Tomorrow’s World Bible Study Course*, the section titled “The Messenger of the Covenant” explains:

The third aspect of the New Covenant, prophesied by Jeremiah and proclaimed by Jesus Christ, involves the forgiveness and removal of sin. It is sin that cuts man off from His Creator and dooms him to death. Jesus Christ came to make possible the removal of sin and its penalties. He did this by giving His life as a ransom for ours, paying the death penalty that we have all incurred by our attitudes and actions. The New Covenant that Jesus Christ came proclaiming is at the heart and core of the Gospel.

This is described by Jeremiah’s famous prophecy regarding the New Covenant: “No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:34). (As an aside to highlight the importance of the New Covenant, Jeremiah 31:31–34 is the longest continuous Old Testament

passage quoted in full in the New Testament. This quotation is found in Hebrews 8:8–12.) A core aspect of the New Covenant, of which Jesus Christ was the Mediator and Messenger, is the forgiveness of sins.

The forgiveness of sins, made possible by Christ’s sacrifice, is not only a central part of the New Covenant—it is also central to the Gospel:

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1–4).

Paul also explained that “we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1:23–24).

The message that Jesus died on our behalf to pay the penalty we deserve because of sins is in every way good news. That Christ was murdered on a stake is part of the overall message of the coming Kingdom of God, revealing how Christians can be forgiven—a key step in God’s plan of salvation. No one will inherit the Kingdom of God without accepting Christ as their personal Savior, and thus having their sins washed away by the Savior’s shed blood.

5: This Message Is Remembered Every Year at Passover

Passover is the most referenced and described Feast in the New Testament. As He kept the Passover, Jesus instituted new symbols that memorialize His sacrifice:

When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:14–20).

Christ's blood was shed through beatings, scourging, the crown of thorns, being nailed to the stake, and then finally and most fully when a soldier pierced His side with a spear—all “for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28). Through the literal blood that came from Jesus Christ's body, which the Bible calls “precious” (1 Peter 1:19), the sins of the world are cleansed. It is the only way.

Paul explains that this vital part of God's plan—the New Covenant, containing the message of the stake—is to be proclaimed every year at Passover: “In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes” (1 Corinthians 11:25–26). For nearly 2,000 years since Jesus of Nazareth died in AD 31, Passover has annually remembered Christ's death, memorializing the message of the stake.

We Must Respond with Repentance

Once believers accept in faith the message of the stake, they must respond to it. Action is required. Our living Christianity does not leave Christ on the stake, and Dr. Roderick C. Meredith explained this concept in his booklet *The Holy Days: God's Master Plan*:

Salvation is a process. We are now “being saved” (1 Corinthians 1:18) and ultimately shall be saved—if we endure to the end (Matthew 24:13). Paul explains, “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His *life*” (Romans 5:10). If we observe just the Passover, we leave God's plan incomplete. We leave Jesus hanging dead on a cross—end of story! Yet remember—our Savior rose again! And it is through His *resurrected* life that we *shall be saved* (p. 18).

This is where much of mainstream Christianity leaves the message of the stake incomplete by minimizing—or outright ignoring—repentance, obedience, and surrender to God and His laws. We could say that the “message of the stake” must be followed by the “message of repentance,” rehearsed every year at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which teaches the lesson of responding to Christ's sacrifice with deep repentance and letting Christ live in us. Repentance was part of Christ's message from the very beginning of His ministry (Mark 1:15).

The message of the stake, commemorated every year at Passover, reminds us of what God the Father and Jesus Christ did. At that first step in the process of salvation, the Christian must accept Christ as Savior and must accept God's grace and forgiveness in faith. The next step required is a response to

God's grace—deep repentance. Jesus explained this message in terms of crucifixion, a horrific torture that He knew was in His future, and which He had likely seen other people suffer: “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). Essentially, Christ was describing the baptized Christian's need to live a life of crucifying their old, sinful way of living, while now living a new life free of sin (Romans 6:4–11).

The Festival that follows Passover is the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which pictures our striving to replace sin (leaven) in our lives with righteousness (unleavened bread). Christians, accepting Christ as Savior, realize the enormity of what He was willing to endure—giving up existence as a God-being and then suffering the excruciating pain of separation from His Father and death while nailed to a beam of wood.

In response to that sacrifice, grateful Christians will do everything in their power to sincerely repent, strive to obey God, and turn away from sin for the rest of their lives, with the help of the Holy Spirit. Why? Because sin is horrific. Sin is filthy. Sin is costly. Sin is the cause of the problems and suffering in the world. Sin is why Jesus Christ had to die. Christians who understand the message of the stake will never take sin lightly, but will strive to *crucify* their sinful passions and desires (Galatians 5:24).

They will also take seriously Scripture's warning that “it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame” (Hebrews 6:4–6). If there's anything in our lifetimes that we absolutely never want to do, it is to crucify Jesus Christ again. For that reason, the message of repentance must follow the message of the stake.

Let's conclude by looking again at 1 Corinthians 1:18: “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” For true Christians, the message of the stake is the power of Almighty God. Why such a strong statement? Because as horrific, filthy, and costly as our sins are, we are totally and completely cleansed of them.

The message of the stake is not a message meant to elevate or honor an implement of torture, but rather a message of the Savior's willing sacrifice for us. Paul sought to convey the *message* of the stake and everything that it means spiritually to the Church members in Corinth—and to us.

This is the truth and the message of the greatest act of love: God the Father giving His Son to be crucified and thereby forgive the sins of the world, washing them away in His shed blood. That is the message of the *stauros*, the stake—and it is the power of God. (LW)



Food, Fun, and Fellowship at Family Weekends

Charlotte Family Weekend

The Charlotte Headquarters congregation hosted its annual Family Weekend from December 22–25. The kickoff was a Friday evening Bible study by Mr. Richard Ames on the epistle of James.

Sabbath activities included a hymn-sing and a presentation on how the *Tomorrow's World* telecast is produced, which included previewing an exciting new telecast, “2024 in Bible Prophecy,” publicly aired the following week. Mr. Gerald Weston gave the sermon at the afternoon Sabbath service. The attendance at services was 511, which included approximately 240 visitors from across the U.S, Canada, and beyond. Following the Sabbath, we enjoyed a lasagna dinner and dance.

Sunday included morning seminars on friendliness, meeting people new to us, and the importance of engaging in live, in-person interactions with family and friends. Afterward, we enjoyed a lunch of hamburgers and hotdogs, followed by group activities involving attendees of all ages. Two traditions displaying the varied talents of our brethren were maintained with our bake sale and crafts sale. One special and new addition to the weekend was color draping, where attendees learned what colors of clothing look best on them.

The finale on Monday morning included volleyball games as well as games for young children and those who are still young at heart. It was a jam-packed weekend of great fellowship, teaching, and joyous celebration of our Church family.

Alabama Family Weekend

On December 22–24, congregations in Alabama—along with 33 visitors from other areas—enjoyed a Family Weekend at the Embassy Suites in Hoover, Alabama. Fellowship began on Friday, when more than 50 brethren came together for an afternoon of bowling. Afterwards, we enjoyed a meal in a private dining room and a lot of time getting to know one another, including Mr. Dexter Wakefield and his wife Marcia, who spent the weekend with us.

On the morning of the Sabbath, Mr. Wakefield gave a Bible study titled “Why We Don’t Keep the Sacrifices,” which was followed by a brief question-and-answer session. Mr. Wakefield also gave the sermon in the afternoon, titled “The

7,000-Year Doctrine.” The Sabbath service was attended by 109 brethren, including members over the phone and online.

The Sabbath service was followed by a very fine dinner attended by about 85, at which many dressed in attire representing different decades, extending from biblical days to the 2000s (the 1920s seemed to be most popular). It was great to see our children wearing outfits from the various decades, and they seemed to really enjoy it. After dinner, we all enjoyed a wonderful time dancing to music from various decades. Everyone obviously had a lot of fun, especially our little ones, who seem never to run out of energy as they dance the night away. Some of us who are not quite so young definitely felt it the next morning, however!

On Sunday we played various games, with cornhole and bingo being the highlights. One member had never played cornhole before, but really excelled against every opponent—with a smile! We had plenty of gifts to give to the winners of bingo, which included some of our little ones who had great joy in participating, and especially in winning. This was indeed a very fine weekend, and it was obvious that everyone enjoyed this time together. Some talk for next year’s Family Weekend is already in the air, confirming that this one was indeed a wonderful time. We thank our God and Savior for giving us this time to spend together, fellowshiping as one happy family!

Kansas City Family Weekend

The Kansas City area faced the challenge of organizing a weekend that would truly serve the entire family. David and Sarah Manning came up with a creative theme (the Oregon Trail), and the combined efforts of brethren who added their time and talents made the event happen. Families traveled from many U.S. states, as well as from Canada. God blessed the winter weather with mild temperatures and no snow, facilitating safe travel.

Friday activities included family sports. Later that evening, Mr. Bobby Jacques conducted the Bible study, addressing, for the benefit of our youth, the issue of war and military service.

On the Sabbath, approximately 350 brethren attended services, with 100 listening online. Mr. Stephen Elliott spoke

concerning marriage and family. After dinner, the brethren tested their knowledge of the Oregon Trail by playing a Kahoot trivia game. To cap off the evening, young and old enjoyed a dance.

Activities the next day began with a seminar stressing the importance of preparation from our youth, conducted by Michael Elliott. Since several pioneer travel routes began from Independence, Missouri, it was fitting that Sunday's activities continued to revolve around the Oregon Trail theme. Some examples of rigorous "stops" along the way revealed how well we could hunt game for food, rope cows and horses, stack hay bales, change wagon wheels, pull a prairie schooner across a river, hammer nails, and even empty snakes out of boots.

Many commented that one of the main reasons for coming to such an event was for the benefit of our children, teens, and young adults. The Kansas City congregation, with its sizable number of dedicated youths, provided opportunities that are not readily available in smaller areas. Our older brethren experienced the same blessings and felt very much included. Thanks to all who made this outstanding weekend possible.

Trinidad Family Weekend

Eighty "Trini" brethren spent December 24–26 at the Turning Point Campsite in St. Joseph, Trinidad, and another 19 came and spent Monday with us. The location was very peaceful and indeed a great spot to get away from the chaotic festivities happening elsewhere. There was lots of time for fellowship and relaxation among the members, with board games, dominoes, and quite a few card games taking place. We had a Bible study on Sunday evening, and on Monday evening a movie followed by a discussion. Lots of time was spent in the pool on Monday afternoon. The kitchen staff provided us with top-quality meals, as well as lots of fresh fruit, fruit juices, and iced tea throughout.

The campsite is set on the side of a small hill, and a number of brethren of all ages woke up well before sunrise to use



the incline for exercise—making several trips up and down. Some dumbbells and skipping ropes were brought in, and some used these as part of their routine as well. This was not a planned activity, but it was certainly pleasing to see brethren making use of the opportunity to fellowship and get physical exercise. The biggest "complaint" was that the two-night stay was simply too short!

As is our custom in God's Church, we left the facility as clean as we could, and we also donated some brooms and mops. This apparently made quite an impression on management, with the caretaker's wife using terms such as "phenomenal" and "one in a million" to describe our efforts. Evidently, this came after a string of bad experiences with other groups. We are pleased to have been able to shine the light of the Gospel of Christ in this way.

Little Rock Family Weekend

Bright sunshine welcomed members and guests on a cool Friday afternoon for the launch of the Sherwood, Arkansas, Family Weekend. Visitors from Ohio, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, and Texas gathered for fun and fellowship. The enticing aroma of Italian food greeted those entering the hall, which was festooned with Italian décor. A delicious spaghetti dinner was served with salad and garlic bread. After such wonderful physical food, it was time for spiritual fare. The Bible study by Mr. Phil West, entitled "Developing Philadelphia Character," stressed three attributes of godly character that will assure our deliverance in the difficult times to come: developing sincere love for the brethren, understanding where we fit in the government of God, and focusing on our individual part in doing the Work of God.

After a restful Sabbath morning, everyone gathered at the church hall at 1:00 p.m. for a hymn-sing. This set a positive tone for an enjoyable day of Christian fellowship. Mr. Randall Davis presented a motivational sermonette entitled "We Are Where We Are for a Reason." He explained that what is important to us determines who and where we are in life, what we truly value affects what we accomplish, and how we invest our time, energy, emotions, money, and special skills reveals our character. He admonished that we use these resources to serve others. Special music was given by Mrs. Shelby Vice, who played and sang Psalm 84, as composed by Caroline Cobb. The sermon, brought by Mr. Davy Crockett, was entitled "How God Has Used the Family: Past, Present, and Future." In person and online, 112 brethren enjoyed the special Sabbath services.

After the Sabbath, the hall décor was changed to a South-west motif and the ladies presented a delicious taco dinner. A talent show followed. Eight numbers were performed for an enthusiastic audience: three by preteen singers, one by a teenager playing and singing a song of her own composition,

and four numbers played and sung by members of the band, which included a piano, two guitars, and a bass guitar. It was a varied program with something enjoyable for everyone. Afterward, there was great participation in games for all age groups.

The fun resumed Sunday morning at 10:30 with a scrumptious brunch of pancakes, eggs, beef bacon, and hash browns served to an appreciative crowd. Then, everyone's attention turned to playing bingo, which included many nice prizes that had been donated for the event. The game was great fun, and the enthusiasm and fellowship were a fitting finish to a very enjoyable Family Weekend in Little Rock.

Texas Family Weekend

Our annual Texas Family Weekend at Hidden Pines Venue, a secluded 15-acre parcel of land near Mineola, Texas, was a



total success again this year, with 206 attending in person and another 94 livestreaming, for a total attendance of 300 for Sabbath services. Mr. Glen Harrison gave an inspiring sermon titled "Man of God," followed by a delicious Italian-themed dinner consisting of spicy Romano chicken, spaghetti with beef sauce, green beans, Caesar salad, a garden salad, and garlic bread, as well as lovely desserts! After sunset, we had a talent- and fun-show and dance. On Sunday morning, 174 attended the Bible study given by Mr. Marshall Moluf on the armor of God. That was followed by a Sunday brunch of eggs, beef sausage, beef bacon, biscuits, gravy, fresh fruit, coffee, a juice bar, and more fellowship. There was also a cornhole tournament and gaga ball for the kids—all indoors, as the weather was cold. But since it was toasty inside, the outside temperatures didn't hamper the wonderful time had by the brethren at all!



Many attendees commented that the Family Weekend was well organized and that "It was like a mini-Feast." We wrapped it up around 3:00 p.m. Sunday afternoon to allow everyone to get a good start returning home. The weekend attendance included members from Texas and Louisiana, as well as others who came in from farther away. The messages were outstanding, and the food and fellowship were exceptional! It was clearly a delightful and spiritually focused time for all attendees.

Jacksonville Family Weekend Campout

Forty-eight of your spiritual brothers and sisters enjoyed a beautiful weekend (December 22–24) together at Camp Chowenwaw, located just outside of Jacksonville, Florida. The accommodations included seven cabins, a private dining hall, and a large firepit that created an enjoyable atmosphere for even the most inexperienced campers. The theme of the weekend was the "elementary principles" listed in Hebrews 6:1–2.

The weekend began with a covered-dish meal of chili, followed by a segmented Bible study given by four different ministers on principles listed in Hebrews 6:1–2 (repentance, faith, baptism, the laying on of hands, and eternal judgment). A Sabbath brunch provided a bit more time for rest and relaxation in God's creation. The messages at Sabbath services also covered the "elementary principles," with Mr. Jack Lucas giving a sermonette discussing resurrection from the dead and Mr. Ryan Dawson giving the sermon on faith in God and going on to maturity.

The weekend included additional activities focused on growth and building bonds with our spiritual family, such as a workshop on song-leading basics for the men. Saturday night's activities included three rounds of Bible Play-Doh Pictionary, followed by a hymn-sing to wind the evening down.

It was truly an inspiring, spiritually recharging weekend. The only thing warmer than the weather (which was in the mid-50s Fahrenheit at night and saw a high of 73 during the day) was the family atmosphere produced by all who attended!

The preceding Family Weekend reports were created, compiled, and edited with the help and support of *J. Davy Crockett III, Ryan Dawson, Rand Millich, Paul Shumway, Gary Stein, John Strain, and Anthony Stroud.*

—Editorial Staff

From Living Education: The Role of a Resident Assistant

At Living Education–Charlotte, some students are given the exciting opportunity to continue with the program for an extra year. These Student Leaders attend a new set of classes, are given more time to contribute to God’s work, and, in some cases, serve as Resident Assistants for the Living Education dormitories, helping first-year students acclimate to the LE environment. Serving as a Resident Assistant comes with its own unique challenges, rewards, and opportunities, so we caught up with four recent RAs to ask them to relate some of the most memorable aspects of the experience.

Challenges and Rewards

The role of a Resident Assistant holds many opportunities to stretch oneself. Chris Pringle, the men’s RA for the 2021–2022 academic year, was struck by the diverse interests of students, which he found challenging to keep up with. “One of the hard things,” he said, “and I suppose parents face this, too, is when the interests that they have are interests that you don’t understand. How do you know the best way to help them manage those interests? That became a little bit of a challenge for me at times.”

Despite—or because of—the challenges, the role of an RA for Living Education–Charlotte is filled with rewards. Chris found joy in watching students grow and prepare for future life stages. “On day one,” he said, “you have a bunch of those who come in with no real-life experience, but you can see their wisdom grow through the program. Getting to watch that process for a number of the boys was really gratifying. I remember how much Living University helped me as a person, so, getting to either be a part of that or just watch the program work in their lives was really special.”

Yolanda Watt, the RA for the women’s dorm at that time, found herself managing responsibilities like shopping for supplies and groceries, which wasn’t easy amidst rising gas prices. “That was a bit challenging at first,” she said, “driving around, getting either groceries for the Friday-Night Dinners or dorm supplies, managing the best time to get what I needed and make sure that I didn’t use all the gas that I had in my car.”

Particularly satisfying to Yolanda was her role as a counselor and confidant. “It was gratifying to be like a ‘Dorm

Mom,’ if you want to call it that,” she said, sharing that she enjoyed “just being able to know that if the girls had any problems, they would be willing to come to me and we could try to work things out, try to figure out the best methods and make sure everyone gets along. I felt like that was great.”

Nathan Kroon, last year’s RA for the men’s dorm, spoke about the unexpected disconnect between Student Leaders and first-year students due to different class schedules. “Because you’re not in the same classes as them, you might not know everything that’s going on with them,” he said. “That sometimes made it a little difficult to understand what actions you might need to be taking at that point.” Nathan found joy in serving, especially in regard to organizing activities. “I enjoyed serving in whatever way I could,” he said, highlighting a service project that the LE students accomplished for a local widow in the Charlotte congregation. “The student leaders organized that,” he said, “and then we all got the other students involved in helping. That was very rewarding—just helping to put together something that helps another person.”

Ellie McNair, who served as the RA for the women’s dorm last year, concurred with Nathan as she pointed out the challenge of managing expectations due to the different experiences of first- and second-year students. “The disconnect



Yolanda Watt

between the two years is quite wide,” she said. “You’ve gone through a lot of things that previous year—you’ve seen the whole picture the year paints, and your job is to communicate that through your actions. The first-year students haven’t gone through all the same experiences, yet you subconsciously expect them to have gone through them already. So, you have to keep that little bit of disconnect in mind. These people are learning lessons, and you need to put yourself in their shoes of where they are in the year and what they’ve done.”

To Ellie, it was rewarding to foster sisterly bonds among those in her dorm. “It was really neat to be able to try to set a tone within the girls’ dorm itself,” she said. “I think it makes a difference if you take the time once a week to make sure the girls do an activity together, or hang out, or watch a movie together. The guys didn’t necessarily have to be part of the group for everybody to get along really well—the girls wanted to spend time together with other girls, and I really did find it nice.”

Imparting True Values

Resident Assistants are an integral part of instilling and developing godly values in the students of Living Education–Charlotte. Chris emphasized the importance of learning to live in harmony with others. “There are times when we don’t agree,” he said, adding that “we don’t see eye to eye about certain things, but we have to have grace for each other, and we have to be patient with each other, because we’re all in different places.” He also reflected on how these experiences help young adults to prepare for future life stages, like marriage. “We think that we can just go from being single our whole lives to being married and carrying a household, and it’s going to work automatically,” he said. “That’s naive. I have a friend who has said on multiple occasions that one of the best things you can do to prepare yourself for marriage is to have roommates, because that’s how you learn how to live with another personality, with people who do things in a very different way.”

Yolanda accentuated the value of being fair and understanding in chore distribution. “I had a list of chores that we needed to get done,” she said, “and I would rotate each of the ladies each week on the chores, and I try to make sure I scheduled in a way that one person didn’t feel like she was doing way more than the other. If I ever felt like that was going to be a case, I would assign a little bit more to myself so that the rest of them didn’t feel that way.” As the “Dorm Mom,” Yolanda also strove to ensure harmony in problem-solving and emphasized the importance of understanding both sides of any issue. “I tried to be fair if there were any issues, and to listen to any complaints,” she said. “There weren’t really a whole lot, thankfully. But if I did have any complaints, I tried to listen and hear both sides of the story before casting any

judgment. I might not be perfect at it, but I tried to be fair to everyone.”

Nathan pointed out the need to understand LE’s rules and structures. “At the beginning of the year,” he said, “we would explain to the first-year students the rules that we had set in place—and some of them might not have sounded agreeable at first, to some people. But Mr. McNair explained that we have a very specific and organized way of doing things, and there’s a reason that we do everything the way we do.” The RAs made a concentrated effort to communicate this to the students. “When someone would be like, *Why do we do that?*,” Nathan explained, “Mr. McNair didn’t want us to be like, *Yeah, I know it’s kind of silly, but we do it anyway.* We wanted to make sure we knew why the rules were important, and we wanted to present each one as equally important—not blindly following, but understanding the importance of the rules that are in place.”

Ellie also highlighted the crucial nature of personalizing service and encouraging creativity, especially in organizing events like the Friday-Night Dinner. “I really wanted to encourage them to use their creativity and come up with out-of-the-box ideas for what they were going to do for their Friday-Night Dinner, because it’s such a unique opportunity,” she said. “I tried to encourage them to try their best but make it creative—something that you would want to serve to others. If it’s not perfect, it’s okay, but you wholeheartedly know you did your best instead of just doing whatever you know works—it was what you wanted to do, as well.”

This approach helps in developing a mindset of service that is both enjoyable and personal. “It changes your mindset of service,” Ellie said. “You really need to start personalizing it as early as you can, so that it isn’t something where you feel you have to do it in the way you saw someone else do it.” Ellie related that a simple change of mindset can make service not only more enjoyable, but more beneficial for those served. “You can make it about others,” she said, “but with a flavor that helps them get to know you through your service. That was a value I wanted to communicate; if you try to serve without a flavor of your own, you think it’s really hard, because you can’t do exactly what another person did—yet you can do what you can do. And that is generally what people want anyway.”

Fulfilling the role of a Resident Assistant is no easy task—but it is a rewarding one, and it’s an invaluable contribution to what makes Living Education–Charlotte a lasting positive influence in the lives of its students. So, be sure to say a prayer or two for the courageous “Dorm Moms” and “Dorm Dads” who sacrifice so much for the young adults attending LE—and, if you’re a young adult planning to make LE a part of your life, consider the possibility of becoming an RA yourself!

—Editorial Staff



TITUS 2:3-5

Woman to Woman

“What Can I Do?”

By **Janth B. English**

As Christian women, we are watching what is happening in the world and we see prophetic events taking place. We are well aware of the Great Commission that Christ gave the Church—to preach the Gospel to the world and make disciples of all nations. We pray, “Your kingdom come,” yet we know this will not happen until the Gospel is preached in all the world as a witness (Matthew 24:14).

We follow the examples of other women who have gone before us by diligently supporting God’s work financially as our circumstances allow (Luke 8:1–3). We understand that it is not God’s will for Christian women to be the ones who are the public face of the Work, proclaiming to the world the message that Christ has given His Church; our most important service is with our families and in our congregations. Yet we feel the urgency and the need for God’s kingdom on this earth, so we may feel compelled to do something to help bring it about. We may ask ourselves, “What can I do to help fulfill the Great Commission and remain within the roles that God has ordained for women?” This article will suggest a few points for you to consider.

Meet Them at the Door

If we look at preaching the Gospel as only a one-way communication going out to the world via those God has chosen to be the faces and voices of His work, we have missed a vital part of our job and minimized the role of local congregations, including the women in them. Christ instructed His followers to make disciples of all nations and to teach them (Matthew 28:18–20). The Father calls people through the Church’s efforts to preach the Gospel, and then He sends them to the local congregations. Mr. Dan Hall, my pastor, inspired me to think of it in a helpful way, stating that we, the local congregation, are the *pièce de résistance*; we are the selling point that shows how God’s way works! So, one way we can help fulfill the Great Commission is to be welcoming to those God calls.

When God sends future brothers and sisters to our congregations, He expects us to nurture them and provide a safe

place for them to grow. We should try to meet every new person we see, and to get their names; using people’s names while you converse with them will help them feel more comfortable and help you to associate the name with the face.

If your congregation provides snacks, be sure to invite guests to join in. It can be good if you sit with them for a while to help them feel more at ease. Try not to make the same mistake that I made, however, of being *overly* enthusiastic. A friend confided to me that I had overwhelmed her when she first started attending; I was trying to be friendly, but I went overboard. You can avoid this mistake by trying to sense how a person is responding to your overtures.

God is calling people out of a dark and hostile world, so, it’s not unusual for someone to feel skeptical and a little anxious upon encountering positive, friendly people. It may at first seem too good to be true, but as you continue to be a light, week after week, new people will come to accept your actions as normal for the people of God. Your warm welcome helps fulfill the Great Commission by encouraging our future brethren to come again so they can learn God’s way of life more perfectly.

Widen the Circle

Once we have made a welcoming introduction, we should not abandon those God is calling, nor risk letting them feel like “outsiders.” I have heard from different people on several occasions that they have felt isolated and lonely even at Sabbath services. Of course, we do not do this deliberately, but it happens. A person who is feeling alone may be inclined to stop attending services with us. An important means of fulfilling the Great Commission is to be inclusive and not to show partiality; being inclusive creates human-to-human connections and helps everyone to feel like part of the team.

Many of us get to see our friends only on the Sabbath, so we understandably want to spend time catching up with them about the week’s activities. But if we are not careful, we can find ourselves fellowshiping with the same people every week, and *voilà*—we have become part of a clique. It is part of human nature to be drawn to those who are more like us, but this can lead to our showing partiality, something Christian women ought to avoid (James 2:8–9). A remedy for

this natural tendency is to fellowship *intentionally* with those who may be newer or who may be feeling left out. If you are talking with friends, it may prove interesting to invite a new voice into your discussion. If you see someone standing alone, strike up a conversation. You may be just the encouragement that person needs.

We can also use hospitality to build bonds and foster friendships. When we are hosting friends in our homes—which we should try to do often—we have the opportunity to include brethren who may not get invited often, especially the new people God is sending us to nurture (Luke 14:12–14). Sharing hospitality does not need to be an elaborate adventure that takes a week of cleaning and cooking to prepare; I decided long ago that my home did not have to be “company clean” to invite brethren over. “Family clean” is clean enough. And the occasion need not be a big dinner party; board games with popcorn can offer just as much fun and interaction. The bonds that we build through intentional fellowship will help those God is sending us to stay the course, thus helping us to fulfill our mission.

Quiet—Not Silent—Examples

This brings us to another way Christian women can nurture new brethren and do our part in making disciples of those God is calling. We can be an example by our conduct and our dress. Let’s be honest—the world has practically no clue about how women should conduct themselves, present themselves, or be treated. Society also has a distorted view of Christian

God is calling people out of a dark and hostile world, so, it’s not unusual for someone to feel skeptical and a little anxious upon encountering positive, friendly people. It may at first seem too good to be true, but as you continue to be a light, week after week, new people will come to accept your actions as normal for the people of God. **Your warm welcome helps fulfill the Great Commission.**

women, portraying them as preachers or at least proselytizers trying to “win souls for Jesus.”

So, when people come to our congregation, they will see a very different picture. It is up to us to show them true Christian womanhood by how we conduct ourselves. Notice—we are to *show*, not to *tell*. Our example is a very effective means to teach what Christ has ordained for women. This is a big responsibility, because it may be the only way they learn how God expects women to carry themselves. We are fulfilling our

mission to make disciples of those God sends to us by teaching them godly principles through our examples.

As we fellowship with newer brethren, questions will naturally arise. Many of us who have been a part of the Church for some time can probably answer most questions. However, the way we answer can be very important. To be asked a biblical question that you know the answer to can be flattering, and the temptation may be to start expounding all you know on the topic. This is usually *not* the right thing to do. While we may know the answer, the truth is that it may not always be wise to “jump right in” with it. It is best to refer people with doctrinal or controversial questions to the ministry, and, when appropriate, give them a reference to Church literature. If you are *not* sure of the answer, do not hesitate to admit it. We are all learning, and this will help the inquirer to see that none of us knows it all. We are all growing in grace and knowledge.

Of course, there are questions that Christian women are uniquely qualified to answer, and these answers should be shared freely. For example, a woman may ask how you juggle your family and a job outside the home. A young mother may ask how to engage her children on the Sabbath, and some may find getting the entire family prepared for the Sabbath a daunting task.

A Purpose for All

God is calling women out of society to be part of His Church. When they come, they will see how Christian women differ from women in the world. They will see the contentment we have, and they will ask questions about how it is achieved. As godly women, we can share our stories and our wisdom with other women as God sends them to our congregations. We are fulfilling the Great Commission by teaching others through our example and by answering questions they may ask about being a Christian woman.

God is using His women. Our role in carrying out the Great Commission is very important. We are not called to sit back and do nothing; we are helping to make disciples from all nations. How we nurture the new brethren God is calling can be instrumental in helping them to “stick with it”—to stay the course. I have touched on a few ways we can do this; I’m sure you can think of more. It is interesting that, as the bride of Christ, we will help bring many sons and daughters into the Kingdom, and we as Christian women can have a special part in doing that now by being welcoming, being inclusive, setting a godly example, and being ready to give an appropriate answer to those whom God is calling. Let’s thank God for our part in His plan and do what we can do. (L)

Ordinations

Mr. Lester Clifton was ordained an elder on November 5, 2022, by pastor Martin Fannin, assistant pastor Jim Meredith, and elder Larry Rigling. Mr. Clifton serves in the Etowah, Tennessee, congregation.

Mr. Jason Hatch was ordained a deacon on November 12, 2022, by pastor Martin Fannin and assistant pastor Jim Meredith. Mr. Hatch serves in the Crossville, Tennessee, congregation.

Mrs. Debra Haynes was ordained a deaconess on April 12, 2023, by pastor Martin Fannin, assistant pastor Jim Meredith, and elder Tony Collier. Mrs. Haynes serves in the Knoxville, Tennessee, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Ricky (Amanda) Rupert and **Mr. and Mrs. Justin (Kristina) Stewart** were ordained deacons and deaconesses on September 16 by pastor Gene Hilgenberg and assistant pastor

Shannon Christal. Mr. and Mrs. Rupert and Mr. and Mrs. Stewart serve in the Joplin, Missouri, congregation.

Mr. Chris Sookdeo was ordained a deacon on the Sabbath of June 3 by pastor Paul Shumway and elders Damian Weekes and David Grant. Mr. Sookdeo serves the Chaguanas and San Fernando congregations in Trinidad.

Weddings & Anniversaries

Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence (Katie) Hartshorne celebrated their **60th wedding anniversary** on November 2 and were honored by the brethren with a gift after services in recognition of this wonderful milestone. Mr. Hartshorne is an elder serving the Edmonton and Red Deer congregations in Alberta, Canada, and he and his wife have long assisted in nurturing those congregations. Mr. and Mrs. Hartshorne have three children, three grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Mr. and Mrs. William (Barbara) Oswald were joined in marriage on February 21, 1959, and celebrate **65 years** together this year. They are longtime members of God's Church, baptized together in 1969, and a tremendous example of

service and support for the brethren. Mr. Oswald has served as a minister and Mrs. Oswald as a deaconess in Missouri for decades. They have six children, 15 grandchildren, and 16 great-grandchildren.

The Tri-Cities, Washington, congregation was delighted to celebrate the **40th anniversary** of **Mr. and Mrs. Bob (Merry) Smith** with a reception of brownies and ice cream. Mr. and Mrs. Smith met at a Church activity in Yakima, Washington, and were married on July 10, 1983. They celebrated their anniversary with a special dinner at their favorite restaurant. Congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Smith on this fine milestone!

Births

Ethan Scott Sookdeo was born on August 1, weighing 3.09 kilograms and measuring 55 centimeters long. Ethan is the first child of Mr. and Mrs. Chris (Dominique) Sookdeo, members of the San Fernando, Trinidad congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Tim (Kate) Stark are humbled to share the news of the arrival of their second son, **Jude Joseph Stark**. He was born on November 28, weighing eight pounds, nine ounces. The Starks give God thanks and glory for a healthy baby and thank the brethren for their prayers, messages, cards, and support. The Stark family attend the Traverse City, Michigan, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Ared (Rebecca) Woskanian are thrilled to announce the birth of their beautiful baby daughter, **Abigail Woskanian**. Abigail was born January 23, weighing a healthy 3.62 kilograms, measuring 54 centimeters, and with a beautiful head of hair. Mrs. Woskanian is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Bob Rodzaj in Wisconsin.

In Loving Memory

Mr. Gaylyn Ellsworth Bonjour, Jr., 80, died on January 10 at his home in Matthews, North Carolina. He was born in Long Beach, California, on November 30, 1943, to the late Mr. and Mrs. Gaylyn (Nellie Jane) Bonjour, Sr. He spent his early life involved in construction as a pile driver and also worked as a mason and farmed. He was baptized in 1982 and ordained an elder in 1996. Mr. Bonjour served for more than 20 years as director of mailing operations at the Living Church of God Headquarters. He was preceded in death by his wife of 48 years, Mrs. Leona May Bonjour, in 2013, and by his brother. Mr. Bonjour is survived by his sister, Mrs. Grace Eileen Medard (Andre); his son, Kevin (Bonnie); three grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.

Mrs. Sharon Carr, 86, a member of the Portland, Oregon, congregation, died peacefully in her sleep on December 22. Mrs. Carr became a member of God's Church in the 1960s and was very conscientious and zealous. She and her husband Russell housed ministerial trainees who passed through the area. In response to a request from Mr. Armstrong to pray for the AC students, she regularly prayed for students she had selected from the Envoy. She was a wonderful example of a faithful servant to her husband and seven children, as well as to her community and the brethren. She will be missed and remembered for her sincere kindness and gentleness.

Mr. Ben Chapman, 91, of the Dublin congregation in Ireland, died in hospital on November 18. Mr. Chapman was baptized in April 1965 after coming into contact with God's Church in 1964 through Radio Luxembourg and *Reader's Digest* ads for the *Plain Truth* magazine. The family deeply appreciated the prayers and cards from the brethren.

Mrs. Eileen Lechelt, 93, of the Edmonton, Alberta, congregation in Canada, died peacefully on June 4. She was a devoted wife to her husband, Allan, who predeceased her

in 2018. Mr. and Mrs. Lechelt were longtime members of God's Church, baptized together in 1976. She is survived by their three children, eight grandchildren, and nineteen great-grandchildren. Mrs. Lechelt enjoyed being with the brethren, loved to cook, and was ever the gracious hostess, treating her guests with delicious homemade foods. She is greatly missed.

Mr. Rob Schofield, 73, of the Taunton congregation in the United Kingdom, died November 22 after a short illness. He thoroughly enjoyed his first Feast in 2022, and firmly believed in God's plan for us all. He will be deeply missed by his wife and their family.

Mr. Richard Schumann, 77, a deacon serving the Portland, Oregon, congregation, finished his race on December 15. Mr. Schumann was a faithful and longtime member of God's Church. After completing his service in the United States Air Force, he graduated from Ambassador College, Pasadena, with a bachelor's degree in theology. Mr. Schumann had varied interests from radio and mechanics to performing opera. He served throughout his life in numerous ways and was a wonderful example to many. He is survived by his loving wife Barbara and their three children: Rebecca, Christopher, and Brian.

Mr. Frank "Tommy" Thomas Turner II, 63, of Charlotte, North Carolina, died on Friday, January 12. He was born in Jacksonville, Florida, to parents Mr. and Mrs. Frank (Ann) Turner. He was passionate about the Church and his faith played a significant role in his life. Mr. Turner was a very beloved son, a blessing to His family, and a steadfast servant of the Work of God for many years as the manager of the Risk & Legal Department at Headquarters. He is survived by his parents, one sister, one niece, and many friends. He will be dearly missed by very many.

Electronic Service Requested

Bread: A Biblical Symbol

The word *bread* appears in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. Though it often literally refers to a specific food or to food in general, bread is also a very important and instructive symbol of biblical truth, particularly during this season of the year.

Bread is one of the most universal foods and is made from a wide variety of grains in the different nations around the world. This may be why the Bible uses bread to symbolize the nourishment we need to live. We are made from the earth and need food to sustain our lives (Genesis 3:19). Without food, we die—returning to the dust from which we were created. The Hebrew word for bread is *lechem*, which can mean food for man or beast, but especially bread or the grain used to make it. You may recognize *lechem* in the name Bethlehem—*beth* means house, so *Bethlehem* means House of Bread.

So, what does bread symbolize in the Bible? Most importantly, bread can symbolize Jesus Christ. Jesus declared that He is the “bread of life” and that those who come to Him will never hunger or thirst (John 6:35).

Bread is also used as a metaphor for togetherness and fellowship with one another. The “breaking of bread” (e.g., Acts 2:42) refers to sharing a meal with someone. Inviting someone to “break bread” with you means not just eating a meal together, but also sharing conversation and fellowship with one another. The literal breaking of bread is central to the New Testament Passover, which Jesus shared with His disciples before He was arrested and crucified. Professing Christian sects and denominations the world over use different terms, such as the Lord’s Supper, Holy Communion, and Eucharist, but Christ kept the *Passover* while He was institut-

ing new symbols of bread and wine. He was the Lamb of God, symbolized by the Passover lamb. Jesus explained that the unleavened bread represents His body, broken for mankind (Matthew 26:26; 1 Corinthians 11:24).

Two commemorations of the Feasts that the Lord gave Israel are the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Israel was commanded to eat the Passover “with unleavened bread [*matstsâh*, today called *matzo*]” (Exodus 12:8). They were to eat unleavened bread from the fourteenth of the first month through the twenty-first day of that month (v. 18). Unleavened bread contains no leaven or yeast, so it does not rise but remains flat. It is a symbol of choosing to abandon sin, while leavened bread during this time symbolizes sin itself.

An example of this symbol is also found in the New Testament, where the Apostle Paul tells Christians at Corinth to “keep the feast [of Unleavened Bread], not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:8). Unleavened bread represents sincerity and truth. Leaven puffs up bread dough, and true Christians are not to be “puffed up” like leavened bread (1 Corinthians 4:6, 18–19; 5:2; 13:4). This “puffing up” takes place in a mind that is filled with vanity and pride, like the mind of Satan, the devil (Colossians 2:18; 1 Timothy 3:6). It is the opposite of godly love (1 Corinthians 13:4).

The biblical symbol of bread gives us important knowledge. For more, you can read the booklet *The Holy Days: God’s Master Plan*, which explains in detail the meaningful symbolism of God’s Holy Feast Days.

—Roger Meyer