

# THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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## What the Doctor Ordered

### *Dear Brethren,*

Our Ministerial Training Program here in Charlotte is producing many exciting results. Over the last few years, Mr. John Strain has been able to work with seven younger men who have since been sent to assignments across the country: Mr. Lenny Bower, Mr. Michael Brown, Mr. Ryan Dawson, Mr. Michael Elliott, Mr. Alex Celan, Mr. Julian Braddock, and Mr. James Populo. The importance of bringing younger men into the ministry is great, as, even now, nearly half of our ministry is over the age of 70.

Our training program has also benefited us in ways we never expected. A couple of years ago, we had problems with one of the Mail Processing Department's oldest machines, affectionately named Millie, which inserted booklets and letters into envelopes. It had reached the advanced age of 18 and was having maintenance issues. Replacing Millie would be very expensive, but our small MPD staff was far too busy to take on much manual envelope stuffing whenever Millie stumbled.

I mentioned this in a brethren-and-coworker letter, and many stepped up to make contributions—including a few larger ones—to purchase a replacement for Millie. Mr. Wakefield encouraged us to sell Millie for parts or see if we could somehow revive her. Professional technicians were of no help, as they considered that she had lived long enough and did not want to work on her anymore.

It was then that Mr. Julian Braddock, here at the time as a ministerial trainee with a background in mechanics, took a look at Millie. In very short order, he discovered the problem and brought her back to life. Mr. Braddock was “just what the doctor ordered”—his presence and expertise brought greater

efficiency and financial savings in manpower and equipment. Even as I am writing this letter, Millie is humming away, alongside a newer machine. She now works when we have larger projects, or as a back-up if the newer inserter is down for maintenance.

This year, Mr. James Populo is here as a ministerial trainee, and his background is in project management. He has worked in this field for a multi-billion-dollar corporation, where he consulted with various departments on how to work more efficiently. He is here right when we need him to help us work more effectively across departmental boundaries. While we are still early in the process, one fact is certain: It is good to have someone come in as a friendly but outside consultant to shake things up from time to time. Routines are good, but they can also trap us in habits that prevent greater efficiencies.

### **What About Your Life?**

This can also be true of our personal lives. Sometimes, it is good to have someone outside our context take a look at how we might do better. Couples who are struggling in marriage can benefit from inviting their minister in to look at the problem dispassionately, without bias. One such marriage problem that I remember well—because I learned from the experience—manifested when I visited a new contact interested in the Church. The man was interested in baptism and Sabbath services, but his wife seemed totally against the truth of God. Even though I had been in the ministry for decades, I was slow to pick up on the problem. However, I eventually realized that she was not actually against the Church, but against her husband neglecting her by spending all his time studying. When I

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pointed this out, she softened and became quite reasonable. Sadly, he needed to change and was not ready to do so. I don't know what happened to them, but unless he changed, their marriage probably did not go well.

Sometimes people have child-rearing issues. I have noticed that they rarely counsel with someone more successful in that area of life. Instead, they go to people who are struggling as they are, and engage in a blame party—blaming the schools, blaming peer pressure or social media, blaming a lack of attention from the Church. All of these can be real problems, but some families negotiate these challenges better than others. So, why don't people go to those who seem to be doing better to find out what they are doing that makes them more successful?

In all such cases, it is the fact that we really do not want to change. Dr. Laura, a popular radio talk show host, made this astute observation: *People who call in a marriage counselor rarely want to change themselves. They want the counselor to be an ally to help them change the other person.* Yes, it is easier and feels better to blame one's mate, the schools, social media, parents, and a host of others. That way, we do not need to make painful changes. While change in the right direction—most often not fully understood at first—is rarely comfortable, it bears good fruit.

The *Tomorrow's World* magazine and telecast have changed over the last 25 years. This is noticeable when reviewing older magazines and telecasts. I think most of us would agree that the changes have been good. Of course, when we think of the changes in writers and presenters, we naturally miss those who went before us, as death brought about most of those changes. Yet, the Work has gone on.

Many changes are incremental in manner—small changes over a long stretch of time. That is especially true of the telecast and magazine. Other changes are more dramatic. Sometimes it is a change in a job assignment at HQ. In the field, it may be a new pastor moving in. No matter how carefully the new man tries not to “upset the apple cart,” significant changes do occur. In almost every case, those changes are simply the results of different administration (1 Corinthians 12:28), not departure from the truth. It is important to recognize the difference—but some members do not, and may react with fear, disagreement,

or even defection. Most often, however, such changes enrich a congregation and bring about a broader perspective.

### God's Spirit Is There to Change Us

As you read this, we have finished this year's Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread, and are coming to Pentecost. Ancient Israel experienced both Festivals in a physical manner. Yet, spiritually, they never put the leaven of their past lives behind them. Nor was the law of God, given on what we now call Pentecost, written on their hearts—only on stone.

As we observe Pentecost this year, let us humble ourselves before our Creator and allow His Spirit to transform our lives. Rather than resisting it, let us embrace *positive* change. As we are instructed, let us “be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2). Indeed, “we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

We will never reach perfection in this life, but must always strive to improve. It is easy to see baptism as an end in itself, but there is more. We must change for the better. Baptism is only the beginning of our transformation into sons and daughters of God (2 Corinthians 6:18). “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ *have put on Christ*.... And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:27, 29).

Finally, brethren, let us never forget Dr. Meredith's favorite scripture describing a true Christian:

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*).



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## Where Did the Years Go?

**I**n this issue of the *Living Church News*, we are noting 25 years of the *Tomorrow's World* telecast and magazine. That milestone reminds me of when I graduated from high school. Over the next several years, many of my friends' parents celebrated their silver anniversary of marriage. That seems like a long time when you are a young adult, but how that perspective changes with time!

Time, like the weather, is something everyone talks about, but no one can truly change. It appears to pass slowly when we look forward, but quickly in retrospect. Five minutes is an eternity for a child waiting for an ice-cream cone, and a parent taking children to see grandparents is barraged with cries of, "Are we there yet?" Older adults, on the other hand, look back and wonder, *Where have all the years gone?* We also hear "How time flies!" and "Children grow up so fast."

### Thousand-Year Days

The Bible has much to say about the difference between how God and man see time. "But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3:8). What are we to make of this verse? What is its point? We learn much about God's plan from the last half of the verse: "a thousand years as one day." But what about the first half—"with the Lord one day is as a thousand years"?

In effect, Peter is saying that time, though inflexible, is not as important as what we do with it. "Time flies" with God—a thousand years may pass, and it seems as a single day. Yet, at the same time, God is efficient beyond our understanding in His use of time—He can do a lot in a day! Consider the days of creation.

Dr. Meredith often quoted from Peter Drucker's *The Effective Executive* about time and how we use it: "Time is totally irreplaceable.... It is the one truly universal condition. All work takes place in time and uses up time. Yet most people take for granted this unique, irreplaceable, and necessary resource. Nothing else, perhaps, distinguishes effective executives as much as their tender loving care of time."

God is the most effective executive. Though He has plenty of time, He uses it wisely. This is one reason why it is said, "with the Lord one day is as a thousand years." We often hear that God lives outside of time and space,

but what does that mean? God placed the sun, moon, and stars where they are to mark time. "Then God said, 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years'" (Genesis 1:14). Time in that context was created for mankind. We measure time by the sun, moon, and stars.

However, we may also understand time in terms of sequence—*this* is done before *that*. For example, God created the angels before He created the universe and our earthly home, and they were able to rejoice in God's handiwork because they were created first. God challenged Job, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4–7). Clearly, there was a *time* when God laid the foundations of our earthly home. This came in sequence after He created the angels. So, while God exists outside of measurable time and space, it is not as though time, in terms of sequential events, does not exist.

God reminds us about time in His word. And since it is, as Drucker wrote, "totally irreplaceable," God is concerned about how we use it. He reminds us of the difference between a never-ending life and a limited life. "For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night.... The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away" (Psalm 90:4, 10). God desires that we "number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (v. 12).

Our physical life carries with it an expiration date. When we are young, we usually think it is so far off that it will never arrive. But, as it draws closer, we increasingly understand the limitations of time. The earlier we learn to "number our days" and *act* upon that understanding, the wiser, more sober-minded, and more productive we should become.

### The Parable of the Talents

Our ability to achieve more in this life is, to a degree, dependent on the natural gifts God gives to each of us. We see

this in the Parable of the Talents. “For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, *to each according to his own ability*; and immediately he went on a journey” (Matthew 25:14–15). The remainder of the parable shows that God rewards each of us according to what we do with what we have. The one with five talents doubles them to ten, and the one with two doubles them to four. God is *equally* pleased with *both* servants. “His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord’” (vv. 21, 23).

God is only displeased with the servant who does nothing with the opportunities given to him. Consider the words *wicked* and *lazy* in the parable:

“Then he who had received the one talent came and said, ‘Lord, I knew you to be a hard man.... And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.’ But his lord answered and said to him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant.... take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.... And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’” (Matthew 25:24–26, 28, 30).

One man of great accomplishment was Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong. Clearly, he was a man of great talent and energy. However, he struggled in his early life with his use of time. He describes in the first volume of his *Autobiography* that he accomplished much when he was focused, but was unproductive at other times. And he often said that he had to learn to “drive” himself. But what does that mean?

Certainly, it means that he had to fight against his natural tendencies to “take it easy” and instead make hard decisions to do what was most important. Is this not where “the rubber meets the road”? Most of us have the human tendency to take the easy path. Put two jobs in front of us and we will likely choose the easier of the two. So, to drive oneself means to go against that tendency and make the conscious choice to do the task that is harder but more important.

### **The Parable of the Sower**

Opportunity and drive are key to the Parable of the Sower. In it, we find four categories of people who react differently to hearing the word of God. We are familiar with those who receive seed by the wayside, to whom “Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts” (Mark 4:15). That does not fit most of you reading this article.

The second group is made up of those who have very little depth of character. They are immediately joyful upon hearing

the word of God, but when times get tough—often because of opposition from family, neighbors, or coworkers—they quickly turn back. This might apply to a few of you, but the third category is a greater problem for most of us who have grown past the first two categories. These are the ones who allow “the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in [to] choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful” (v. 19). The cares of this world more readily appeal to our human instincts, and often involve easier or more pressing choices to make.

Then we come to the last group, which I trust applies to most of you reading this article. “But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred” (v. 20). Have you considered what the last portion of that sentence means? Even among those who will be in the Kingdom of God, some will have produced more than others—some thirtyfold, some a hundredfold, and some in between. Why?

We know that we are saved by the grace of God. We cannot earn eternal life by our efforts—it is a gift from God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ—but the Bible tells us that we are *rewarded* in the Kingdom of God according to our works (1 Corinthians 3:8; Matthew 16:27). The two factors that appear to be most relevant are the gifts of God that manifest in our natural abilities and what we do with those gifts—the hard choices we make. This is part of the message of the Parable of the Talents. Not everyone is given the same number of talents. But, as shown by the man who buried his talent, it is sadly possible to do nothing with what we are given.

Note, by the way, that a “talent” in the parable refers to a unit of money. Over time, the word has taken on the meaning of a gift or natural ability—we use it today in such contexts as musical ability or other aptitudes. It is important to understand this parable in its *spiritual* context.

### **Two Determinants of Achievement**

Solomon counseled us, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going” (Ecclesiastes 9:10). Though God is not limited by time and space, we are. And every day we have a choice before us—to take the easy way or the productive way. It all comes down to our willingness to *make hard choices*—to drive ourselves to do what has lasting value. *Drive* and *choice* must not be separated.

The Apostle Paul warns us of the dangers of falling asleep spiritually. “Therefore He says: ‘Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.’ See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Ephesians 5:14–17). To “walk circumspectly” means to live with our eyes

wide open, to look around and understand the times in which we live—to see the big picture!

Paul also warned the Romans, “And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed” (Romans 13:11). This is a universal truth, for every day we are one day closer to the end of our life’s story in the flesh. Whether the end of the age is near or far, it is closer today than it was yesterday. People walking circumspectly recognize that we are not living in normal times. Our world is immensely more dangerous and closer to Armageddon than when the *Tomorrow’s World* magazine and telecast began 25 years ago. We never know from one day to the next what world-shaking surprise awaits us.

Paul addressed the brethren at Thessalonica about what he thought at that time was the end of the age:

But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:1–8).

Paul may not have understood how much time would pass before the end of the age, but this should not tempt us to shrug off what we see in our world today. Jesus warned that some at the time of the end will think He is delaying His coming (Matthew 24:48–51). Many Church members thought the end would come in the 1970s—then left God’s truth when that proved untrue. So, while we know certain events must first take place, we are warned to watch and be ready. “Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!... But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only” (Matthew 24:32–33, 36).

### **A Balanced Life**

Continuing his admonitions to the Romans, Paul wrote, “The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off

the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Romans 13:12–14).

The context here is not learning to play the piano, though that is a profitable pursuit, but casting off “the works of darkness”—overcoming our human nature that gives in to the easy path of a sinful lifestyle.

It is easy to spend excessive time on video games, television, or social media. It is not so easy, at least for many, to learn a new language so you can communicate with brethren near and far. It is a challenge to learn to play the piano so you can contribute to Sabbath services. It takes persistence to exercise daily to contribute to good health. And let us never forget the need to pray, study, and fast. Doing right and profitable things focuses our attention away from frivolous pursuits that can become bad habits taking us away from our calling and relationship with our Creator. These are choices we make.

Does taking “tender loving care of time” mean that we can never do anything we enjoy? Not at all! We find Abram “sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day” (Genesis 18:1). When the Apostles returned to Christ after their journeys, He “said to them, ‘Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.’ For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat. So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves” (Mark 6:31–32).

The truly Christian life is one of balance, but balance means different things to different people. What it should mean to each of us is that we must walk circumspectly. We must honestly examine our habits and decisions. “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified” (2 Corinthians 13:5). We must be aware of how we spend our time. If we are as the individuals who did nothing in the Parable of the Minas and the Parable of the Talents, we may end up on the outside of the Kingdom. But if we have sown on good ground, we will produce greater or lesser crops. The size of our crop will be determined by how much effort we put into wisely using the God-given ability we have been blessed with.

Twenty-five years is a long time or a short time, depending on whether we are looking forward or backward. We may celebrate what God has done through His work. We can collectively be thankful for Dr. Meredith and his leadership, as well as for the fact that God has used all of us to continue supporting His work here on earth.

So, where will we be in a year—in five years, ten years, or 25 years from now? Mr. Armstrong used to say, *We must work as though it all depends on us and pray as though it all depends on God.* Not a bad way to spend our time! (LN)



# The Holy Spirit: Changing Your Life

By **John H. Ogwyn (1949–2005)**

*This brief Bible Study composed by Evangelist John H. Ogwyn (1949–2005) is one of several dozen articles available in the Bible Study section of LCG.org. We encourage you to consider this valuable online resource as a helpful tool to enrich your study of God's word.*

**M**any people are very confused about the Holy Spirit. They not only do not understand what it is; they have no idea what it is supposed to do in their lives or why they need it. What about you?

We live in a world of fear and anxiety. Man is increasingly being forced to come to grips with the limits of technology. All of our vaunted advances in education and the dissemination of information have not made this world a safer place. What is a person to do in a hostile, crazy world?

What changes can the Holy Spirit make in your thoughts and actions? Is there something that you must do for these changes to take place, or does the Spirit just sort of “take over” a Christian's life?

## **We Must Exercise the Holy Spirit**

In the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit is presented to us as a gift from God—yet it is clearly a gift that has strings attached to it. The Apostle Peter in his Pentecost sermon said, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Two things are clear in Peter's statement. First, the Holy Spirit is a gift from God; no one can earn it. Second, in order to receive this gift, we must repent of sin and be baptized. Real repentance involves a change of direction in our lives. It means far more than simple remorse or regret for the past. Rather, the very word itself implies a turning away from the past, a changing of the mind.

The Bible draws various comparisons to the Holy Spirit to help us understand it more clearly. Primarily, the Spirit is compared to wind. After all, the Greek word for spirit, *pneuma*, means wind or breath. Another common analogy is that of flowing water (cf. John 7:38–39). Just as air and

water are necessary life-giving forces, so God gives Christians eternal life through His Spirit (Romans 8:11). Also, just as air and water both flow and have power to affect and change that which they act on, so also does the Holy Spirit. There are, however, additional analogies that the Scriptures use. One of these analogies is that of fire.

Most of us have had some experience with a wood fire, whether with a fireplace in our home, a campfire, or perhaps memories of the old wood heaters of our childhood. The Apostle Paul drew on the common knowledge of people in his day about wood fires when he told Timothy to “stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (2 Timothy 1:6).

One important characteristic of a wood fire is that it must be stirred from time to time. Otherwise, an ash layer forms, the flame dies down, and the heat given off diminishes. A fire that was burning well at bedtime often appears to be completely out the next morning, having suffered from hours of neglect. However, by stirring the coals until the ash layer is knocked off and oxygen can reach those last sparks in the coals, it is often possible to reignite a blazing fire. Paul was reminding Timothy that God's Holy Spirit is not a gift to be neglected or ignored. It must be stirred up regularly if it is to function as it ought. If it is neglected long enough, it is even possible to eventually lose that precious gift (Psalm 51:11).

The Holy Spirit, which we receive through the laying on of hands following baptism (Acts 8:17), is intended to change our lives. The Spirit is the means by which God accomplishes His Work in us, as well as through us. As we read in Heinz Cassirer's translation, “And indeed, it is God himself who is at work within you, as regards both will and deed, in pursuit of his gracious design” (Philippians 2:13, *God's New Covenant: A New Testament Translation*).

## **The Holy Spirit is Not a Spirit of Fearfulness**

Paul told Timothy that “the spirit which God has bestowed upon us is not one that makes us shrink back in fear” (2 Timothy 1:7, Cassirer). Fears and anxieties control the lives of many people. Let's face it; the world in which we live can be a pretty frightening place. Sometimes people become immobilized by their fears. They are so fearful of doing the

wrong thing that they are unable to come to a conclusion and often wind up doing nothing. Of course, that in itself is generally the wrong thing. Other times, however, people become panicked by their fears and make irrational decisions. Such unbalanced decisions can have far-reaching and devastating consequences.

When the Bible speaks of having the fear of God, it is talking about an entirely different kind of “fear.” This “fear” refers to the awe and reverence we are to have for the great Creator and His power. The Greek word translated “fear” in 2 Timothy 1:7, *deilias*, is never used to refer to the fear of God. It is only used to refer to the kind of fear that results from a *lack of faith*. It is the term used when the Bible talks about the fearfulness of the disciples during the storm when Christ came walking on the water. It is also used when reference is made to the panic-stricken reaction of the disciples at the time of Christ’s arrest.

This cowardice and timidity, which either panics or paralyzes a person, is the opposite of faith. Paul reminded Timothy that this sort of fear is not the result of God’s Spirit. Moses through faith “forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king” (Hebrews 11:27). He had the kind of confidence in God and His promises that enabled him to withstand every attempt to intimidate or dissuade him from the proper course

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of action. The Holy Spirit of God transforms fearful human beings into men and women of faith and courage.

Look at what happened to Peter. On the evening of the Passover he was so overwhelmed by fear that he cursed, swore, and denied that he even knew Jesus of Nazareth (Matthew 26:73–74). Just over seven weeks later, he stood in the temple and boldly proclaimed the Gospel. And in Acts 4, we read of the absolute confidence with which Peter faced the Jewish religious establishment’s threats and intimidation after he and the others “spoke the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31). While human courage has its limits, the boldness that results from God’s Spirit has no bounds.

### **The Holy Spirit Is the Spirit of Power**

Paul wrote to Timothy that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Power. The Greek word for power is *dynameos*, the root from which we derive our English words *dynamic*, *dynamo*, and even *dynamite*. It means dynamic power and ability, and is often used to refer to miracles.

The Holy Spirit is God’s out-flowing power (Luke 1:35). It is the means by which He created and brought into existence the very universe (Psalm 104:30). It is the power by which He works in the minds of human beings made in His image (Genesis 6:3). It is the power by which the lame miraculously walked, the blind saw, the deaf heard, and the dead were raised during the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ (Luke 5:15–17).

This same power is available to you and me. Christ told the disciples that “power shall be yours at the time when the Holy Spirit will descend upon you” (Acts 1:8, Cassirer). Having that power, nevertheless, does not mean that we are immune to human fears and discouragements. Paul explained, “Such a treasure [the Holy Spirit] is indeed ours, but it is carried by us in what are but vessels of clay to show that the power exceeding all else is God’s and does not belong to ourselves” (2 Corinthians 4:7, Cassirer). The Apostle goes on to explain, “We are hard-pressed on every side, yet [we are] not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair” (v. 8). Humanly we are still ourselves, with our weaknesses and fears, but we are now “plugged in” to the power source of the universe.

God’s power is still available to work miracles, just as it was over 1,900 years ago. As a minister of the dynamic, living God, I have literally seen miracles take place under my hands numerous times. I have gone to the home of distraught parents in the middle of the night to anoint and pray for a weakened, fever-racked child. I have seen that little child sit up at the conclusion of the prayer totally devoid of fever, reach over, and begin playing with toys as if nothing had ever been wrong. I have seen the red line of blood poisoning, already extended above the elbow, simply diminish and disappear within minutes after the prayer of faith had been prayed. Those and thousands of other similar incidents experienced by many of God’s people down through time are evidence of the dynamic, miracle-working power that is the Holy Spirit.

The power of God through the Holy Spirit not only works miracles of healing; it is the power that enables us to overcome our human nature and become like God. However, this miracle requires our active participation—our willing cooperation with God. Notice how Paul explained it in Colossians 1:27–29.

In verse 27 he explains that having Jesus Christ living His life in us is our hope of glory. In verse 28 he expresses his desire to present those he was ministering to as “perfect”—brought to spiritual completion—in Christ. How is this done? Paul writes, “It is with this end in view that I toil and struggle, in reliance on the very energy of Christ which is powerfully at work within me” (v. 29, Cassirer). We must strive in accordance with what God is doing in us through His power.

## The Holy Spirit Is the Spirit of Love

The fundamental characteristic of God is love (1 John 4:8). The Holy Spirit is the means by which we actually begin to partake of God's very nature (2 Peter 1:4). Paul explained in Romans 5:5 that God's love enters into our hearts and minds through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the means by which our "normal" nature and attitude undergo a transformation. It tunes us into God's "wavelength" and we become receptive to Him as a result. When we "tune in" God, we are enabled to begin "tuning out" Satan, who is described as "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2).

The love that flows out from God, in and through us, is not simply an emotion or a good feeling. The Apostle John explained how God's love would manifest itself in the lives of true Christians. "But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected [brought to completion] in him" (1 John 2:5). God's word tells us how to show real love, both to God and to our neighbor. If we carefully follow God's word in its full intent, then genuine godly love will manifest itself in our actions and attitudes.

God's power is still available to work miracles, just as it was over 1,900 years ago. **As a minister of the dynamic, living God, I have literally seen miracles take place under my hands numerous times.**

Most professing Christians think that *love* and *law* are opposites. They could not be more wrong. Rather, Paul said, "The purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart" (1 Timothy 1:5). The law defines sin (1 John 3:4) and therefore provides guidelines to teach us how to show love. God's law is the channel through which His Spirit flows.

## The Holy Spirit Enables a Sound Mind

"You can go crazy reading the Bible!" some have been told. The common idea in the world is that a little religion is fine, but those who seek to live their lives by every word of God are a little bit odd or "kooky." What about it? Is God's Spirit going to manifest itself in the emotional excesses of the "holy laugh"? Will it result in people becoming mind-numbed "zombies" as evidenced in the criticism directed against various cults?

Paul explained to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:7 that the Holy Spirit is a source of sound-mindedness. What exactly is sound-mindedness? The meaning of the original Greek word that Paul used, *sophronismou*, is to be wise and sensible. It is rendered into English by such terms as "sober," "self-controlled," and "discreet." It is the term that Luke uses in Luke 8:35 when he describes a formerly possessed

man sitting clothed and in his "right mind" after Christ casts the demons out.

God's Spirit never leads a person to be out of control: "God is the author of peace, not of disorder. All the assemblies of those consecrated to God give proof of it" (1 Corinthians 14:33, Cassirer). One in whom the Holy Spirit is manifested will become more balanced and sound in his thinking. God reveals principles of conduct throughout the Bible, dealing with everything from family relations to business and financial management. One who is seeking to live by every word of God will, through effort and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, become increasingly able to apply these principles of sound judgment.

The bitterness and envy that dominate the minds of many people in today's world lead away from sound-mindedness. They are totally contrary to godly wisdom (cf. James 3:14–15). An honest and forgiving heart is the kind of place where God's Spirit thrives. That is the kind of sound-minded approach to life that leads to real peace.

Today's is a crazy-making world. Violence and lust permeate much of what passes for entertainment, whether in music or at the movies. What we feed our minds is extremely important. People who would never dream of willfully ingesting something unclean into their stomachs sometimes fill their minds with spiritual uncleanness by the hour. That does not promote sound, balanced, wholesome thinking. The Apostle Paul stresses in Philippians 4:8 that we should fill our minds with what is true, lovely, pure, and honorable. These things bring out the best in us. Whether it is in music, literature, painting, sculpture, or drama, the arts have a profound effect on our emotions, moods, and thoughts that we should never underestimate.

God offers us His Spirit for a purpose. It is the means by which we come to share in God's power, His attitude, and His thinking. However, we must be ever mindful to "stir up" that gift, which is in us through the laying on of hands. That stirring is accomplished through regularly studying and meditating on God's word and through prayer. It is aided by our fasting and going to God humbled and deeply aware of our utter lack of self-sufficiency. It is furthered as we seek to put God's word into our lives by taking it seriously and trying to make changes in all areas of our lives—big and small.

The Greek word for zeal in the New Testament comes from the verb *zeo*, which literally means *to boil*. To lack zeal means that the fire is going out. It is to be, at best, lukewarm. Our society is geared to promoting a lukewarm state, the overriding characteristic of the last stage of the Church of God. As we come ever closer to the climax at the close of this age, we must be deeply mindful of the need that all of us have to continually "stir up the gift of God which is in you" (2 Timothy 1:6). <sup>LN</sup>





# The Miracle of Conversion

By **Richard F. Ames**

**G**od gave His people three annual pilgrimage Feasts, each of which can teach us awesome lessons. We recently kept the first by taking the Passover and observing the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In a few months we will keep the third, the Feast of Tabernacles, also called the Feast of Ingathering. Between them comes the second, the Feast of Harvest, which we also know as Pentecost (Exodus 23:14–17).

The word *Pentecost* comes from a Greek word meaning *fiftieth*, since it is observed after counting 50 days, beginning with the day of the wave sheaf offering during the Days of Unleavened Bread. Among the many awesome lessons Pentecost teaches us is the lesson of *conversion*—the miraculous transformation Christians undergo from our inborn carnal nature to the divine nature God placed within us through the gift of His Holy Spirit, given via the laying on of hands of the ministry after our baptism.

When we look at the world and all its violence and carnality, it should remind us that before we were converted, we were no different. Those who grew up in the Church, as children of converted parents, had the special blessing of having the Holy Spirit with them (1 Corinthians 7:14). But even they did not have the Spirit *within* them until hands were laid upon them after their baptism. For every baptized Christian, Pentecost should remind us of the great miracle of conversion.

We understand from Scripture that the resurrected Jesus Christ became the first of the firstfruits. “But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming” (1 Corinthians 15:23). Yes, we as Christ’s followers will be among the firstfruits in the Kingdom of God.

So, how does the transformation that will let us enter the Kingdom of God take place? It comes through the work of the Holy Spirit that dwells within us, which we received just after baptism. On that first New Testament Pentecost, 3,000 new believers began that process, being baptized and receiving the Holy Spirit.

It is worth noting one miracle of conversion that, though visible at that first Pentecost, often goes unnoticed. We read that among the approximately 120 believers present were

Jesus’ mother and His brothers. Yes, even before the Holy Spirit descended, a miracle was at work. Here were Jesus’ brothers—unbelievers during His lifetime (John 7:5)—now among the disciples.

## **The Descent of God’s Spirit**

Some professing Christians who call themselves “Pentecostal” have a practice of vocalizing a kind of “babble”—incoherent syllables that they believe to be some kind of divine language given to them. But that was not the miracle of Pentecost. Remember that the Jews of Jesus’ day were scattered across the Roman Empire and beyond. People came to Solomon’s Porch, just outside the Temple, from many lands, speaking many native languages. Here is how Luke describes the actual miracle of languages at Pentecost:

And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, “Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:5–11).

These people were not speaking or hearing gibberish, and God was not making them understand any one language that He favored—not Greek, not Aramaic, not Hebrew. They were hearing Christ’s message in their own native languages. And it should be no surprise that many were receptive to the message, as they had just a few weeks earlier seen a great heavenly sign that had been prophesied in Scripture. The Apostle Peter reminded them of that sign, foretold by Joel’s prophecy, of the sun turning into darkness (Acts 2:17–20).

We should note that this darkness wasn't some regular astronomical phenomenon like an eclipse. When Christ was hung on a stake, Jerusalem for three hours experienced a supernatural darkness in fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. The throng assembled at Solomon's Porch knew that something awesome had taken place at that time, so they were receptive to Peter's message. And what did he tell them? "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Peter said plainly that the people to whom he was speaking had killed Jesus Christ—as we all have, since we all are guilty of sin. And, in response to what they heard, 3,000 new believers called out to their Creator in repentance.

Many in that throng were the very same people who had called for Christ's crucifixion—and the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, had carried out their will. So, how did these Jews respond to Peter? "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart [they were convicted of their sins], and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (vv. 37–38).

Three thousand were baptized on that day—no doubt including many who had called for Christ's death just weeks before. They began a miraculous process of transformation, despite their grievous sin. They repented and received the Holy Spirit, to begin the process of changing from carnal human nature to God's own divine nature. Their example shows us that no sin is too great to be repented of—even the sin of killing the Savior. Yes, let us not forget that every one of us has killed Christ through our sins. Each of us is no less guilty than any member of that mob.

Pentecost opened the calling of the firstfruits of God's master plan. And that first New Testament Pentecost typified the miraculous transformation from human nature to divine nature. How does that transformation take place? By our begetting through God's Holy Spirit. James describes the beginning of that process of conversion: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (James 1:17–18, *King James Version*).

When we receive the Holy Spirit, we are begotten by God, and we begin to change from our carnal human nature and grow into God's holy and righteous character. When we look around the world and see the evil from all corners of the earth, from South America to Europe to Asia, all throughout mankind—all around us—we see a world of carnal nature. But that is *not* our destiny. There are not enough words to give God the thanks for the abundance of blessings and grace

that He has given us, especially the gift of being changed from carnality to divine nature, learning to radiate the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23).

### Examples of Dramatic Conversion

As Christians, we are to be conformed to the image—the character, the mind, the nature, and the Spirit—of Christ. Baptism is a start, but then comes a lifetime of overcoming. "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever" (2 Peter 3:18).

Our Christian conversion begins when God begets us with His Spirit. We need to be conformed to the image of Christ. We need to be transformed, not conforming to the world, but renewing our minds with the Spirit of God.

Scripture gives us some examples of dramatic conversions. Consider Stephen, one of the first deacons. He was accused of blasphemy against Moses and God. For 49 verses in the book of Acts, we read of him recounting the history of Israel, demonstrating that he was not a blasphemer. God gave him great boldness to deliver a powerful message to the Sanhedrin before he was stoned to death.

"You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it." When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" (Acts 7:51–56).

Amazingly, as Stephen was dying, he prayed for his enemies. "And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not charge them with this sin.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep" (vv. 59–60). Stephen set us a profound example of genuine and deep conversion.

Furthermore, this set the scene for what would later become another example of such conversion. Near the end of the account of Stephen's martyrdom, we find a sobering detail, describing how "they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul" (v. 58). Yes, Saul! When Stephen

called out to Christ, the man who became Paul was there—a man who was infamous among the first Christians. He later wrote, “For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it” (Galatians 1:13). But despite his evil conduct, even Saul could be converted:

And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life (1 Timothy 1:14–16).

Yes, the young Pharisee Saul, who had been a leading figure at Stephen’s martyrdom, would in time be converted. The same man who had fiercely persecuted God’s Church became a passionate preacher of Christ’s message, and God used him powerfully to serve the Gentiles.

The prominent Jewish leader Saul was converted after Christ’s resurrection. But did God convert any of the Jewish people about whom we read in the Old Testament? There were very few, but we read, “Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow” (1 Peter 1:10–11). Yes, the Holy Spirit was in some of the prophets of old, which means they will take part in the first resurrection. This includes Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as all the men and women of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11.

Consider King David, who committed adultery and caused Uriah’s death. Despite David’s grave sin, Scripture records that his prayer reflected deep conversion. David came to understand the depth of his sin and his need for deep repentance: “Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight” (Psalm 51:4). And later he prayed, “Create in me a clean heart, O God and renew a steadfast spirit in me” (v. 10).

Of course, along with the examples Scripture gives us of dramatic conversion, many of you readers can recount your own dramatic examples from your own lives, and from those of your friends and family members. Conversion is an awesome gift from God, and it brings about a miraculous transformation from human nature to God’s very own holy and righteous character growing in our own lives. That transformation comes about through the power of the Holy Spirit.

## The Power of God’s Spirit

But what is the power of the Holy Spirit? We read, “The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). This description is of what we call the recreation. It was the power of God that created all of the animals and the fish and all of the environment. Every Sabbath we should remind ourselves that God is the Creator of “the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them” (Exodus 20:11).

The extent of God’s power was a subject of David’s meditation, as we read in Psalm 8:3–8:

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen—even the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas.

Truly, God upholds all things “by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3). The Holy Spirit is the power of God. When David meditated on the vast universe, he understood God’s power, even if he did not know the scientific details we know today about the two trillion galaxies in this universe—at least—each moving at millions of miles per hour. And that is just a tiny portion of the vast power your Savior has through His Holy Spirit, the power of creation!

And even more amazing than such physical power is the power of begetting. We read, “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been [begotten] not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever” (1 Peter 1:22–23). Yes, God has begotten us as His children. He tells us, “I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:18).

The world does not understand that God is reproducing Himself, preparing begotten sons and daughters to become literal members of His family at the resurrection. We who are firstfruits today are awaiting the seventh trumpet of Revelation, when we will be born into God’s kingdom—when we will be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:19). Of course, we won’t be filled entirely with God’s fullness until we are born into His kingdom as glorified Spirit-children.

Until then, He is working with us, using His Holy Spirit to help us grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, to help us

become transformed and conformed to the very image—the character, the mind—of Christ. The power of the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of creation, the Spirit of begetting, and the Spirit of the resurrection.

### Characteristics of God's Spirit

The faithful evangelist Timothy received this encouraging admonition from Paul, his beloved mentor: “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).

God's Holy Spirit works in many different ways with very different characteristics, imparting godly life to us. “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit [that] dwells in you” (Romans 8:11). The life we live as Christians is not yet the resurrected life of Spirit-beings, but it is life in the spirit of that coming resurrection. We live our physical lives in godliness, anticipating the life of Spirit that awaits us.

God empowers us with the awesome spirit of love! We read that “hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us” (Romans 5:5, *Revised Standard Version*).

Truth is another characteristic of the power of God's Spirit. At the Passover service, we heard these words from the Apostle John: “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come” (John 16:13). We understand, of course, that this description is a personification, a metaphor, just like the Old Testament personifications of wisdom, presented as if it were a person. A power does not literally speak or hear—we should not misunderstand personifications of the Holy Spirit.

But even though the Spirit is not a person, we must not diminish or discount it—it is the awesome power of God Himself, and we shouldn't minimize that. What can that power do? “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17). Yes, the power of the Holy Spirit guides us into all truth. As Christ tells us, “you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

But how much of that power are we using in our own lives? It is the power to be renewed and to be encouraged. “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16).

And, having received the Holy Spirit, we have a responsibility. We must “put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,

and be *renewed in the spirit of your mind*, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:22–24).

This means that we must conduct ourselves in truth and in God's grace, as we read in Ephesians 4:29–32:

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 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.

Christ promised that His Spirit would flow from believers as rivers of living water (John 7:38). He said, “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit” (John 15:8). I hope that each of us is staying close to God in daily prayer, beseeching Him to help us bear good fruit by radiating the fruits of His Holy Spirit.

### Our Mission as Converted Christians

With God's Holy Spirit in us, we have a mission. But we do not carry out that mission alone. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). Through the power of God's Holy Spirit, it is Christ in us who gives us strength. “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the LORD of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6).

As humble disciples of Jesus Christ, we need to realize that we do not know everything God the Father knows. Yet, through His Spirit, we can do His will. “He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. 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 1:7–8).

The miracle of conversion puts within us the power of the Holy Spirit. That power gives us strength to overcome our carnal human nature—and it gives us strength to do our part in carrying out the Work of God. As we yield to our Savior, learning to use more of His Spirit, we become more and more like Christ, developing in our own lives God's holy and righteous character.

Let us never cease to pray that we can become more powerful lights to the world around us, and that through that power we can each do our part to support the Work as God's Church preaches the Gospel of the Kingdom of God even to the very ends of the earth. Thank God for the miracle of conversion! (LN)



# 25 Years of *Tomorrow's World*

By **Editorial Staff**

**T**he very first *Tomorrow's World* telecast aired in January of 1999 and, just four months later, the newly established Living Church of God published the inaugural issue of our *Tomorrow's World* magazine.

This year, 2024, marks the 25th anniversary of what God began accomplishing through the Living Church of God. Among those involved in this work today are men such as Presiding Evangelist Gerald E. Weston, Director of Media Operations Richard F. Ames, Executive Editor Wallace G. Smith, and Digital Media and Broadcast Manager Michael J. DeSimone. To commemorate 25 years of Christ's Gospel being preached through the Living Church of God, we sat down with each of these four men to glean insights from their perspectives on how LCG's work has grown over the past two-and-a-half decades.

Mr. Weston reminisced about LCG's beginnings under its founding Presiding Evangelist, Dr. Roderick C. Meredith. "We had a lot of members," he recalled, "because the majority of the members of the Global Church of God had seen what was happening and were supportive. But the magazine, the telecast, the studio, the booklets—essentially, everything had to be started from scratch. And of course, Dr. Meredith was very good at that sort of thing."

Mr. Weston also emphasized the initial challenges inherent in quickly resuming operations. "We were there at Dr. Meredith's dining room table, planning the beginning of the Church.... It was a very humble beginning in many respects." From those humble beginnings have come significant growth in quality and organization. "When I look back over the 25 years," Mr. Weston commented, "I see that the quality of everything—the booklets, the magazines, the telecast—has improved immensely."

Mr. Ames highlighted the Church's adaptability to technological advancements. "One thing has not changed," he said, "and that is the mission of the Church. Regardless of historic circumstances, cultural changes, technological changes, we still have the same mission, and that mission is to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God." However, as Mr. Ames noted, "the methods have changed over the years." From radio broadcasts in 1934 to using the Internet and platforms

like YouTube today, the Work's technological progression is obvious, and Mr. Ames elaborated on the recent incorporations of artificial intelligence in translation and broadcasting. "Artificial intelligence has helped with our translations," he said. "We are now going into the Urdu language for the telecast, which is helped by artificial intelligence."

Mr. DeSimone remarked on the operational challenges inherent in the telecast and the need to avoid complacency in our presentation of God's message. The Church does its best to present that message in a way that conveys its relevance today. "There's always growth and improvement in the way you do things," he explained. "We're probably going to look back in five years and say, 'Oh, I can't believe we did it that way. It looks so weird.' That's the way it is—you want to make adjustments that allow the telecast to stay contemporary and not stand out as out-of-date. There's always growth and improvement in the style of how you communicate."

Mr. Smith pointed out the enduring relevance of traditional broadcasting methods like television, which continues to be a powerful tool despite the rise of digital media. "Television has surprised many with its longevity," he said. Referencing Mark Twain's famous quip, Mr. Smith remarked that "the death of television has been greatly exaggerated, and it remains a powerful medium for reaching people with the truth of God."

Yet, as Mr. Smith pointed out, "One of the most effective ways we've evolved, though it's invisible to most, is learning to reach people online who might otherwise never find us. When everyone and his brother is shouting on the Internet, it takes real skill to stand out, and the Work continues to evolve and discover new ways to do that." He also stressed the importance of the Church's message remaining unchanged: "The truth is still the truth! What was true five generations ago is true in this one, too. And since the magazine first began, a focus on the purpose of man, the will of our Creator, and the prophetic message of Jesus Christ about the coming Kingdom of God has always been at our core, and it continues to be."

## **Overcoming Challenges**

Naturally, the Church has faced many and varied difficulties over the past 25 years. Manpower, particularly in the field

ministry, has presented a significant challenge. “Age is a main issue, because we don’t have that many new people in the pipeline,” Mr. Weston said, explaining the challenge of sustaining a vibrant and effective field team. “We face challenges today that we did not face when I first came into the ministry,” he explained. “In the Worldwide Church of God, we were really the only well-known option for the Sabbath, Holy Days, and so forth. Today, we face different groups all fishing in the pond of Worldwide.” However, Mr. Weston is certain that God is blessing LCG in a unique way and has since its inception. “Dr. Meredith, from the very beginning, was preaching the Gospel to the world,” he said. “Almost immediately, we were on television, publishing a magazine—not just fishing in the pond of Worldwide, but going to the world. That’s been one of the big differences.”

Mr. Ames highlighted the profound impact of the 2020 pandemic on Church operations and governance. “One of the decisions that Mr. Weston gave instructions on was that we should wear masks,” he said. “Another issue that came up was the matter of singing, which could be dangerous. Well, when this was discussed at the Council of Elders, I said right away, ‘This is going to be a challenge of Church government.’” The subsequent fallout from these decisions proved Mr. Ames correct. “We had a disruption from several ministers and about 400 people left our fellowship because they would not

Mr. DeSimone pointed to the rise of such social media platforms as Facebook and YouTube as unexpectedly major contributors to the outreach of the Gospel. “Facebook and YouTube are the online platforms where we get the biggest action,” he said. “Those weren’t around [until relatively recently], nor was there anything like them around before they were made. **The number of people who see something of ours on their phone, through Facebook, is in the millions.**”

submit to Church government and wanted to follow their own dictates,” he explained. Despite these departures, Mr. Ames noted the Church’s resilience and growth, commenting that “God has replaced those 400 and added many more.”

For Mr. DeSimone, a perpetual challenge lies in continual improvement and overcoming blind spots in our efforts. “What are we not seeing that, with God’s help, will help propel us forward?” he pondered, highlighting the ongoing quest to enhance the effectiveness of the Work’s telecasts and digital media. His focus on incremental improvements reflects

a strategic approach to preaching the Gospel in a rapidly changing world. “How can we do our part to make the telecast even more effective?” he asked, mentioning the questions that are constantly on the minds of those in his department: “What can we do to reach more people on the Internet on an ongoing basis? What can we do to help get more literature into people’s hands, so that more seed can fall on good ground and we can do more of what God wants us to do?”

Mr. Smith pointed out the growing cultural resistance to biblical teachings. “Merely saying one agrees with values that were widely held in 1999 can result in being kicked off of stations now,” he remarked, noting the challenges of proclaiming the Gospel in an increasingly secular environment. “Yet, the need for strong preaching of the truth has never been greater. Like Jesus Christ in His day, we are increasingly seeing what it is like to preach the truth in a world that violently does not want to hear it.”

### Surprises Along the Way

Undaunted by these multifaceted challenges, the Living Church of God maintains its steadfast commitment to preaching the Gospel amidst adversity. As Mr. Weston previously noted, the *Tomorrow’s World* telecast and magazine have grown remarkably over the past 25 years, greatly influenced by technological advances and how God has inspired His Church’s leadership to utilize them. Such growth has been characterized by both unexpected developments and adaptive strategies.

Mr. Weston reflected on his personal journey, expressing astonishment at his role as the current Presiding Evangelist. From working as a field pastor and Regional Director to becoming not only a regular contributor but the central figure over the telecasts and editorial work, Mr. Weston noted that his personal growth has paralleled that of the Church. He shared, “I would never have imagined doing telecasts, or being in Canada or the UK, or being Editor in Chief and writing on such a regular basis. Doing the telecast gives you great respect for those people who are on television daily.”

Mr. Ames highlighted the transformative impact of the Internet, noting its “ability to reach almost every corner of the earth.” Over the last quarter-century, digital advancements have enabled the Gospel to break through traditional geographical barriers. “We had television in the 1950s, and Mr. Armstrong experimented with it in 1955,” Mr. Ames recollected. “But later on, in the 1970s, the Worldwide Church of God began to use that television technology. But now, where

are we in the 2020s? Technology is still changing. The Internet has come in, and what we have found is that the Work has been able to use that technology—particularly YouTube as one of the platforms.”

Separate from the telecast and magazine, but a vital part of the Work, are the informative booklets that LCG produces—and powerful strides have been made in getting those out to the world, as well. “Another development is the booklets’ amazing translation into Chinese,” Mr. Ames said. With helpful translators in the Church and a capable staff in Charlotte, we have begun producing fully formatted booklets in both traditional and simplified Chinese. “They’re being printed in our Canadian office—we have at least eight booklets so far printed in Chinese.”

Echoing Mr. Ames, Mr. DeSimone pointed to the rise of such social media platforms as Facebook and YouTube as unexpectedly major contributors to the outreach of the Gospel. “Facebook and YouTube are the online platforms where we get the biggest action,” he said. “Those weren’t around [until relatively recently], nor was there anything like them around before they were made. The number of people who see something of ours on their phone, through Facebook, is in the millions.” Mr. DeSimone also noted the integration of artificial intelligence into the ongoing expansion of our communication tools. “We’ve used it already to help with the creation of telecast translations,” he said. “We just finished one in Urdu, and we are working on Hindi. We’re also using A.I. to help translate into Portuguese, and our next will be Italian.”

Mr. Smith expressed his appreciation for what God has achieved in the Work despite limited resources, adding that he never expected to contribute in the ways he has. “I am frequently delighted by the quality I see in what we are doing,” he said. “The insightful writing from our authors, the consistency and visual style Mr. John Robinson has woven into our material over the years, the top-notch video editing and artistry of the TV team—clearly, God is doing it through them. We know we can improve and strive to do so. Still, it’s humbling to consider how much is achieved by such a small group of people.”

### **The Work Moves Forward**

God has continually inspired His people not only to maintain a high standard, but to reach ever higher. Mr. Weston is impressed by the digital transformation that has revolutionized so much of the Work over the past 25 years. Social media and artificial intelligence have helped the ministry to break language barriers and reach a global audience, as Mr. DeSimone emphasized. Mr. Weston is similarly excited about the potential of A.I. in expanding into new languages, such as Urdu, which is spoken by more than 200 million people. Despite the challenges, he sees enormous potential: “We can go into all the world in a way that we never could before,” he said. Nev-

ertheless, he recognizes that artificial intelligence, in particular, is “a double-edged sword. You can’t just turn everything over to it. How far are we going to go with it? We have to make decisions on that.”

Mr. Ames highlights the fulfillment of prophecy as a pivotal aspect of the Work’s progress, noting the significant events now unfolding, such as the examination of red heifers in Jerusalem. He emphasized the importance of staying attuned to prophetic events as they unfold. “We need to make sure that we’re watching world news, and we’re realizing, yes, we’re in exciting times,” he said. “What we’re seeing is prophecy being fulfilled. And, as Mr. Weston points out, these are prophecies that we have spoken of for years.”

Mindful of the fact that human effort alone cannot carry out the Great Commission given by Jesus Christ, Mr. DeSimone stressed, “Ultimately, it will be Christ who has to do the Work. All we can do is spread out the seed, and water—God is the one who brings the increase. The most you can do is your best, and you’re still going to miss—you’re still going to not know everything. We’ve got to depend on God to do those things through us, to fill in the gaps that we can’t. He’s only going to use us as instruments.”

While the ultimate success of the Work depends on God’s will, strategy and proactive effort are still crucial, and Mr. DeSimone emphasized the importance of strategic planning and efficient use of available tools. “We can sleep at our desks and say, ‘Well, God has to do it all anyway,’” he said, “Or we can say, ‘What are the best tools that we have?’ and utilize the tools in front of us to do the best we can. We ought to be doing the most we can with the tools that are available to us.”

Mr. Smith brought to mind the personal connections that are foundational to the Work, which are steadily being enhanced by *Tomorrow’s World* Presentations. “I think we are learning to maximize the impact of the live *Tomorrow’s World* Presentations,” he said. “Those are key moments, where we are face to face with people who have been drawn by our message—and we want to make the most of those opportunities.” This personal interaction not only allows for a deeper connection with people, but also provides a direct avenue for communicating the Gospel effectively.

As we commemorate 25 years of the *Tomorrow’s World* telecast and magazine, let us all continue to support God’s work in the ways we are able and remain diligent in our prayers for Him to increase the effectiveness of His message through us. As Mr. Ames said, “We still have the same mission—to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, to warn the Israelite nations as the watchman in Ezekiel 33, and to feed the flock. We thank God that He is blessing the Work and opening the doors for the Gospel to go out; we thank Him for the power of Jesus Christ working in His servants here at headquarters and around the world.” <sup>(LW)</sup>



# How Was David “After God’s Own Heart”?

By **Mark Sandor**

**F**rom Jeremiah 31:33 and Hebrews 8:10, we know that God, through His Holy Spirit, is writing His laws on our hearts—making our hearts more like His. But do we actually know what it means to have a heart like God’s own?

When we think of having such a heart, we naturally think of King David, as God inspired the Apostle Paul to describe him: “And when He had removed him [Saul], He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, ‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will’” (Acts 13:22). What an amazing compliment!

If we didn’t know anything about David’s life beyond this brief description, we could easily conclude that it must have contained very little sin. But we *do* know more about David’s life—and our knowledge can make that compliment seem a little strange, since David’s adultery and premeditated murder are documented in 2 Samuel 11. That chapter is a turning point between the first ten chapters of 2 Samuel, where David is largely rewarded for his righteousness, and the last fourteen chapters, where he faces the many consequences of his sins.

How could “a man after God’s own heart” so fundamentally miss the mark well into adulthood? And considering these sins, how can he *still* be called a man after God’s own heart? Let’s examine David’s life to unpack what it really means to have a heart like God’s.

## **The Many Wives of David—and the Consequences**

David’s sin with Bathsheba was not his first. Long before David broke several of the Ten Commandments in 2 Samuel 11, he had already transgressed God’s statutes regarding kings and marriage. Deuteronomy 17:14–20 contains instructions for kings of Israel, intended to keep them focused on their reliance upon God. Among these, God inspired Moses to write, “Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away” (Deuteronomy 17:17). While David might not have started out intending to break this statute, he ultimately failed to keep himself from multiplying his wives.

Tragically for all involved, David’s romantic life had many heartaches. The seeds were sown when David killed Goliath,

since part of King Saul’s reward for slaying the giant was marriage to one of his daughters (1 Samuel 17:23–25). This blossomed into David marrying Saul’s daughter Michal, who had fallen in love with him (1 Samuel 18:20). However, this young love was not to survive. As Saul persecuted David, David eventually fled without Michal (1 Samuel 19:11–17). It seems unlikely that David understood at the time that this would lead to a decade-long separation from the wife of his youth.

Saul, never one to make things easy on David, gave Michal to a new husband named Palti (1 Samuel 25:44). Scripture does not tell us Michal’s opinion on this marriage or whether it occurred before or after David married Abigail and Ahinoam. 1 Samuel 25 covers the circumstances that led to David and Abigail’s marriage, which Mr. John Robinson covered in depth in his May-June 2023 *Living Church News* article, “Shear Folly: Lessons from David, Nabal, and Abigail.”

For the purposes of this article, the important detail is that David began to multiply his wives instead of following the instructions in Deuteronomy 17. Why did he do this? Samuel had already ordained him to be the next king (1 Samuel 16), and he had God’s prophets and priests at hand to instruct him in God’s will (1 Samuel 22:5, 20). Did David reason that Deuteronomy 17 did not apply since he was not yet king? Did David quibble that having three wives was not truly “multiplication”? Perhaps he simply sought comfort and companionship at a difficult time in his life. Still, the bad fruit of these multiple marriages should have been hard to ignore.

When Saul died and David grew more powerful, he eventually demanded that Michal be returned to him (2 Samuel 3:13–16). Sadly, Michal’s youthful love of David had long since evaporated. Palti, her new husband, seems to have truly loved her, and Michal’s final interactions with David reveal that she had come to despise the man she once loved (2 Samuel 6:16, 20–23). It appears that Michal died a lonely and bitter woman in David’s harem.

Abigail, despite her stellar introduction, quickly disappears from David’s story; she is barely mentioned after 1 Samuel 25. What happened to this wise, beautiful, and capable woman? 2 Samuel 3:3 reveals that she bore David a son named Chileab. Curiously, and perhaps tragically, Chileab is only mentioned in genealogies (see 1 Chronicles 3:1, where he is called



Daniel). His close half-brothers Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah play significant roles in David's later years—but Chileab disappears. Commentaries note that this likely means Chileab died young. If so, would it be hard to imagine Abigail entering a depression and withdrawing from David? And with David having at least *six* wives by then (2 Samuel 3:1–5), did he simply occupy himself with the others rather than comfort his one grieving wife? While we cannot say much for certain, it seems likely that Abigail's and Chileab's absence from 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, and 1 Chronicles is an indication of tragedy.

Of David's other wives and concubines, we know even less, and David abandoned any pretense of keeping Deuteronomy 17 as he “took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem, after he had come from Hebron” (2 Samuel 5:13). Somehow, David—the man after God's own heart—had allowed this area of his life to stray far from God's statutes.

Deuteronomy 17 warns that if a king multiplies wives, they will turn his heart away. It is easy to think of Solomon in this regard, whose heart was clearly turned away from God because of his astonishing multiplication of wives (1 Kings 11:1–8). David's heart never turned away from God, as his son's would—but he also treated this divine directive as ignorable. Is it any surprise that, when he saw Bathsheba, he treated her marriage to Uriah as ignorable, too? Tragically, David gave in to sin. Perhaps even more tragically, he had strayed so far from God by this point in his life that his first reaction was to try to cover up the consequences of his actions by committing more sins. And tragedy did indeed follow.

### Called to Account

David's life would be ravaged by the consequences of breaking God's laws. His three oldest sons, ten of his concubines, and his entire nation would suffer as his sins came to fruition. Those who think David “got away with it just because he repented” should review 2 Samuel 11–24—the accounts there are filled with the painful consequences of David's wrongdoing.

Given all of this, in what way was David a man after God's own heart?

One answer should be obvious to anyone who knows David's story: In *many* areas of his life, David showed attributes that proved his godly focus. His psalms, in particular, reveal the profound degree to which David centered his life on pleasing God. David was still an imperfect man, but a review of 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, and 1 Chronicles will show the extraordinarily good fruit of David's focus. Perhaps most tellingly, David's heart was revealed when he spared Saul for the first time (1 Samuel 24). When David showed the barest disrespect to God's anointed, his heart troubled him. We can recognize David's status as a man after God's own heart in how submissive he was to government.

David's heart is again revealed in his response to correction. In 2 Samuel 12, he is publicly called out for his sin with Bathsheba. Nathan the prophet is sent to tell him about an injustice that has taken place in Israel—a rich man has stolen the beloved lamb of his poor neighbor rather than use his own sheep to feed a traveler (vv. 1–4). When David angrily pronounces the death sentence on this fictional rich man, Nathan drops the hammer: “You are the man” (v. 7).

In response to this rebuke, David meekly and candidly replies, “I have sinned against the LORD” (v. 13). This is truly the response of a man after God's own heart.

### Obedience, Repentance, and Acceptance

David's repentance stands in stark contrast to many other kings who responded with violence, defensiveness, and vanity rather than accepting correction. King Saul tried to find any excuse for his sins to evade personal responsibility (1 Samuel 13:11–12; 15:15–21). King Solomon sought to kill Jeroboam instead of facing up to his own role in causing Israel's problems (1 Kings 11:40).

But David sincerely and deeply repented. He understood how thoroughly he needed to change. In Psalm 51, he does not complain about God's laws or his situation. Instead, considering his conduct with Bathsheba, David recognizes that he needs his heart cleansed and his sins forgiven: “Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Psalm 51:2–3, 10). David set the example for us of how to be men and women after God's own heart: When we are confronted with our sins, we repent in utter humility.

David's heart had been unwilling to rebel against King Saul, as Saul was God's anointed. Yet, while David surely desired to keep all of God's laws, he had developed a blind spot regarding his multiplication of wives. As a result, he sinned—as we all do. Yet David did not *practice* sin. In many ways, his repentance was a further sign that he understood the importance of government; when his rebellion was made abundantly clear to him, he proved himself a man after God's own heart, repenting deeply of breaking God's law. He made no excuses and meekly accepted the consequences of his actions, refusing to be a rebel.

What about us? We can often feel that we are so far removed from our biblical heroes of faith as to have nothing in common with them. Yet we see that the life of a man after God's own heart was a constant and painful battle against sin, much like our lives. If we learn to submit to government, humbly accept correction, and sincerely repent when we fall short, we are following David's example as our hearts become more like God's. (LW)



# Fruits of God's Holy Spirit

By **Dexter B. Wakefield**

**G**od's word teaches us that those in His Church are to demonstrate fruits of the Spirit. These fruits are evidence in our lives that God's Holy Spirit produces as it transforms us inwardly, and such fruits are an important sign that Christians have the Spirit of God dwelling in them. As we enter the Pentecost season, it is a good time to think about the fruits of God's Holy Spirit in our lives.

The Holy Spirit of God is described in His word as the power of the Most High God, who is the Father. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). God's word also describes the Holy Spirit as the mind of God. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). A good general statement is that the Holy Spirit is the mind and power of God.

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. "But when the Helper comes, [which] I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth [that] proceeds from the Father, [it] will testify of Me" (John 15:26). That power has been given to Jesus Christ. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth'" (Matthew 28:18, *KJV*). God gives the Holy Spirit to His begotten children—it begets us, identifies us, constitutes a promise, and works in us.

God's Holy Spirit is a kind of down payment—an earnest deposit—for our transformation to come. "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee" (2 Corinthians 1:21–22). Indeed, our future birth into the God Family "seals" us for that great destiny.

## **A Transforming Spirit**

The Holy Spirit of God—His mind and His power—is a transforming Spirit! The Apostle Paul told the Church in Philippi, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). This is so important, because when this Spirit dwells in us, it can transform our thinking and wills to be like

God's—if we will submit ourselves to Him. Paul instructed the Church in Rome, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1–2).

A person's will is the power to choose. And each of us—prior to conversion—chose in accordance with our carnal natures and the ways of the world that we live in. But, at some point, God grants us repentance, and we must choose to obey Him. Obedience to God means subordinating our human wills to God's perfect, righteous will.

When a little girl is told to clean up her room—and she does not want to—it is necessary for her to subordinate her will to her mother's instruction in order to obey. But when she becomes an adult, she likely keeps her home just as neat as her mother did—because she chooses to have a neat, clean place in which to live. Her will in the matter has changed.

Similarly, God's Spirit leads us through our trials and choices. Initially, we are just being obedient to God in keeping His commandments. But by constantly leading us to choose as He does, God's Spirit transforms our wills to become like His. That process is called conversion. To the extent that we are converted and transformed inwardly, we want to choose as God does. And we are to yield to God's will, as His Spirit leads us to obey, to love God, and to want to be like Him. Our righteous choices reveal themselves as fruits in our lives—fruits of God's Holy Spirit working in us.

## **Some of the Fruits**

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering [patient endurance], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22–23). God is love, and His mind is joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, desirous to do good things and always faithful. Do we show these characteristics—these fruits—in our daily actions? Are we like our heavenly Father and Elder Brother in these things?

God's Spirit illuminates the right path for us. "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness,

righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:8–10). Doing God’s will—willingly and from the heart—is always acceptable to Him.

God’s Spirit is essential to our calling and conversion. Jesus promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit would work first with us to open our minds to His truth—and then in us to change us. Prior to His disciples’ conversion at Pentecost, Jesus told them, “If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever”—referring to the Holy Spirit, which “dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:15–17).

### God Grants Repentance

Repentance is something that God grants us; “they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life’” (Acts 11:18). Sadly, not everyone chooses to accept what God grants. However, when they do, it is made clear by fruits. Early in our conversion, God’s Spirit works with us and leads us to true repentance—which brings changes in how we live. “Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance” (Matthew 3:8). After repentance and baptism for the remission of sins, we receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands. “Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (2 Timothy 1:6).

After the laying on of hands, the Holy Spirit dwells in us. “That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit [which] dwells in us” (2 Timothy 1:14). This

God’s Spirit leads us through our trials and choices. Initially, we are just being obedient to God in keeping His commandments. **But by constantly leading us to choose as He does, God’s Spirit transforms our wills to become like His. That process is called conversion.**

Spirit and its fruits are the evidence that Christ lives in us and that we are living our lives in Him. “Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit... He has given us” (1 John 3:24).

This transformative Spirit changes how we think and how we see the world around us. “The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD” (Isaiah 11:2). How often have those who are being called into God’s Church said, “I understand the Bible for the first time!” But they soon find that others do not seem

to be able to understand it as they do. God’s Holy Spirit first works with us and then in us, and it works this miracle of spiritual understanding and knowledge in all those He calls and converts. This is a miracle in the lives of all of God’s people.

The fruit of God’s Spirit in a true Christian produces a sound mind. “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). God’s Spirit instills a special kind of wisdom and thinking. “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (James 3:17–18). Even in trying, difficult times, stirring up God’s Spirit produces the fruit of a peaceful mind.

The Apostle Paul gave the Church great encouragement for times of trial through God’s Spirit. “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:16–17).

### The Spirit of Revelation and of Prophecy

The Apostle Paul urged all of God’s people to use His Spirit for spiritual vision and the revealing of things that others cannot see. “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit” (1 Corinthians 2:9–10). The carnal man only understands the things of this world, but the Spirit reveals things that are otherwise invisible.

The Spirit that God gives is very different from that which is naturally in a man—and it produces very different fruits. “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit... from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God...

For ‘who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?’ But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:12–16).

God’s Spirit dwells in Christ’s “little flock,” and transforms God’s begotten children inwardly. This transformation is evidenced by fruits of the Spirit. The Church is only a little flock, because God is not calling the rest of the world now—but He will in the future. A small harvest occurs in the spring before the great harvest in the fall. The Feast of Firstfruits—Pentecost—points us to the time when God will pour out “a pure river of water of life” for the whole world (Revelation 22:1, 17). <sup>(L)</sup>





# Funerals: An Opportunity to Comfort with the Gospel

By **Michael Grovak**

**O**ur world honors many achievements that have no real permanence. It honors athletic achievements that are forgotten as the athletes age and lose their prowess. It admires and envies the ultra-wealthy, though their wealth does not last beyond this lifetime. It honors those who are powerful in the military or politics, though their power is only transitory. By comparison, a member of God's Church who dies in the faith has achieved the *greatest* honor any human being will ever achieve—an eternal honor. Paul wrote of the “crown of righteousness” that he and all Christians who die in the faith are *guaranteed* to receive (2 Timothy 4:8). We, the living, attend funerals to *honor* someone who has “gone to sleep” and accomplished such an immense achievement.

Funerals are often a time of great sadness for those who have lost loved ones. But we know that when our brethren die, they have finished their race—and their next moment of awareness will come when Christ returns. And when we lose unconverted relatives or friends, we know they will have their opportunity for salvation during the Great White Throne Judgment.

Funerals bring families together; they also bring peoples and nations together.

Scripture depicts a number of funerals as major events for God's people. All of Genesis 23 is spent describing Sarah's burial. Joseph gave his father Israel a state funeral, which included a pilgrimage from Egypt to Canaan for his burial (Genesis 50:1–13). Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus went to Pilate at great personal risk to obtain Jesus' body so He could be properly interred according to the Jewish burial customs of His day (John 19:38–42), though many of their Sanhedrin colleagues viewed this as a treasonous act.

Jesus' resurrection first became known because several women were attending to His funeral arrangements. These women accompanied Joseph and Nicodemus to Jesus' interment (Luke 23:55). They spent the weekly Preparation Day after His crucifixion preparing spices and fragrant oils in accordance with the burial customs of the time (v. 56). Then they went back to the tomb with these supplies early on Sun-

day morning, becoming the first to discover that Jesus had risen on the Sabbath (Luke 24:1–10).

From the beginning, God's Church has understood the importance of asking and acknowledging God's involvement in major life events. The Living Church of God's ministerial ceremony book contains directions for four particularly vital ceremonies: the Passover, baptisms, weddings, and funerals.

I worked part-time in my grandfather's funeral home until I was about 30 years old. With other relatives having served as funeral directors, growing up in my family has allowed me to absorb the lessons of many decades of experience serving families during their times of grieving, so I hope this short article will be helpful to *Living Church News* readers.

## **Funerals Focus on the Gospel**

The LCG funeral directions state, “It is an opportunity to be of great service to members of the Church, and to inform unconverted people of the truth concerning death and the resurrection to eternal life. This may be the first and last time some will ever hear the truth on this subject during this age.” Not only will a minister share with non-members the precious truth of our eternal hope and destiny—the eulogy of the deceased's life will preach, by example, the power and fruit of living God's way.

Non-member relatives and friends of the deceased generally respect the message of hope they receive at a funeral service. I've been told that our funeral service has caused some non-members to “check their Bibles.” But while they appreciate the witness given, it is only God who can open their minds.

Some years ago I conducted the funeral service for a widow who had several children, none of whom were Church members. Her son approached me after the graveside committal and thanked me sincerely for the “wonderful service.” He said it was just what his mother would have desired. Then, he concluded by stating, “But my mother is still in heaven.” He heard the truth and realized it was different from what he believed. Someday, he will understand.

## **Funerals Comfort the Living**

When loved ones die, it is important that those closest to them are not left to grieve alone. Funerals and funeral visitations are important opportunities for friends and family to



comfort each other, as well as others close to the deceased. Consider the death of Lazarus, an occasion when Jesus worked one of His greatest miracles—bringing the deceased back from the dead.

Lazarus had been dead four days when Jesus arrived (John 11:17). Many people, probably at least a few dozen, were there to “comfort them [his sisters] concerning their brother” (v. 19). Lazarus was apparently unmarried, suggesting that he died fairly young. In those circumstances, it was surely a great comfort to his sisters to have many friends and relatives present. These many mourners served as witnesses to Jesus’ great miracle, which caused them to believe in Him (v. 45).

There are times when we need to give solace to others. Funerals are an opportunity for the community to gather and provide comfort to the surviving family. Receiving this comfort from a group offers a great deal of hope, reassurance, and encouragement.

### Funerals Are Solemn Events

The Church’s ceremony reminds us that weddings and funerals are solemn events with a scriptural foundation. Funerals

Funerals are often a time of great sadness for those who have lost loved ones. **But we know that when our brethren die, they have finished their race—and their next moment of awareness will come when Christ returns.** And when we lose unconverted relatives or friends, we know they will have their opportunity for salvation during the Great White Throne Judgment.

in God’s Church convey to everyone that God is at the center of this major life event.

Those planning a service should ensure that it is dignified and shows respect to the deceased. It is not a time to wear casual clothing; Sabbath wear is appropriate attire for a funeral service or visitation. A respectful eulogy is a traditional part of a funeral service, and eulogies should not become a “free-for-all.” Some funerals include an open invitation for anyone to come forward and say whatever they wish. I have heard such invitations result in disrespectful statements about the deceased or the airing of grievances toward surviving family members. Those involved in planning a funeral should make sure that it will be dignified and structured.

Another recent trend detracting from a funeral’s solemnity is the choice to call the ceremony a “Celebration of Life,” in an attempt to sidestep the reality of death. The Living Church of God does not use this term for funerals, nor does it

approach funerals in such a way. Funerals, rather, are a time to acknowledge the sobering reality of death and to celebrate God’s very encouraging plan to overcome it.

### Funeral Customs and Planning

Human cultures have a wide variety of funeral customs. Genesis 50 shows that Israel received an Egyptian state funeral, with a 70-day period of public mourning. Afterward, a large entourage traveled to Canaan to bury Israel at the Cave of Machpelah. By comparison, Acts 8:2 may suggest that Stephen was taken to his burial directly after his stoning.

In the United States today, a typical funeral arrangement may include a simple graveside service or a visitation followed by a funeral service—on the same day or over two days—typically within about a week of the person’s death. By comparison, the funeral service of Kenyan Pastor Mr. Ephraim Abok was conducted three weeks after his death. This allowed 2,500 mourners from across Kenya and neighboring countries to pay their respects. The funeral events lasted 26 hours.

I mention some of today’s practices as well as those of antiquity to show that there are and have been a wide range of practices at different times and in different cultures. For God’s Church, the common theme of funerals is that they should be dignified, pay respect to the deceased, and point people to the hope of the resurrection.

And, if possible, it is beneficial for our survivors that we plan our own funeral arrangements in advance—and share those plans with a trusted relative or friend. Especially for those of us

reaching our sixth and seventh decades of life, it is not something we should ignore or try to hide from. A funeral need not be very expensive, and it would be prudent when possible to set aside funds or take out a small insurance policy for funeral costs. My wife Michelle and I have made prearrangements with a local funeral home and shared those plans with our daughter. Such arrangements normally do not include pre-paying for services, though that is an option. Pre-planning takes a burden off grieving family members, while also leaving no question about your desires.

Paul reminded us that “it is appointed for men to die once” (Hebrews 9:27). Unless we live until Jesus’ Second Coming, we will die. The Church’s funeral service provides hope and comfort to the living, serves as an opportunity to preach the Gospel, and honors the deceased Christian whose name has been recorded in God’s Book of Life—and who awaits the resurrection (Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; cf. Hebrews 12:23). (L)

## Weddings & Anniversaries

On March 14, **Mr. and Mrs. Dale (Yolanda) Bailey** celebrated their **65th wedding anniversary**. They were married in 1959 by a Justice of the Peace on the Island of Catalina, California.

Mr. and Mrs. Bailey first heard about the Church in 1967, listening to *The World Tomorrow* program on the radio when the Church was called the Radio Church of God. They were both baptized on February 5, 1968. In 1969, Mr. Bailey was asked to attend Ambassador College in Pasadena, California, as a married student. He also managed the Pasadena campus building program, utilizing his California State Contractor's License. In 1981, they were transferred to the Ambassador College campus in Big Sandy, Texas, where Mr. Bailey served as the Director of Facilities. Mr. and Mrs. Bailey have always been very active in their local congregations. They currently attend the Big Sandy, Texas, congregation, where Mr. Bailey serves as an elder. Mr. and Mrs. Bailey have two children, three grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

On the morning of September 6, 1962, **Mr. and Mrs. Felipe (Trinidad) Casing** were married by pastor Pedro Casing in the Radio Church of God. They celebrated their **61st wedding anniversary** with family and friends at a restaurant and were presented with a bouquet of flowers and a cake. Mr. and Mrs. Casing have been blessed with five children, seven grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. Mr. Casing has served in the ministry of God's Church since 1982. Mr. and Mrs. Casing attend the Davao City congregation in the Philippines.

**Mr. and Mrs. Roger (Anita) Maddison** were surprised by a reception after services in the Tri-Cities, Washington, congregation in honor of their **50th wedding anniversary**. Mr. and Mrs. Maddison were married in Arizona on April 7, 1973, and moved to the Tri-Cities area in 1979. Mr. Maddison has served as a deacon since 2005, and they have both served heartily in the eastern Washington area. Their dedication is greatly appreciated by the congregations there. Mr. and Mrs. Maddison have one son and four grandchildren.

**Mr. and Mrs. Don (Kathy) Talbott** celebrated their **50th wedding anniversary** on November 10. They met in a hops field in Mabton, Washington. Mr. and Mrs. Talbott raised four children and have six grandchildren. They were baptized in the mid-1970s and the Church and their family have been the focus of their lives since. The Tri-Cities, Washington, congregation surprised them with an anniversary cake and card after services.

On the Sabbath of November 4, the Adelaide congregation in Australia surprised **Mr. and Mrs. Ian (Jenny) West** with golden and yellow flowers and a cake in recognition of their **50th wedding anniversary**, which was the previous day. Pastor Martin Montgomery thanked them for their loving example of steadfastness. Mr. and Mrs. West are longtime members of God's Church and much loved by the brethren.

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## Births

Mr. and Mrs. Jay Christensen welcomed their firstborn son, **Jonah William Christensen**, into the world on March 6. He weighed 7.1 pounds and measured 50.5 centimeters. Mother and son are doing well. Mr. and Mrs. Dayrell Tanner, great-grandparents of the baby, and the Brisbane congregation in Australia are also delighted by the new member of the family and the congregation.

Very early on March 14, Mr. and Mrs. Stephen (Rebecca) Mew welcomed their fourth child, **Jasmine Anne Mew**, into the world. She was born weighing 2.91 kilograms and measuring 51.5 centimeters. The Mew family attends the Brisbane congregation in Australia. Congratulations to the whole family.

Mr. and Mrs. Michael (Elizabeth) Sheffield, of Hawera, New Zealand, are happy to announce the birth of their daughter **Bethany Anne Maree Sheffield**, born October 15. Older brother Lawrence is excited to have a baby sister.

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## In Loving Memory

**Mr. Bernard Armstrong, 82**, died the morning of December 12 at an assisted living home in Richland, Washington. Baptized in 1976, he was a longtime member of God's Church who loved God's word and the brethren, and often talked about Scripture in conversations. He will be missed by the Richland congregation and many friends in other places where he previously lived. He is survived by three sons, a daughter, and several grandchildren.

**Mr. John Albert Huston, 93**, died peacefully in his sleep on February 6 in the comfort of his own home and with his wife Irene by his side. Mr. Huston was born in 1930 in Pennsylvania to Wesley and Jeanie Huston and grew up with two brothers and one sister. His long life included serving honorably in the U.S. Air Force—he was a flight instructor during the Korean War—working in a family business, and earning a business degree at Berkeley, California. He learned beekeeping at the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences in Davis, California, and never lost his enthusiasm for bees. As a young man he learned to ski and loved to ice skate. He could scuba dive and spearfish and made a living doing both. Mr. Huston learned about God's truth while in the military and was baptized in 1958. While attending the Feast in Big Sandy, Texas, in 1965, he met his future wife, Irene Treadwell, and her eleven-year-old daughter. They married in 1966 and shortly after moved to Pasadena, California, where he worked in the printing department at Ambassador College for several years and also volunteered in the Church in various areas, always with a heart to serve. While there, Mr. and Mrs. Huston also enlarged their family with a second daughter. Mr. Huston loved sweets, but his passions in life were God's work and his loving wife. He is survived by his wife, one daughter, and one brother, and he is also missed by the Fresno, California, congregation.

**Mr. Richard Johnson, 71**, finished his race on February 27. Mr. Johnson was a faithful and longtime member of God's Church and served as a deacon in the Pensacola, Florida, congregation. He was known for his sense of humor and generosity. Mr. Johnson is survived by his wife Susan (Grandchamp) Johnson; children Jeromy (Melody) Pierce, Angela (Rutland) Lozzio, and Anna Marie Johnson; stepsons Marlon (Jennifer) and Matthew Bonckowski; ten grandchildren; two great-grandchildren; nieces, nephews, and a host of friends. He will be missed by all who knew him.

**Mrs. Louise French Seright, 95**, died February 7. She was born in a homestead dugout in New Mexico on September 3, 1928. She began work as a telephone operator before marrying Clifford Lyle Seright on January 22, 1950. He died July 18, 1997. Mrs. Seright was baptized in 2002. She is survived by her daughter Debra Lynn Rehorn and son-in-law Kevin Rehorn. Mrs. Seright loved horses, gardening, landscape painting, and playing banjo.

**James C. "Jim" Strouth, 84**, formerly of Mount Airy, Maryland, died at his home in Florida on December 29. Mr. Strouth was the eldest of 15 children. He was a bricklayer during the late 1950s and developed his own home improvement business in the early 1970s. A longtime deacon in God's Church, Mr. Strouth continued his long faithful service for his last four years in the Lakeland, Florida, congregation. He was known for his quiet nature and enduring patience. When faced with life's challenges and adversities, he trusted God for deliverance, looking forward to His kingdom with persistent faith and loyalty. Mr. Strouth is survived by his wife Mary, three children, seven grandchildren, and ten great-grandchildren. He will be greatly missed and always affectionately remembered.

## Ordinations

**Mr. Ettiene De Waal** was ordained a deacon on January 20 by Pastor Lawdi Ferreira. Mr. De Waal serves in the George congregation in South Africa.

**Mr. James Luwanja** was ordained a deacon on December 30 by Evangelist Peter Nathan and Pastor Lawdi Ferreira. Mr. Luwanja serves in the Lilongwe congregation in Malawi.

**Mr. Pablo Vargas Moscoso** was ordained a deacon on February 24 by Presiding Evangelist Gerald Weston, Evangelist Mario Hernandez, Pastors Christian and Armando Orrego, and Elder Humberto Barraza. Mr. Vargas Moscoso serves in the Santiago, Chile, congregation.

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## Peace of Mind Is Within Reach

Charles Dickens (1812–1870) penned a poignant introduction to his famous novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, published in 1859, and his description of that time certainly fits this modern age. He wrote, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.”

As the events of each day unfold, the details of Dickens’ colorful portrayal are playing out all around us. Prosperity exists alongside poverty, opulence next to squalor, productivity in view of wasteful negligence. Cultural rot is rampant in the form of illicit drug abuse, gender confusion, constant sexualization, abortion on demand, and corruption in all levels of government and society. For some, these conditions bring the “winter of despair.”

Is there a way to face these intractable problems without being overwhelmed with discouragement? There is, but not many find it—because it is in the Bible.

The prophet Isaiah had a difficult message to deliver in troubled times, yet he gave this timeless advice about seeking God and His will: “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You” (Isaiah 26:3). Peace of mind can be an elusive thing, but those who seek God and His righteousness can have it (Matthew 6:33).

Ezekiel, another prophet sent to a troubled nation, was told by God to “look with your eyes and hear with your ears, and fix your mind on everything I show you” (Ezekiel 40:4). In other words, don’t be distracted, but focus on what God has for you.

How can we be certain that our mind is “stayed” on God? We read, “With my whole heart I have sought You; oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You!” (Psalm 119:10–11). And we should *enjoy* our study of the Bible: “I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word” (vv. 15–16). And consider this vital principle for uncluttering our minds: “Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way” (v. 37). By avoiding worthless things, we have more time to focus on the eternal principles found in the Bible.

Finally, we come to a valuable memory verse containing this promise: “Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble” (v. 165). This refers to a genuine peace of mind that is ample for all our needs.

In the New Testament, God inspired the Apostle Paul—who took blows and bore scars for boldly proclaiming the coming Kingdom of God—to write in the midst of his trials, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6–7).

While it may seem to be an oversimplification, it is true nonetheless: In times of stress, “fix your mind” on what God has for you and you will eventually have the peace that passes all understanding.

—J. Davy Crockett III