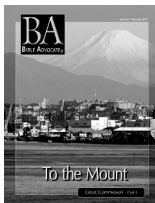


BA
BIBLE ADVOCATE®

January - February 2019

To the Mount

Great Commission - Part 1



Inside

2019: Resurrection Commission



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Resurrection Commission

Welcome to 2019! A new year means a new theme. This year the *Bible Advocate* joins the General Conference in dedicating the entire year to the Great Commission. Few Christian statements are more familiar to us than this one. But are we fulfilling it?

Knowing Jesus as our Savior and Lord means following His plan: to rescue and restore creation to its original purpose. God has been faithful to that mission. And in Christ's life, death, and resurrection His plan is *revealed*, and, remarkably, He invites us to join Him in *realizing* it in the world.

That's why the Church of God (Seventh Day) has *Engaging in Witness* as a central point of her vision. From our website: "We believe that lost people matter to God, that the Church has a mandate to evangelize, that each member has a role in that process, and that world conditions call us to be aggressive about winning the lost."

There is fresh urgency in fulfilling our commission. We face challenges unlike any generation before us. Western civilization has entered a post-Christian era. For most of us, sharing the good news as witnesses of an empty tomb and risen Lord means engaging an antagonistic world unlike that of pre-Christian times. We're still learning what it means to be God's faithful witnesses to such a world as this.

Hence the theme "Resurrection Commission" and the reminder that the mission is not our own, nor is the power. Whatever the challenges before us, we're not so different from the eleven who met Jesus on the mountain, who saw, worshipped, and witnessed the Resurrection and Life — *before they were sent*.

So must we. Jesus goes with us, and only in His resurrection power will our commission find success.

Given the weight of our mission and the challenges before us, the *Bible Advocate* devotes itself this year to investigating the full context of the Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28.

In addition, look for testimonies of transformation and evangelism success stories from next door and around the world. We hope you're inspired and equipped to go forth as witnesses of our risen King.

— Jason Overman





The Little Commission

Improving our witness by going back to worship.

by Jason Overman

We've all heard of the Great Commission, Jesus' last command to His disciples: "Go . . . make disciples of all the nations . . ." (Matthew 28:19). Many have been moved by it. But many others, although they know it, aren't so moved — at least not directly. For them the Great Commission is overwhelming, perplexing, or someone else's "calling." The unfortunate result is that Jesus' commission goes unfulfilled for many believers. Maybe you identify with this.

A *commission* is defined as

"an instruction, command, or duty given to a person or group of people." Jesus' commission is like that. Surely it wasn't directed to an elite few but to all those who know Him as Savior and follow Him as Lord. And it is not a staggering duty or physical feat. Going to the nations is as easy as going next door. So why do so many of us find His commission beyond our grasp or our call?

There are probably as many answers as there are disciples, but I've been pondering one possibility from the very context in which the Great Commission was originally given. In our hurry to get to the crown of Jesus' instruction, we typically rush past the humble directive He gave first. We all know the Great Commission, but do we recall the *little commission* that started it all?

Maybe if we're more attentive

to the first, we'll be better prepared for the second.

Back to Galilee

According to Matthew's account, before Jesus gave His commission, He first called His disciples to Himself. The verses just prior to His famous last words provide the larger context:

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:16-18).

Here Jesus reoriented His eleven remaining disciples. This reorientation is nothing less than the passage from death into life

— His life! Nothing would succeed without this. So He called His followers to a special place, to an appointed mountain in Galilee. They knew where to find Him, but they had to leave where they were and go. This is the little commission, but it's not insignificant. Everything hangs on it.

Jesus first gave the important instructions just before His crucifixion. After the Supper, as they went out to the Mount of Olives to pray, Jesus talked to His disciples of His death, their offense, and the unimaginable aftermath: "But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee" (26:32). The good news of resurrection was there in the face of a terrible cross all along.

But how soon the disciples forgot their little commission. Can we fault them? The inescapable, unrelenting trauma of death tends to do that.

Three days later, burdened and grieved by losing Jesus by a brutal, shameful crucifixion, they were reminded of their little commission again. When Mary and the other women went to the tomb, expecting to anoint the "crucified," they found an empty tomb — and an angel — instead. While they looked downward, deathward, the heavenly messenger pointed them upward and gave them a little commission of their own: "Go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him" (28:7).

The women ran — and ran into Jesus. They worshipped Him, just as the disciples would, because that is the result of encountering the Resurrection. If once wasn't enough, Jesus reminded them again of their commission

to remind the disciples of their commission: "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me" (v. 10).

"Go and tell." The women's little commission anticipated the great one. Why were the women given this twice? Maybe, like the men, they were forgetful. We can't blame them either. Who would remember Jesus' words before His death and believe the Resurrection? The hard, numbing reality of death's sting is potent.

tion and their actions. Leaving death behind, the women ran in the power of the Resurrection to tell the good news to the disciples.

To the mountain

The woman followed their instructions, and so did the men. They came to Galilee to that particular mountain. More importantly, they came to a particular person: the Resurrection and the Life. They saw. They worshipped.

“Only the Risen could induce the worship necessary to throw off the shackles of death.”

Who can resist it? That's why supernatural encounter is necessary. Both the angel and Jesus told the women not to be afraid. Resurrection is shocking. It is world defying and world altering. Death is reliable. Resurrection changes everything.

Of course the women were afraid. Death is a familiar habit, but its power must be broken, and only the Risen revealed could reorient them from death to life. Only the Risen could induce the worship necessary to throw off the shackles of death that limited both their imagina-

tion and their actions. Leaving death behind, the women ran in the power of the Resurrection to tell the good news to the disciples.

They learned. All authority and power over heaven and earth, and death itself, belong to Him. The little commission to come to Jesus was not so His followers could get the Great Commission. First, it was so they could understand who He is and how they would accomplish all He sent them to do. Second, it was to reorient them from the practical, realistic realm of death to the supernatural, transformative realm of resurrection. The little commission to come to the mountain to see and worship prepared them for the Great Commission. It

taught *Him, before them* – that *their sufficiency was not of themselves but in the risen Christ!*

What better place than the mountain for Jesus to reveal Himself, to reorient His followers' lives in resurrection worship and service for Him? The mountain is an important feature in the Gospel of Matthew. On a high mountain, Jesus turned aside Satan's last temptation before beginning His ministry, and there His glory was unveiled in transfiguration (4:8; 17:1). On a mountain near

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to teach them to obey all that Jesus has taught – was given in a context similar to that of the Sermon on the Mount. That's where they learned what it meant to be faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus (Matthew 5-7).

Now, in this place, on this mountain on the other side of the cross, grave, and raising, they would not only become the disciples of the King they were intended to be, but also turn the world upside down by making

said, "Go," maybe we should hear His call and follow Him up that mountain. If some doubted then, needing Jesus' resurrection reassurance, then maybe some do today as well. Whatever our level of confidence, maybe we all need to come again to Him and be reoriented and renewed in His resurrection power.

Are we any less disoriented and despondent than the disciples or the women were by all the ways that death takes our hearts and hands captive? I don't think so. We who halt in uncertainty at the Great Commission, or charge ahead ambitiously, must return to that little commission. For to return to Jesus is to leave behind what the world offers, along with all our own best efforts and ideas. To return to the mount of the Risen is to see and worship and be transformed.

In Jesus' little commission we're prepared for His Great Commission. In our faithfulness to the first, we find success in the second. For how can we not share the One who has shattered death and is our life, and life itself?

So before you go out, go to Him. **BA**

“To return to the mount of the Risen is to see and worship and be transformed.”

the Sea of Galilee, Jesus withdrew alone for prayer, and there the multitudes were healed and amazed that the kingdom of God had come near (14:23; 15:29).

Most significantly, calling His disciples to the mountain appointed at the end of the Gospel brought them full circle to the beginning of their discipleship with the Master: "Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him" (5:1, ESV). The Great Commission to make disciples of all nations – to baptize them in the name of the

disciples of all nations for His coming kingdom. They would succeed in this only because they heard the little commission and came and worshipped and learned that Jesus is all in all.

Going to Jesus

If the Great Commission is for all of Jesus' disciples, in all times and in all places, then maybe the little commission is for us too. If the eleven disciples needed the first in order to accomplish the second, don't we? If Jesus said, "Come to Me" before He



Is Jesus calling you to the mountain? See pages 16-17 for an overview of mountaintop moments in the Bible, when God's people experienced Him in a new way.



Victor Bangura (left)
and Manasseh Boima

On Mission ...

In Sierra Leone

Join us in this space each issue of 2019 for CoG7 evangelism stories direct from the field from all around the globe.

Here, IMC Secretary John Klassek interviews evangelists Victor Bangura and Manasseh Boima. Victor Bangura is secretary general of CoG7 in Sierra Leone. Manasseh Boima pastors the Church in Grafton, a region within the capital of Freetown. Their radio programs in the Kailahun District reach into Liberia and Guinea. John Klassek ministers to the CoG7 church in Perth, Australia.

The following is an edited transcript of the video interview.

John Klassek (JK): If I came to Sierra Leone, what might I expect once I get off the plane?

Victor Bangura (VB): One, you will meet friendly people. Then a beautiful environment, although the weather may be warm for you. You will see beautiful trees and beautiful people.

JK: Do you pastor together, or do you pastor in different areas?

Manasseh Boima (MB): Well, yes, we work together as brothers, as workmates, as pastors in the ministry. We don't stay in a single place. We move in different directions, different regions, different communities, and do different jobs.

JK: How did you hear about Christ, or how did you come into contact with the Church of God (Seventh Day)?

VB: We came across the Church of God (Seventh Day) through *Bible Advocate*. That was since 2003. Then we became official members in IMC in 2007.

JK: So, brother Manasseh, were you part of that story back then?

MB: Yeah, of course. I was part of the story, and presently I am a part of that story. But whatever [Victor] has said, it's a collaboration. He is more senior to me in the ministry. He has vast

continued on page 27

Six rules for becoming
successful “fishers of men.”

by Cathy Mogus

When I married Allen, fishing came with the territory. Not only would I enjoy the thrill of hooking salmon off Canada’s west coast, but I would also experience fishing for people in ways I never expected.

After a dramatic conversion to Christ in 1993, my fisherman husband had a new passion: “catching people” for Jesus. Together we discovered similar rules held true for both kinds of fishing.

1. Go where the fish are

Allen and his buddies fished for salmon in one area for over twenty years. But as the fish became depleted in that locale, they looked elsewhere. When Allen caught a forty-five-pound beauty farther north, he and his friends quickly changed spots.

For Christians, the “catch” is usually not sitting in a church pew. He (or she) is more likely living next door, working at the office, strolling through a park, or attending a family reunion. Jesus instructed His disciples to go to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:6, NKJV) — their own territory.

In order to bring people to Jesus, we may need to befriend a neighbor, volunteer in our community, join a sports activity, or simply walk the dog more often.



2. Use the right bait

Cut-plug is Allen’s favorite way to hook a salmon. Apparently, a headless, spinning herring lures the big ones.

What attracts people to Jesus? Only the Master Fishing Guide knows what each individual will “bite” on, because personalities, backgrounds, and needs differ.

When I married Allen, I had to move to a new city. My first friend there was our bank’s receptionist. Pat was not a believer, but she knew I was involved in Christian activities.

When her mother died from cancer, Pat was devastated. “Cathy, I need to know if I will see my mom again,” she told me over lunch one day. “Do you think there is life after death?”

I was thankful I had answers to give her. Today, several years later, Pat is a solid Christian. The fishing grounds? My bank.

In order to use the right bait, we must depend on the Holy Spirit’s guidance. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord” (Isaiah 55:8).

3. Give ‘em line

“If you feel a jerk, give the fish some line so they will swallow the bait,” Allen told me when we first started fishing together. Salmon are fighters, and if the hook is not firmly set in their jaws, they will simply nibble at the bait. Knowing how much line to give them and when to “set the hook” is the key to successful salmon fishing with cut plug.

Many people have been frightened away from Christianity because well-meaning Christians tried too hard too soon to lure them into the kingdom. Allen, for instance, told me he would have become a believer years ago had it not been for Christians who rammed the Bible down his throat.

It’s important to give potential Christians “line” unless the Holy Spirit prompts us to do otherwise. How do we do that? By accepting them as they are and by listening to them without judging. I’ve seen this method of “fishing” work time after time. Love, listen, and let God net them in His good time.

This kind of fishing can be

Catch 'Em Like a Salmon

compared to harvesting a crop. Jesus said that “as soon as the grain is ripe, he [the farmer] puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come” (Mark 4:29).

4. Reel 'em in with care

I'll never forget catching my biggest fish — a forty-two-pound king salmon. With three men itching to help me, I played it for over an hour before bringing it in. Over and over, I let the fish swim away from the boat and then slowly reeled down until it finally tired. Only then could I reel down faster — and pray one of those men would net it!

Likewise, it takes patience, knowledge, and prayer (lots!) to know when to ask a nonbeliever to make a commitment to Jesus Christ. Fortunately, netting is the Holy Spirit's job.

A few years ago, I befriended my neighbors next door. Bob and Alice were good people, but not Christians. I asked the Lord to show me how I could influence them for Him. I felt impressed to simply be a good neighbor and friend. I made it a point to have tea with Alice on a regular basis.

But when Bob was diagnosed with throat cancer, I knew it was time to “reel in” faster. God prompted me to give up my church responsibilities in order to “go fishing.” I'm so glad I did! The apostle Paul said, “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power” (1 Corinthians 2:4).

5. Don't fish alone

Catching large salmon by oneself is tricky. It takes one on the rod, one on the motor, and one on the net. I'll never forget the time there were four of us fishing together, and two thirty-four-pounders got on our lines at the same time. We were in for some excitement — and teamwork!

We are not totally responsible for someone's salvation, even our children's. The apostle Paul said, “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:6, KJV). If Paul had been a modern fisherman, he might have said, “I had the rod, Apollos ran the motor; but God netted it.”

Although I befriended Bob, invited him and Alice to church, and visited him in the hospital, it was actually my pastor who led him to the Lord. And the Holy Spirit was on the net.

6. Preserve the catch

As soon as a salmon is caught, it is cleaned and put on ice. Once back home, we freeze, smoke, or can it immediately.

Likewise, we can't let new believers flounder on their own. They need Christian fellowship, the Word of God, a prayer life, and encouragement to share their faith. They must be “preserved.”

The apostle Paul worked hard to help new converts grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ. Not only did he continually pray for them, he also wrote them letters of encouragement and visited them when possible: “In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy . . . being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:4, 6).

The salmon stock is rapidly depleting in our part of the world, but fishing for the souls of men has never been better. Christ is coming soon, and “the bite is on.” It's time to do some serious fishing! **BA**

Cathy Mogus writes from Richmond, British Columbia. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, except where noted.



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100th Anniversary Issue

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of SERVICE TO GOD AND MAN

The Bible Advocate

AND
HERALD OF THE COMING KINGDOM

August 10, 1863 -- August 9, 1963

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Questions & Answers



Is a religious service or legal certificate necessary for a couple to be truly married in God's sight? What about common-law marriage?

Marriage is not the invention of men, nor is it under the authority of human governments. The Bible lays down the essential elements of marriage, declaring it an institution of God from the start. True marriage is mutual and heterosexual, monogamous and permanent, according to Scripture (Genesis 2:18-25; Matthew 19:1-9).

Common-law marriage is a legal status recognized by about a dozen of the fifty United States. It affirms that a man and woman who live together for a specified time (usually seven years) are considered legally married even if they never obtained a license to marry or were never married by a minister or other qualified official. This may serve a useful purpose for some couples' standing before the state, but it is not approved in Scripture. Nor do we find in the Bible a clear and simple answer to the question of what constitutes a marriage.

Some say that when two persons, male and female, engage in sexual intercourse, they are considered married in God's sight. This simplistic view does not harmonize with many Bible texts (1 Corinthians 7:1-5, for example) and is hopelessly inadequate to cover all cases.

A more helpful answer — and a more nearly biblical one — is this: Any mature man and woman who mutually decide to be married according to His plan, and who publicly (in the presence of witnesses) express their commitment to such a marriage, may then be considered married in God's sight. This is the standard doorway to marriage, one that has long been upheld by the laws of nation-states founded mainly on Judeo-Christian ethics.

The provision for common-law marriage recognizes an exception to the prevailing laws referenced in the previous paragraph. Common-law marriage should be seen for what it is: a back door to legal marriage for those who bypassed the common door to holy matrimony as it has been widely affirmed by Christian practice.

Christians should resist the trend of the world and hold high the gold standard of marriage as God taught in the beginning and as Jesus Christ and His apostles confirmed and clarified in the New Testament writings.

If doubts remain about the importance of being rightly married before God and others, recall the biblical counsel to obey the laws of the land, that whatever is not of faith is sin, and that to those who know what's right and do it not, to them it is sin (Romans 13:1, 2; 14:23; James 4:17).

— Elder Calvin Burrell



Goin' ta Jesus

A sexual abuse survivor
becomes a little child again.

by Mary Anne Quinn

Bubbles. *That's just what we need here, I thought.* A friend's husband and daughter had come over to pick up some furniture. They were expected; three-year-old Alianna was not. When she was introduced to me, she pirouetted, revealing the flair of both her skirt

and her personality — definitely a bubbles kind of girl.

I retrieved two bottles of bubbles from the stash I keep in our front closet. While her mom and grandfather wrestled a dining room table and chairs into the back and onto the roof of their van, my new friend and I blew bubbles. We laughed as they danced on a soft breeze and popped on the grass, bushes, and each other. One just kept floating up.

"Look, Alianna!" I exclaimed. "That bubble is going to Jesus."

As Alianna tracked the rising

bubble with widening eyes, she made a joyful, little bounce and rose up on her tippy-toes as if she might just float up to heaven with it. "Goin' ta Jesus!" she echoed, clapping her hands together with excitement.

At the same time, a weight of guilt sent my heart sinking within me. *Why did I just say that? That bubble isn't really going up to Jesus. We're going to see it pop any second, and Alianna will know I told her a falsehood.*

It didn't pop. Together we watched that bubble continue to float up and out of our sight. "Jesus loves children, so He must love bubbles," I asserted, as much to myself as to Alianna.

With that thought, an image spontaneously formed in my mind of Jesus sitting on His throne, a bottle in one hand and a pink plastic wand in the other. He was blowing bubbles, too, but His transformed from spheres into hearts as they drifted down upon us. He had a big grin on His face, and I felt in my heart His delight in joining our fun.

Jesus liked being with us. He spoke to my heart that He finds deep joy in loving the kind of little girl who twirls when she tells you her name, and the kind of woman who has no children of her own yet keeps bottles of bubbles in her closet. He's that kind of God. That's why He said we need to "become as little children" (Matthew 18:2-4), not stuffy, anxious grown-ups, to enter His kingdom.

I knew Alianna's family had taught her that Jesus loved her, just as they cherished her themselves. With her buoyant personality, I could easily imagine her catching a ride on that bubble all the way up to heaven and then

running without hesitation right up into Jesus' lap and loving embrace. I envied her carefree approach to life, because I knew it came from the security of being protected, as well as loved, by the big people in her life.

Dark childhood

As a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, I have often considered the invitation to become like a child as more threatening than appealing. I was loved, but there weren't any big people in my life who protected me. Being little didn't mean being cherished; it meant being easy prey.

I used to twirl and pose like Alianna, but I was forced to expose more than my smile and a pretty dress. Alianna's innocence was being cherished; mine had been exploited. Why would I want to become a child again? Why would I ever desire to be that vulnerable again? Now that I was an adult — a "big person" — all I wanted was to be safe. What Jesus wanted was to set me free.

Journey of trust

Like the disciples who tried to shoo the little children away from Jesus, shame and fear barred my heart from "goin' ta Jesus" with the same light-hearted spirit as Alianna's. The day Jesus showered me with bubbles and I bathed in His delight marked the beginning of my journey of learning to trust Him to love me without hurting me.

It wasn't easy, but Jesus was patient and gentle with me, and He always respected my boundaries. I discovered that I could let Him hold me without the danger of being violated. It was safe to be small and vulnerable, with a

great, big God to take care of me. In time, I could share with Jesus the pain and humiliation of the abuse I had suffered as a child. He not only comforted me in my tears but also made it safe for me to express my anger to Him for allowing those terrible abuses to be done to me.

As we faced those memories together, Jesus showed me that He had always been with me. I had never been alone. He also brought people into my life who walked with me on my healing journey. I experienced the secu-

to have fun with Jesus. Together, we stomp through crunchy fall leaves, run barefoot in the sand along Lake Michigan, make snow angels at the park, and enjoy the tangy sweetness of wild raspberries in the forest. Even when He asks me to do hard things, such as forgive those who hurt me, I feel safe with Him and am confident He is always working for my good.

Jesus' declaration on the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30), doesn't mean that I will never be vulnerable or that I will never

“Jesus showed me that
He had always been with me.
I had never been alone.”

urity of a husband, friends, and Christian counselors who enjoyed me without exploiting me and who showed that affection can be offered free of exploitation.

Finding freedom

Now, when I read or hear Jesus' words to "Let the little children come to Me" (Matthew 19:14), I am free to run right into His arms. Just as I laughed and played with Alianna, I am also learning how to laugh and

be hurt again. It means I never have to go back to the fear and shame of my childhood. Instead, I can keep walking forward in increasing childlike freedom, with one hand holding onto Jesus and the other holding a pink plastic wand. **BA**

Mary Anne Quinn
writes from Morton
Grove, IL.





Transformation

(Matthew 28:16)

by Jody McCoy

With the Great Commission, Jesus includes us in His mission to rescue a lost world. However, He can't use us to rescue others if we're in need of rescue ourselves. In our day-to-day lives, we often fail to see our need for transformation. We compare ourselves to each other and think we're doing OK. We're kind to those who are kind to us, and we feel justified to be unkind to those who are unkind to us.

God's law requires us to love others — period! It makes no exception for how others treat us. When we return evil for evil, we become the authors of evil, and the penalty for sin is death. God's still, small voice convicts us of our sins, but it's easy to ignore His Spirit in our tumultuous world. Consequently, we don't realize the peril we're in. To gain perspective, we need some quiet time with God. In other words, we need a mountaintop experience.

We want to think of ourselves as good, not evil. However, Jesus told us that no one is good except God. Goodness doesn't come from us; it comes from Him. That's why we need a Savior. Jesus left the safety of heaven, not to rescue the righteous but to rescue those who would abandon Him, mock Him, and crucify Him. That's who Jesus died for: us.

Transformation comes when we abandon our pretense of innocence and own our guilt. We kneel before the cross with nothing to offer but a broken spirit and a trust in God's goodness. God will forgive us, not because we're good but because He's good. When we give our lives to Him, He gives us His good nature.

For me, this mountaintop experience came at a youth camp in Oklahoma when I was 14. I was under a canopy of mimosa trees, sitting on a blanket scratching chigger bites while our group was listening to a young pastor named Jerry Camero. He captured my attention when he started talking about the terror Jesus endured in the Garden of Gethsemane. He said that Jesus chose to remain in the garden even though He was so scared that He sweat great drops of blood. When Jerry described the brutality Jesus suffered on the cross, it seemed as if the rest of the group faded away. Then he told me that Jesus died in my place, to pay for what I've done.

At that time, I didn't understand words like *justification* and *sanctification*. I just knew that I felt convicted for my sins that caused Jesus to suffer and die for me. I told Jesus I was sorry for all the things I'd done, and I asked Him to forgive me. I felt my guilt release into peace, and I knew I'd been forgiven. With my heart flooding with gratitude, that day I gave my life to the One who gave His life for me. In that moment, I became a new creature. I became a Christian and began to follow Jesus' plan.

We all need transformation, and it happens differently for each of us. Thank God for His grace that brings it! **BA**

Jody McCoy is executive director of the General Conference and lives in Austin, TX.



Great Expectations

Great expectations delight our Most High
God,
Mysterious, unexpected are His ways.

Though our cherished plans go awry,
His good purposes will prevail.

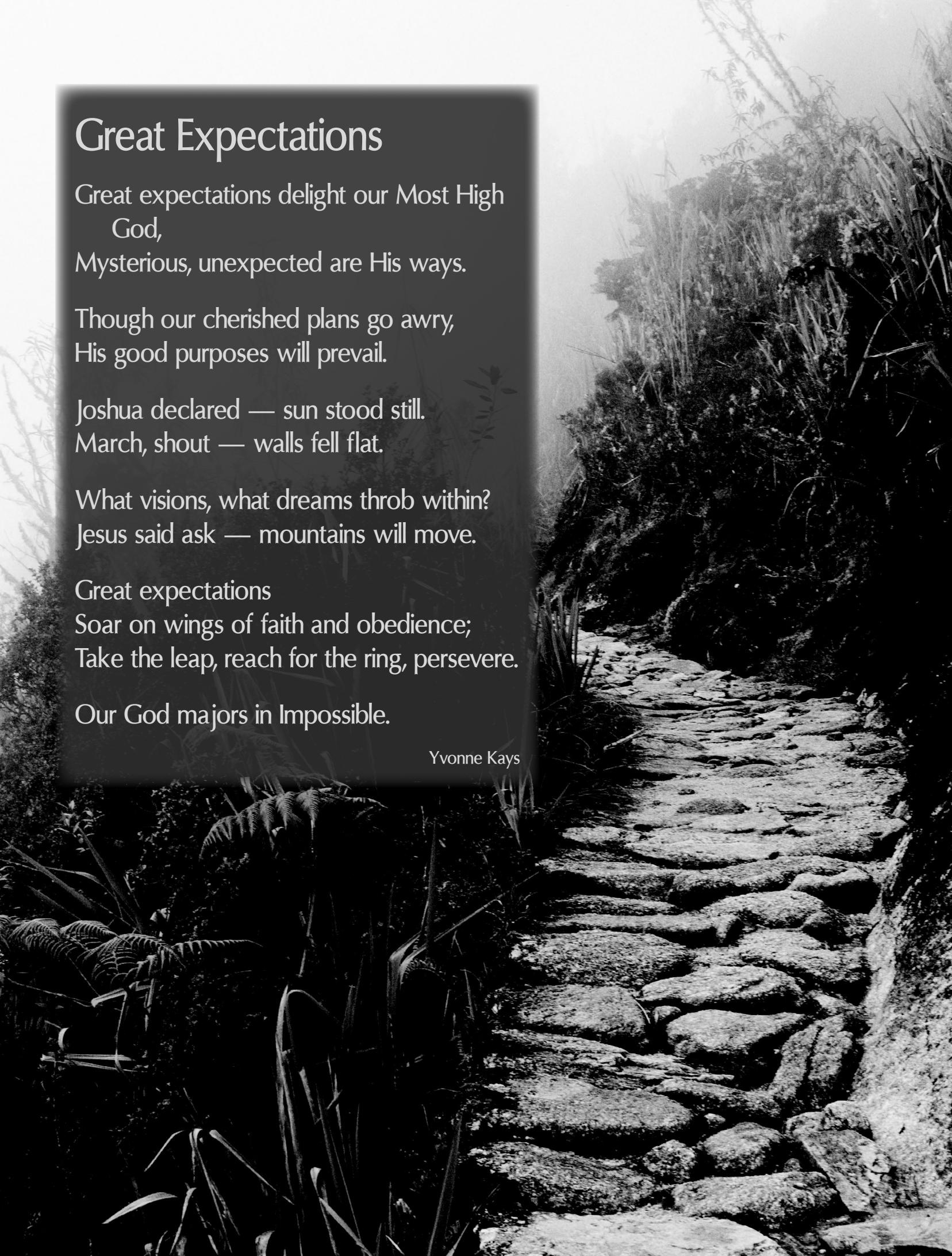
Joshua declared — sun stood still.
March, shout — walls fell flat.

What visions, what dreams throb within?
Jesus said ask — mountains will move.

Great expectations
Soar on wings of faith and obedience;
Take the leap, reach for the ring, persevere.

Our God majors in Impossible.

Yvonne Kays





MOUNTAIN TOP MO

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain

In the Bible’s “mountaintop moments,” God reveals Himself in new ways after calling His people out of their old ways, often through His mighty rescue. He gives fresh direction to those who trust and follow, and He invites them to become partners in His mission to save and restore the world. As you look at this partial list of great mountaintop moments, consider that Jesus might be calling you to the mount to hear anew His Great Commission for your life.

Noah’s Ark
(Mount Ararat)
Genesis 8

Abraham’s Sacrifice
(Mount Moriah)
Genesis 22

Israel’s Covenant
(Mount Sinai)
Exodus 19-20

Moses’ Vista
(Mount Nebo)
Deuteronomy 34

Elijah’s Challenge
(Mount Carmel)
1 Kings 18

Solomon’s Temple
(Mount Moriah)
2 Chronicles 3

King David’s Great Song of Mount Zion

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King (Psalm 48:1, 2).



MENTS IN SCRIPTURE

where Jesus had appointed them (Matthew 28:16, KJV throughout).

The Church's New Covenant Mount Zion

But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn . . . and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect (Hebrews 12:22, 23).

Isaiah's Prophecy

(Mount Zion)

Isaiah 2

Ezekiel's Vision

(Mount Unknown)

Ezekiel 40

Jesus' Temptation

(Mount Unknown)

Matthew 4

Jesus' Sermon

(Mount Unknown)

Matthew 5

Jesus' Transfiguration

(Mount Unknown)

Matthew 17

Jesus' Passion

(Mount of Olives)

Matthew 26

A Kingdom View of New Jerusalem

[Then] one of the seven angels . . . carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God . . . (Revelation 21:9-11).

How to Clarify

by Amber Riggs

Growing up, we have grand dreams of adulthood — a vision of filling our days with things that bring us joy and fulfillment while allowing us to make a difference. Embracing a calling.

And then comes the shock of some realities of adulthood. Dishes pile up. We're surrounded by mounds of dirty clothes that don't fit in our "vision." This vision also didn't include investing money, sweat, and tears into an education just so we could work twelve-hour days before crashing into bed at night and doing it all over again the next day.

The word *vocation* comes from the root word *vocare*, which means "to call." It is an accurate reflection of a deeply embedded human longing to be engaged in a vocation — in a work. Not just any work but one that calls us to something that transcends our individual existence. But what do we do when the sounds we are straining to hear are muffled by life's messy layers?

Clarifying calling

Christian Olympian Eric Liddell (*Chariots of Fire*) has been attributed with declaring, "When I run, I feel [God's] pleasure." In a sense, calling is about discovering what makes us "feel God's pleasure."

When our culture talks about calling, it tends to be enveloped in mystical terms. In *The Call*, Os Guinness pulls back the veil shrouding this mystery by asking us to encounter calling in two parts. He invites us to first embrace a call reverberating throughout the world that is "by [Christ], to [Christ], and for [Christ]." He refers to this as our primary call. This call by, to, and for Christ puts the rest of our lives in context.

The primary call gives context to a secondary call. That is, in whatever position of life we find ourselves, "everyone, everywhere, and in everything should think, speak, and live and act entirely for him." Within this context we muse about the concept of vocation and the specifics of the call unique to our individual lives.

Guinness emphasizes that to realize that powerful sense of calling, the primary call must remain primary. Putting the two together, he defines *calling* as "the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service."

But that still leaves us with a practical question: How do I "hear" my secondary calling?

Explore your calling at a deeper level in Artios Christian College's introductory course LEA 111 Essentials of Vibrant Leadership. Read a longer version of this article at artiosmagazine.org.

Your Calling

Calling as response

Let's imagine how this would look played out on stage. Christ would be the main character. He calls people to come and join Him in acting out His story. Through all the noise, you hear that call and join Him on stage. So you have been called *by* Him, you have come *to* Him, and it is *for* Him as you join Him in acting out His story.

Christ does not call us to be the lead or even one of the supporting actors. He calls us to be chorus members — background storytellers who occasionally feel the warmth of the spotlight. In a musical production, the chorus is that group of unknown singers and dancers who fill the space and sound on the stage among the lead characters. The chorus' job — their vocation — is to respond to the main character. They do this through rich, multi-layered harmonies and unique movements that amplify the play's meaning.

Secondary calling, that vocation that makes you "feel God's pleasure," can be described as the unique harmonies and movements your body uses to respond to the story being played out on center stage. In that sense, vocational calling is more of a *response* to and *interaction with* God and His story. It is an em-

brace of His invitation to join Him in telling that story.

No one can come into contact with God's story and not respond to it. Some people respond with indifference, others with outright rebellion. Still others respond with intrigue. To follow Christ, however, is to respond to and interact with God's story in ways that reflect God's heart.

So how does this response take shape in each sphere of my life?

Make it practical

At home: Home is the front line of Christian living and of Christian leadership and discipleship. Thus my husband and children have first priority. In addition to helping my family interact with life through the lens of the gospel, one way that my calling takes shape in our home is through homeschooling our four children.

At work: As dean of administration for Artios Christian College, I problem-solve and strategize about how to most effectively equip Christian leaders through our specific model of education.

In my congregation: As a worship leader and teacher, I invite people to encounter and respond to God's story through both music and study.

In my community: Teaching classes for other homeschooled students in my community allows me to plant seeds for Christ-centered leadership within a new generation.

Make it personal

My response to Christ's call isn't going to look like yours. All these things fill me with delight, but I don't expect them to fill *you* with delight. God designed each of us to respond to His story in unique ways. And our response can change as we progress through different seasons of life!

So put yourself in God's story. Allow yourself to respond to it in whatever sphere you find yourself. But don't get lost in your own response. Allow yourself to take in the beauty of the enormity of His story and the vast range of responses played out around you. Most of all, embrace that there is no greater delight than for God's pleasure to become the source of your own. **BA**

Amber Riggs lives near Eugene, OR, with her husband, Bryan, and their four daughters.





Portrait of a Leader

What the making of Moses
means for us.

by Dorothy Nimchuk

“I’ve killed a man, and the thing is known!”

On the heels of that thought, the 40-year-old fled, leaving behind the only life he’d known: the best available education, and probable elevation to leadership of a great nation, escaping instead into an unknown future and unforgiving desert.

Forty years later, the man emerged, called by God and entrusted with leading a million-plus people out of slavery and oppression. Their way wound through a desert wilderness not unlike the one that had inured him to cope with similar dangers and deprivations. At 80 years of age, Moses was a competent, though reluctant, leader, his years of experience having shaped his destiny.

Elation over the Israelites’ deliverance from the rigors of Egyptian slavery soon turned to complaints. Boxed in by soldiers behind and the expanse of water ahead, the people felt betrayed by the man who had sought their release. “You’ve brought us out to die in the desert!” No water! *Complain*. No sustenance! *Complain*. No variety in diet! *Complain*. A second cry for water, and Moses, in an outburst of frustration and rage, struck the rock, disobeying God’s instruction. That act alone cost him the honor of leading the people

across the finish line into the Promised Land.

On Mount Sinai, God gave Moses His commandments, handwritten, engraved in stone. Back at the camp, the people had embraced idol worship. God was ready to destroy them all and raise up a great nation under Moses, but Moses rejected the idea: "Remember Your promise to Abraham to make of him a great nation. The Egyptians will say that You couldn't deliver on Your promise."

Moses strongly reprimanded the people for their great sin, yet pleaded with God to forgive them. "Yet now, if You will forgive their sin – but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written" (Exodus 32:32). God told Moses to continue the journey and possess the land, but He would not go with them. Moses pleaded with the Lord to change His mind. "So the LORD said to Moses, 'I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name'" (33:17).

The voice of God had terrified the people at Mount Sinai amid the thunder and flames, so they said to Moses, "You talk to Him." Moses predicted that in the future, a prophet would arise like him with a special message for humanity. He knew the people would digress from serving God, once settled in their new land. However, Moses blessed and encouraged them to remain faithful, but also warned them of the dangers of adopting heathen ways.

On the same day, God called Moses (now age 120) to the top of Pisgah on Mount Nebo, situat-

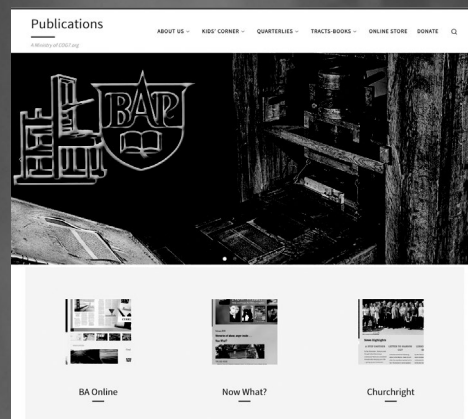
ed in Moab across the river from Jericho. From this viewpoint, God allowed him to see all the land that the children of Israel would possess. Moses died there on that mountain, and God buried him in an undisclosed grave. Other great men would follow, yet none of the same caliber as Moses, whom the Lord knew "face to face" (Deuteronomy 34:10).

Moses' prophetic utterance came to pass in the life and ministry of Jesus. Like Moses' plea for his people, Jesus cried out from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). His message, rejected by His own people, was received gladly by Gentiles. This same message of salvation is yet viable and available to all those who reach out in faith to Christ Jesus.

Are you a child of God? How has His grace impacted your life and leadership? Young or old, you can serve God. Perhaps He is shaping you for service. Ask God what He has planned for your life.

From a fugitive to a great leader used mightily by God, Moses left his imprint on the pages of history (Hebrews 11:23-29). What portrait of yourself will you leave behind as a legacy in the annals of the faithful? May that portrait reflect a life led by the Holy Spirit. **BA**

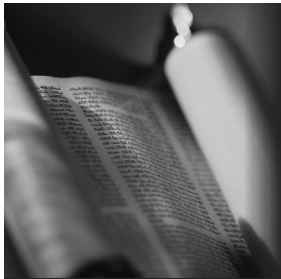
Dorothy Nimchuk
and her husband,
Nick, live in Medicine
Hat, Alberta.



Share Your Faith!

Publications can help. We have 42 tracts on a number of topics available in print and online. Read them at publications.cog7.org. Or place an order at cog7.org/online-store/tracts.





The Unveiled Christ

by **Robert E. Thomson**

The Old Testament is rife with symbols, types, and prophecies that point to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But as Paul notes in his second letter to the Corinthians, those references often are obscure and less than obvious.

Referring to the veil with which Moses covered his face after receiving the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:29, 33), Paul states, “For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ” (2 Corinthians 3:14).

Living on this side of Calvary, we can appreciate more fully the teaching of the Pentateuch than could the contemporaries of Moses. Consider, for example, the institution of the Passover. In the last of the ten plagues, God took the lives of all the firstborn in Egypt (Exodus 12:12). The exception was that when the blood of a sacrificial lamb was sprinkled on the lintel and doorposts, “the Lord [passed] over the door and [did] not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you” (v. 23).

This was a foreshadowing of Christ’s provision of salvation for those who trust in Him, as well as a warning to those who choose not to believe. How blessed are we who, having had the veil removed, understand more fully God’s plan of salvation.

Another example of the veiled revelation of God’s divine purposes for His people is the Israelites’ escape from bondage in Egypt and eventual entrance into the Promised Land. Faced by the waters of the Red Sea in front and the pursuing forces of Pharaoh behind, the children of Israel found themselves in an impossible situation. They were without hope, but on that day they learned a lesson of trust: “By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians,

attempting to do so, were drowned” (Hebrews 11:29). Paul likened this to Christian baptism (1 Corinthians 10:1, 2).

Perhaps the most striking veiled teaching from the Old Testament is the story of the bronze serpent.

And the people spoke against God and against Moses: “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.” So the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died (Numbers 21:5, 6).

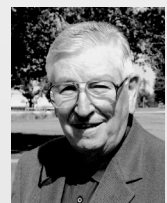
The Israelites repented and asked Moses to seek a remedy from the Lord. The Lord told Moses to make a bronze serpent and put it on a pole. Whoever had been bitten and looked upon it was healed (vv. 8, 9).

Surely this was a veiled reference to the sacrificial death of Jesus: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up” (John 3:14). But why would God heal and save by a serpent, a symbol of Satan and evil?

The unveiled answer is that Christ, who knew no sin, became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). Amazing! The holy Son of God actually became sin in order that we might be saved!

Thank God for the wonderful, inspired books of the Old Testament. But thank Him even more that in Christ, the living Word, the veil has been lifted. **BA**

Robert E. Thomson writes from Palm Harbor, FL.



Call to Convention

It is my great pleasure to once again extend this Call to Convention to each member and friend of the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day). Our 2019 Biennial Convention will be held Monday evening, July 1, through Saturday night, July 6, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, at the beautiful Albuquerque Convention Center. (Details regarding convention events, hotels, meals, and registration will soon be available online and in print.)

People attend our biennial conventions for many different reasons. No matter what your reasons may be, I'm confident that you will not be disappointed.

Do you come to worship? Six major worship services are planned! They will include wonderful music, fervent prayer, encouraging personal testimonies, challenging sermons, and more, all focused on our 2019 Convention theme "Compelled by Love" (2 Corinthians 5:14ff). Even better, all this will take place in the special setting of the Albuquerque Convention Center's awesome fine arts theater.

Do you come to learn? As many as thirty individual seminars or workshops may be offered. Artios Christian College will be presenting classes in English and Spanish. Other workshops will focus on evangelism, discipleship, family life, General Conference Ministries, and other topics — all designed to help you successfully live as an ambassador for Christ and fulfill the Great Commission Christ has given each believer.

Do you come to participate in the General Conference business sessions? Having completed the revision of our bylaws during the 2017 convention, we will return to our normal practice of Tuesday through Friday morning-only business sessions. We will receive State of the Conference, General Conference Ministries, and financial reports. We will elect members to our board of directors and to the 2019-2021 Nominations Committee. We will also discuss and decide any resolutions and bylaw amendments that may be offered.

Do you come for your children, teens, or young adults? There will be programs and activities for all! Do you come for the fellowship, to reconnect with old friends and meet new ones? They'll all miss you if you aren't there! Do you wish to make this convention a part of a family vacation? New Mexico is known as the Land of Enchantment for good reason. You could spend a month there and not come close to seeing all that this beautiful state has to offer.

Make plans now to attend the 2019 Biennial Convention of the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Albuquerque. I look forward to seeing you there!

Loren Stacy
General Conference President





Out of Egypt

A journey to true
freedom in Christ.

by Ash Khalil

My name is Ashraf Khalil, but everyone who knows me calls me Ash.

I was born in Cairo, Egypt, in August 1969. My family members were Coptic Orthodox Christians. They worked hard and were well educated. I was the first child and came along when my father was 51. Exactly one year later, my brother was born. My mother didn't make it through the delivery, so my father faced life as a widower and single father.

Moving to the US

Life was tough for Christians in Egypt. Christians were persecuted by Muslims more and more, and curfews were imposed on the people. So when I was seven, my father decided we needed to leave. As a child all I knew was that we were moving far away.

We moved to Long Island, New York, and stayed with my uncle and his family over two years. The culture shock hit me hard, and I forgot how to read and write Arabic.

We then moved to New Jersey. I experienced prejudices from students in the public school because of where I was from. On one occasion some boys picked on me and wanted to fight. One of them spat in my face. A short, young boy came in

the middle of us and told them to leave me alone, and they did.

My dad wanted to leave New Jersey and meet a man named Oral Roberts. He had seen him on TV and was intrigued by him. He asked me where Oral Roberts lived, and I pointed out a state called Oklahoma on the map. So off we went to Oklahoma.

When we arrived, we immediately went where Oral Roberts was. My father's high hopes were short lived. We had little and soon secured an apartment in low-income housing on the north side of Tulsa. The area was extremely poor and infested with drugs and gangs.

My brother and I attended the Catholic elementary school directly across the street from our apartment. A mission there

was staffed by nuns, who lovingly helped us get on our feet. There was no Coptic church, so we attended the Catholic church attached to the school.

My brother and I became altar boys. That is also where I had my first job during the summer doing odd jobs around the school and helping with the mission garden.

Awakening

A wonderful elderly man named Mr. Curtain was my speech teacher. I was a shy, fat boy, but he was willing to develop me. After some time, he entered me in the state speech contest, and I tied with another student for first place. That gave me the confidence to speak in public.

After some time, the priest of the church had me lecture the Word of God to the congregation during mass on Sunday. I really liked speaking the Word there. We lived in this area until I graduated from Bishop Kelley High School in 1986 at age 16.

I entered the University of Tulsa at age 16 on an academic scholarship, with matching scholarships from TU and the Catholic Diocese. I loved learning and studied hard. But I got into many sinful things during my college years. Just because a school is private doesn't mean it is Christian.

During these years I met a friend who opened my eyes to the errors of the Catholic church. She taught me about the many pagan practices and that Sunday worship was not biblical, etc. I then visited the priest and presented him with these things. He informed me that we were to follow what the pope and bishop

say. I then realized I was being groomed for the priesthood. I couldn't agree with him.

Separation

I left behind the Catholic church, many friends, and everything I knew. After this, my scholarship was pulled, so I had to withdraw from school after my second year. My father disowned me and was angry with me for leaving the church and embracing new beliefs. I was forced to leave his house on bad terms. I still loved and forgave my father for what he had done, and made a constant effort to visit him. I helped him with what he

di Weekes, who would become my wife. I fell deeply in love with her. She was everything I wanted. I started to ask her what she believed and where she attended church. She told me that she kept the Sabbath and attended the Church of God (Seventh Day).

We couldn't find anything that we disagreed on in the Bible. Heidi then informed me that I was attending the wrong church and that I wasn't really an Adventist (I didn't even believe in Ellen White). We were married after I got her parents' blessing, a few short months later.

After we had been married a couple of years, I was involved in

“ I knew all the right answers and beliefs, but something was missing. ”

needed, especially in his old age, because I loved him.

I worked three jobs and tried to attend a community college at night to finish my degree, but it ended up being too much for me. I landed a good job in a company with a lot of room for advancement and moved up in the company quickly.

New future

I was attending a Seventh-day Adventist church when I met Hei-

di Weekes, who would become my wife. I fell deeply in love with her. She was everything I wanted. I started to ask her what she believed and where she attended church. She told me that she kept the Sabbath and attended the Church of God (Seventh Day).

Death scare

After a little time, I became deathly ill with ulcerative colitis. Several doctors tried many drugs, but nothing worked. I became weak and frail. I started to pass out at work and home, and finally was given four months to live.

My only alternative to death was to have major surgery. The doctor said I had a fifty-fifty chance of making it through alive and likely wouldn't be able to father any more children afterward. (At this point we had one son.) I couldn't understand it. I had been healthy, exercising and lifting weights.

After two surgeons performed a four-hour surgery, I awoke in much pain and humiliation. I felt so empty. I didn't want to look at myself or see anybody, especially church folks. When they came to visit me in the hospital, I would

the TV for something to satisfy me, to no avail. I picked up the Bible on cassette and followed along as it played. I listened and read 1, 2, and 3 John. That night I saw who Jesus was for the first time in my life. The Word of God filled my ears and heart. I repented right then of my sins and asked God's forgiveness, and vowed to serve Him all the days of my life. I finally felt true hope and a sense of meaning. I once was lost, but now I was found, was blind but now I could see. I was dead and now I live — now and forever.

house that claimed the room with my books, computer, clothing, pool table, and hand-finished desk. Thank God my family was safe! The only thing that was not burned but scorched on the outside was my Bible.

Then my prized dog died. I realized all my idols and things that consumed my time had been torn down. I returned to the pure Word of God, and nothing beside. I also needed to spend more quality time with my family.

When God makes disciples, He must break and purge them first. I believe all these things that happened to me were God's work to bring a lost son home to Him.

God's blessing didn't stop there. My wife and I were blessed with four more children — a total of five after my surgery — because of God's faithfulness to me. Without Jesus in my life, I would have had no true life now and in eternity. I thank God for His amazing and loving grace toward an Egyptian as I!

So does God still call His children out of Egypt? You better believe it! If He can call me out, He can call you too. If there was hope for me, then there is hope for you in the person and work of Jesus Christ. But after we leave Egypt, do its sins, lusts, and desires leave us? I pray we can all one day say, by God's grace and faith in His Son Jesus and the power of His Holy Spirit, "Yes and amen!" May God get the glory He deserves! **BA**

“When God makes disciples,
He must break and purge
them first.”

hit my “happy button” (pain medicine) to put me to sleep so I wouldn't have to deal with them. I felt my life was over.

True healing

I was in the hospital recovering for some time. A friend from church came to see me and brought food for me to eat. While I ate, he pulled out a cassette player and small box — the Bible on cassettes. I hit the “happy button” and told him to put it on the side of my bed. My wife came in and brought my Bible, and I asked her to put it on the side as well.

Alone that night, I searched

When the nurse came in the next morning and told me it was time to eat, I said I was full. She didn't understand that something in me was more valuable than food. My wife also came in and saw that I was happy. I told her all about what happened, and we thanked God for His grace and mercy for saving me in more ways than one.

Burdens and blessings

Some interesting things happened after that. First, my father died. That crushed me severely. He was all that I had from my biological family who was close to me. Next, we had a fire in our

Ash Khalil pastors the Church of God in Inola, OK.





Sierra Leone

continued from page 7

knowledge of the formation of Church of God (Seventh Day) in Sierra Leone — more than me. They are the original founders of CoG7. I came into contact with them since 2011.

JK: What was the defining moment in your call to Christ?

MB: I was a notorious drug addict. I was taking much of marijuana before coming to Christ. Yes, honestly, life was really dangerous, considering the [young] age. At that time, each church I visited, if the pastor or the preacher talked about marijuana or any other drugs, I would never go to that church again. So that is how I kept on moving from church to church. I even attended a service at an Indian temple, just running away from the truth. But in the early 90s when there was a Bible training center from Liberia, some Americans were from Liberia, [and] they entered Sierra Leone just when the rebels attacked Liberia. So they moved from Monrovia and they came to Sierra Leone, situating in the capital city. It was then I received Christ as personal Lord and Savior.

JK: What about you, Victor?

VB: I was a Catholic until during the war (1997), when the rebels invaded Freetown. That is the time I became a Sabbatarian, though at that time it was not Church of God (Seventh Day). The church at that time was Christ the Hope, but it was a Sabbath church. It was not Adventist but just a separate church.

That church is the one that transformed to the Church of God (Seventh Day). And until I came in contact with the Sabbath, that was the time I came to know Christ. I was baptized when I was a Catholic, but it was a sprinkling, so I [had] to be re-baptized by immersion. I never regretted joining the Sabbath.

JK: What do you see as the greatest potential in Sierra Leone, and what are the greatest challenges?

VB: The potential is so plentiful. The harvest is so much. You see, in our country 70 percent is Muslim. Then 5 percent or 10 percent is African tradition. So Christians are just 20 percent, and [of] that 20 percent you have different denominations: Catholics, Methodists, Presbyterians, Pentecostals, and then Sabbathkeepers. Of the Sabbathkeepers you have the SDA, Baptist, then Church of God (Seventh Day). So there is a lot of potential because the way our church is growing exponentially in Sierra Leone (and mostly we are winning over both sides), we

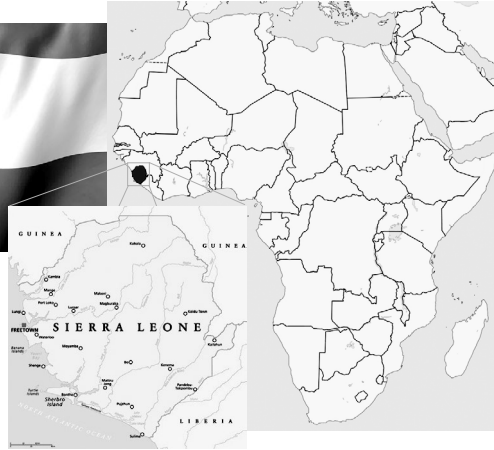
Watch the video of this interview at <http://imc.cog7.org/video.html>.

are bringing our Christian brothers to the Sabbath. Then we are also gaining from the Muslim-dominant area. And we do that through different means. Through farming, because we farm in a community where 90 percent of the villagers are Muslims. When we come to work, we talk to you about Christ. Then we have the great potential to win more souls — thousands or millions of souls in Sierra Leone. The potential harvest is there.

JK: Can you comment on the challenges you face?

MB: In accordance with what Victor has just said, this potential goes together with the challenges. Considering the percentages he mentioned, the Muslims are not the problem. But those who have received Christ in a wrong concept are practicing Christianity in the wrong way. There are denominations, like Catholic people, who influence the gospel so much in our country. They use the government. [It] doesn't





Sierra Leone at a Glance

- Population: over 7 million
- Capital: Freetown
- Land area: 27,700 square miles
- Official CoG7 congregations: 49 *(more are developing)*
- Approximate attendance: 3,430
- Chairman and overseer: Peter Blackie

have money, and the Catholics enter and do lots of investments: hospital, school, even down to the media, the radio stations, the universities. Like some of us, we went to school as a result of Catholic provision. They were cooking, and as a child when you heard that people are cooking, you will go there. They suppressed the gospel in a very

vast way, and that is the present challenge we are now facing. Each time we want to expose some of these things that are discovered, [the Catholics] rise up. Then, besides this, there are areas where we don't have our own facilities. We haven't built a church there, but they have their schools. We can go to the school and start our ministry.



But the moment they know that this ministry belongs to Church of God (Seventh Day), they will stop us. But this challenge is a testimony for [our church]. The more we are persecuted, the more we are challenged. The more we are confronted, people want to know why these guys are blocking these people, why are they stopping them. But that will not discourage us. As of now, the little time we have [on] the media, we can make use of it, and we win souls. People hear, they know the truth, and they are coming from these churches that have been affected, coming back to Church of God (Seventh Day).

JK: Have you been able to share the ten-point vision in your conference area? Which are the easiest that you really gravitate to? Is there a reason that would be easier for you?

VB: For me, [it is] engaging in witness for a lot of reasons. One, Church of God is a Bible-based church. Everything we do is Bible based, Bible centered, and that is a command to engage in witness. And that's why we do it. We do it in public transports, we do it in any gathering, we do it in the farm, we do it in the schools, we do it anywhere, every time, everywhere. We engage in witness. It is very easy.

MB: Yes, in fact, I am a regular Sabbath school teacher, and I train people to become disciples. In 2016, when we were in the Kailahun District, we trained about 26 pastors. All of them are coming from Catholic backgrounds, Methodist backgrounds. But when we reach out to them, they come to the sense that this



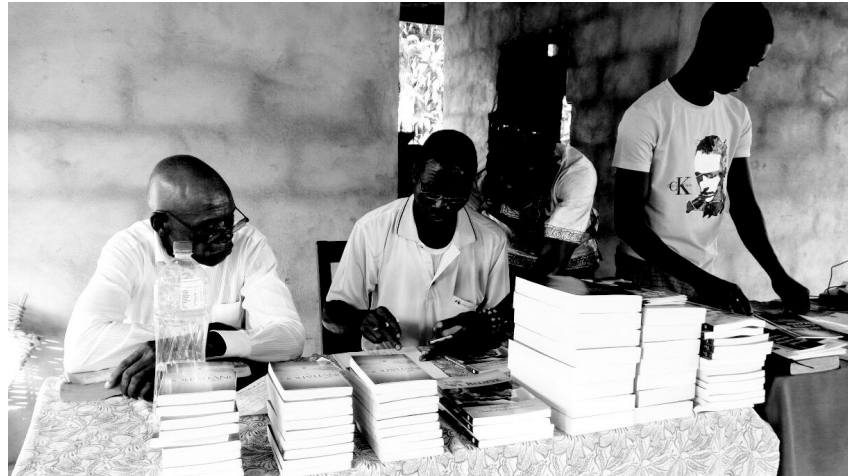
is true. In fact, one of the youth pastors requested training. So they endorsed our training, and I facilitated the training process. We conducted the training process about three months [in the Kailahun District]. As of now, we have 26 churches in Kailahun District alone, out of that discipleship training. In our absence, these guys can go to the radio station on behalf of us [and] defend the doctrine of CoG7 in the Kailahun District. That is one tremendous advance and benefit we have gotten out of the ten points that we have from CoG7.

JK: Manasseh, is there one of the ten points you would find more challenging to present or would need to do more research on?

MB: I am gifted as an evangelist. I love making disciples. The more you make disciples, the more the message goes out. So I don't pay much attention to other areas. But if I master my own discipline as a disciple maker, I think that would be better, and it will help the Church grow. Basically, I don't have any problem with any other point, but my area of interest is *Committed to Discipleship*.

JK: As we wrap up, which of the Church literature do you have access to and use for evangelism and teaching?

VB: *This We Believe* is a wonderful book. It is a wonderful tool. God bless the writers. Then also we have access to the quarterly. But we are having constraint in the children's Sabbath materials. We don't have much material. We want to expand more, and the more you expand,



we have to give. Sometimes when we go to places, I [say], "This is *This We Believe*. This is our doctrine. I want you to go over this book, then later we will discuss it." These are most of the times how we win people over.

JK: Is there anything else you would like to add to that?

VB: There are a lot of challenges. Especially now, I see what the disciples were facing when they were propagating the gospel. But thank God for their faith, because if not for them, I could not have heard about Jesus Christ. I believe I need to sacrifice for others to hear the good news. We do have some little constraints, like what we are doing. In some areas we have constraints in terms of movement, transportation. Then too, the major thing we are in dire need of is a radio station. We have a radio station, and we are going to contact Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea.

MB: That is our vision. We have our radio station, we have our training institute, we equip people, they can go to the radio station and say what they have learned. Simultaneously, our vision is not just for Sierra Leone. Guinea is a Muslim state (95 per-

cent), so if we can have our radio station, we have our training institution. When we train our disciples, they are equipped young men and young women. They can go to the radio station and say real things, reveal the secret that is needed — the secret that Jesus was talking about: When you know the truth, the truth will set you free.

JK: May God bless and encourage you both as we faithfully continue.



Did you know?

According to Victor Bangura, radio is the most popular means of communication in Sierra Leone. Literacy in that country is less than 30 percent, so people don't read newspapers or magazines. The government and pastors use radio to disseminate information.



2018 Ministerial Council Report

The meeting of the General Conference's Ministerial Council was held in Albuquerque, New Mexico, September 17-22. We experienced a wonderful time of worship, instruction in God's Word, application of the Great Commission, and fellowship. We are grateful to the local congregation in Albuquerque for working with us on the evangelistic event that took place on Thursday and Saturday evenings during the week of our meeting. We pray the seeds planted at our meeting will bring forth much fruit and expand the kingdom of Christ. Special thanks to our brother, Moises Capetillo, and the leadership team that surrounds him for allowing us to come alongside them in this effort.

The presenters and speakers during this council meeting challenged our thinking and gave us new insights for our continued journey toward the fulfillment of the Great Commission. I thank them for their time and devotion to the assignment given them as they allowed the Holy Spirit to guide them in speaking to us.

Our council took the following actions:

- Received reports from the License and Credentials Committee, the Study Committee on Human Sexuality, and the Study Committee on the Role of Women.
- Adopted amendments to the council's By-laws and Standing Rules, including the Documentation Manual (Resolutions MC 2018-01 - MC 2018-09).
- Adopted a resolution to add three chapters to the published volume titled *Sex: Created, Fallen, and Redeemed* (Resolution MC 2018-12). The three chapters added are "Male and Female – Created in God's Image"; "Mr. D, Human Sexuality, and Gender Dysphoria"; "Christian and Single."

- Adopted a resolution instructing our council president to appoint a study committee on the old and new covenants (Resolution MC 2018-15).

- Elected the following officers to a two-year term on the Executive Committee: Daniel Flores, council president; Wayne Hrenyk, council vice president; Monico Muffley, council secretary.

- Elected the following members to a four-year term on the License and Credentials Committee: Jhabel Chagollan, John Lemley, Noe Reyes (the following members make up the remaining positions on the L and CC: Steve Kyner, Ken Lawson, Monico Muffley).

- Elected the following members to a two-year term on the Nominating Committee: Joe Corrales, Gerson Gonzalez, David Lozano.

It was announced our next meeting will be October 12-17, 2020, at the Cincinnati Airport Marriott, 2395 Progress Drive, Hebron, Kentucky 41048.

This meeting ended my service as council president. It was a privilege to serve for these past four years, and I am grateful for the confidence and cooperation of council members during my tenure. I am particularly grateful to the members who served alongside me on the Executive Committee and the other committees of our council. Our event coordinator, Dennis O'Banion, has been an indispensable asset to facilitate the many things necessary to select venues for our meeting and to coordinate logistics onsite during each meeting. The members of the Denver office staff, including the custodian of records, were equally indispensable.

Our ministers and other attendees left our 2018 meeting encouraged to transform our Vision of a Vibrant 21st Century Church into reality.

Your brother in Christ,
Samuel Holland



Mountaintop Experiences

The phrase *mountaintop experience* often refers to moments of significant insight or to emotional or relational breakthroughs, no matter where they occur. However, it likely originated in God's many encounters with people upon mountains. The Bible is full of such mountaintop experiences.

In the Old Testament it was on a mountain that Noah exited the ark and received God's promise that He would never again destroy the world by flood. It was on a mountain that Abraham obediently prepared to sacrifice Isaac before God intervened, providing a better sacrifice and commending Abraham for his full devotion. It was on a mountain that Moses received God's law. And it was from a mountain, some forty years later, that Moses was allowed to see the Promised Land. In the New Testament it was on a mountain that Jesus taught His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1). And it was on a mountain that Jesus gave His disciples the Great Commission (28:16ff).

Of all the biblical mountaintop experiences, I'm especially drawn to the one of Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration. Mark relates that Jesus took these three disciples and "brought them up on a high mountain," and there "He was transfigured before them" (Mark 9:2, NASB throughout). I particularly appreciate this mountaintop experience for several reasons.

First, it literally revealed the deity of Jesus. We who read the English translation of this passage might understand *transfigured* to mean only that Jesus' appearance was changed for a while from what it usually was into something it usually wasn't. However, the Greek word translated "transfigured" in English connotes much more. It means that what Jesus truly is suddenly became

visible in a way it usually wasn't. Christ's true reality burst through the humanity He had taken on by "being made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:5-11). For a moment in time, Peter, James, and John were given a special glimpse of the glory of Christ's deity!

Second, the appearance of Moses and Elijah speaking with the transfigured Christ symbolizes the relationship of the law and the prophets to Jesus, and the supremacy of Jesus was made plain. A heavenly voice proclaimed, "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!" (Mark 9:7). Moses and Elijah were gone, and Jesus remained alone.

Third, I relate to the responses of the disciples. This unexpected and miraculous experience left them awestruck and confused. Peter, not knowing what to say (vv. 5, 6), began talking anyway. Matthew tells us that, upon hearing that voice, all three disciples fell to the ground in terror and stayed there until Jesus touched them and told them to get up (17:6, 7). On the way down the mountain, they had questions for Jesus. I can imagine them asking one another, "Did that really happen? Did we see and hear what I think we saw and heard? What does it mean?"

I, too, have questions about some of my own mountaintop experiences with God. I, too, find myself asking, "Did that really happen? Did I see what I think I saw . . . hear what I think I heard? What does it mean?" I, too, need Christ's reassuring touch. I, too, need Christ's encouragement to get up, unafraid. I, too, need to hear that heavenly voice: "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!"

Our Great Commission starts right there.

— Loren Stacy



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