

BA
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Go and Make

Great Commission - Part 4



2019: Resurrection Commission



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We're All Preachers Here!

Are you going to convention in Albuquerque? I am. I hope to see you there! Speaking of *going*, we come to the heart of the Great Commission. The last three BAs laid the foundation. Before Christ commissions, He calls. Grounded in Him, we are ready to go (Matthew 28:16-19)!

Jesus established this two-step pattern earlier: "Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach" (Mark 3:14). First *with*, then *sent*. If there's a word we associate with Great Commission, it is "go." But *go* means "sent," and *sent* means "preach." Matthew's Great Commission focuses on making disciples, but Mark's focus is on the key underlying ingredient: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

Paul talks about the importance of this preaching. "Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:13, 14).

I can hear the objection: "But I'm not a preacher!" Yes, you are. *Preach* means "proclaim." If you can talk, you have all you need. Our first sermon is confessing with our mouths, "Jesus is Lord" (v. 9). Some are skillful orators, but everyone can converse from the heart. Some cross oceans, but everyone can cross the street. Our God's a going God, and He invites us to go with Him. But not without our words.

Of course, it's intimidating. That's probably what drives the numbers behind a recent Barna survey: "Almost Half of Practicing Christian Millennials Think Evangelism Is Wrong." It says 19-27 percent of Gen X, Boomers, and Elders agree. They may live their faith, but they don't want to talk about it. That's a big problem.

Despite the popular expression "Preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words," lifestyle evangelism is not enough if it is silent. Words are basic to our witness, and we must find them. Whatever form the Word takes on our tongues, we're all preachers here. So "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2). In other words, *Go!*

— Jason Overman





A biblical, practical
walk through the Great
Commission.
by Calvin Burrell

Any short list of the Bible's great texts should include the creation account in Genesis 1, the Twenty-Third Psalm, John 3:16, and the Love Chapter of 1 Corinthians 13. Expanding our list to the five or ten greatest texts, would we add Christ's Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer? Probably. His great commandments to love God and love others? For sure!

How about His Great Commission? I would, and here's why: It is Jesus' supreme saying after His death and resurrection, His pinnacle prescription just before returning to heaven. In these

last earthly words, our Savior and Lord assigned all His followers our corporate mission in the world He came to save. Let's unpack it here together, as if for the first time.

Five forms

This huge commission appears in five different forms in five books: Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21-23; and Acts 1:7, 8. Each of these texts gives essentially the same commission. Note the similarities in their core elements.

- All five versions of the Great Commission speak of Jesus' disciples going, being sent, or becoming witnesses to all nations of the world, to all peoples.

- Matthew identifies the commission's central activity as making disciples; baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit; and teaching them to observe all of Jesus' commands.

- Mark describes the commission as preaching the gospel that gives salvation to all who believe and are baptized.

- Luke describes it as preaching repentance and remission of sins.

- John links Jesus' sending His disciples with others being forgiven of sins.

The differences in the five forms of this worldwide commission is seen in their introductions and conclusions.

- Matthew begins it with Christ's claim to universal authority given by His Father (28:18). He ends with Jesus' promise of His never-ending presence (v. 20b).

- Mark begins the Great Commission with Christ's rebuke of the disciples' lack of faith (16:14) and ends it with the

promise of signs and wonders to follow (vv. 17, 18).

- Luke's Gospel begins the commission with Christ's teaching about His death and resurrection (24:46) and ends it with instructions for the first disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the promised power from above was received (v. 49).

- John begins it with Christ's greeting of peace (20:21) and concludes it by Christ breathing His Spirit on the disciples (20:21).

- In Acts, Luke begins the commission with Jesus saying that His disciples' knowledge of prophetic times and seasons was much less important than their obedience to His commission (1:7). The promised Holy Spirit was poured out shortly thereafter (2:1ff).

Impossible command?

Reading and hearing Jesus' words in the Great Commission is the place to start. The next step is even more important. What will we *do* now that we know His climactic instructions for all His disciples? The question is hugely personal.

What do you think of Christ's Great Commission? Do you see it as another one of Christ's impossible commands, like being perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect is impossible (Matthew 5:48)?

Yes, the Great Commission is beyond our reach, for sure — personally, congregationally, and denominationally. The answer to this dilemma of impossibility is that God, for whom nothing is impossible, has already promised, when He blessed Abraham, that this "impossible command"

World Missions Synthesized

After speaking the peace of His death and the power of His resurrection to His disciples, Jesus commissioned them to be His witnesses everywhere, until the whole world hears and knows His grace (the forgiveness of sins) and His truth (teachings and commands). Assuring them of His constant, personal presence, Christ ascended and the Spirit came. — CAB

would be completed. His promise was "In you [and in your seed] all the nations of the earth shall be blessed . . ." (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:18).

Do you feel that your contribution to the Great Commission is insignificant? After all, what can just one person do to reach so many unreached people?

Imagine a dozen or a hundred folks in a group — a local church. Imagine that each one in the group is thinking silently, *What can one person do?* Imagine that each one in the group chose one or two mission-supporting

actions and started doing them faithfully. Imagine if each one agreed to merge their mission efforts with all the others in the group. Now imagine if people in a hundred or a thousand other groups agreed to pray or give or serve together in a dozen or more projects like the ones above, and then all those groups formed a network with fifty thousand other groups of like mind and action. The gospel good that could be done around the world by such "co-oper-action" is not imaginary; it is real.

Great Commission Activities Most Disciples Can Do

Bless great commission leaders — in local and national churches.
Give great commission offerings — more than once or twice a year.

Learn great commission facts — take Perspectives class (Google it).

Make great commission friends — people who love Jesus and missions.

Pray great commission prayers — start a list of fields and missionaries.

Send great commission goers — welcome them home when they return.

Support great commission plans and programs — at home or abroad. — CAB

Jesus' Great Commission words were not new. They were a summary of God's plan from the start, seen here in the chain of Abrahamic Blessing. Note the words *all, bless/blessing, people/nations/families*:

Genesis - *the Blessing* promised: "The LORD had said to Abram: 'I will bless you . . . you shall be a blessing . . . in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed'" (12:1-3).

Exodus - *the Blessing* nationalized: "For all the earth is Mine . . . And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (19:5, 6). Israel was to pass God's blessing around, not hoard it.

Psalms - *the Blessing* in poetry: "I will give You the nations for Your inheritance" (2:8); "God shall bless us . . . and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him (67:7). "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles!" (117:1).

Isaiah - *the Blessing* in prophecy: Israel was to be "a light to the Gentiles . . . all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (42:6, 7; 52:10; see also 2:2-4; 11:9; 19:23-25; 55:5; 61:9; 65:1).

Gospels - *the Blessing* to "others" in Jesus' earthly ministry: Samaritans at the well (John 4:5ff); in parable (Luke 10:30-37); cleansed and forgiven (17:11-19). A Roman centurion (Matthew 8:5-13); a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28); and more.

Christ's Great Commission blessing to all people groups (Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 21, Acts 1) is at one with the missionary promises, commands, and prophecies that precede and follow it.

Acts - *the Blessing* unleashed in power around the Mediterranean world through the going, preaching, and discipling of apostles and the sending support of all God's people (Acts 26:16-18; 28:28; Colossians 1:6, 23).

Revelation 7:9-17 - *the Blessing* will be totally fulfilled with all nations, tribes, and tongues represented in God's eternal kingdom.

— CAB

with people wherever they are in the world? Tell God now that you want to be *all in* for Jesus. Then follow up with fresh action and prayer that prove it.

Think of the Great Commission as an invitation to love, trust, and obey the One who has all authority, ability, and intent to complete the job alone, if necessary. He has not only commanded that it be done but already promised it will be done. What He has promised, He will do.

God's will is to accomplish this work through people like us. With each of us doing our part, all congregations working together, and God's Spirit harnessing, harmonizing, and energizing the efforts of faithful people in every age, the gospel *will* be preached as a witness to bless every nation, ethnicity, language, and people group on earth — before the end of this age (Matthew 24:14).

Then Christ will return to put down every foe and complete the missionary task, until the glory of the Lord covers the whole earth like the waters now cover the sea.

Why wouldn't we join God in a worldwide cause of truth and beauty that He has said *will* ultimately succeed? **BA**

Invitation

Can you see the Great Commission as an invitation to join Christ in loving people everywhere, starting with the folks next door? Most of us can't take the gospel around the world, but we could take it around the corner, if we would. To love the world is no big chore. Our problem is the people closest to us. To take the love of Jesus next

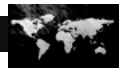
door is an essential piece of taking it to the whole world.

Can you think of the complex Great Commission as the natural extension of a simple invitation to a Christ-centered and others-serving lifestyle?

Can you see the Great Commission as Christ's invitation to join Him in what He has done and is doing: sharing His love and mercy, His grace and truth

Calvin Burrell is former editor of the *Bible Advocate* and director of GC Missions. He retired in 2015 and lives with his wife, Barb, in Stayton, OR. They attend the Marion, OR church.





On Mission . . .

*John Klassek (left) and
Phil Kordahi*

In the Pacific Rim

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

In this issue we feature an interview conducted by IMC Secretary John Klassek (in Perth, Australia) with Pastor Phil Kordahi, IMC representative for the Pacific Rim (Zone 6).

The following is an edited transcript of the video interview, which can be viewed in its entirety at <http://imc.cog7.org/video.html>.

John Klassek (JK): Going back over the years, were you called to Christ in the context of the Church of God (Seventh Day)? Can you tell me very briefly of your journey to Christ?

Phil Kordahi (PK): My journey came from the dark side. It sounds like Star Wars, but it's not. Sue and I were in a group that dealt with demons, but we called them "guides." God was very gracious to my wife and me. I went to Worldwide for three years, but I was very thankful that when I left, a gentleman I met only once rang me up and asked would I like to come along to the Church of God (Seventh Day). And that's when everything changed. I was very

thankful, first, that when I came to the Lord, there was a minister who taught Christ — Jesus Christ alone. That really helped me. That was my basis, and when I came into the Church of God (Seventh Day), that's what I kept: Christ centered — Jesus everything.

JK: Over the years you have served in various capacities within the Church of God (Seventh Day). Today you are Zone 6 representative. Can you tell us a little about what the Pacific Rim consists of?

PK: Well of course, New Zealand, where we now have a church. And the Philippines

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Suggestions for Christian lights in a dark world.

by Robert R. Hostetler

A wealthy businessman of India was preparing to retire from his business. He called his two sons into his office and told them of his plans.

"Now, you are both good sons and capable young men," he said. "I can't decide who I should put in charge of my business and property. So I have chosen a test for you." He gave a single coin to each son. "Take this coin and buy something with it that will *fill* this house."

The older son hurried to the marketplace and decided that the cheapest and bulkiest thing he could buy was straw. So he bought as much straw as his single coin would buy and carried great bundles of it into the house. But the straw barely covered half the floors.

The younger son knew that only a most unusual purchase would pass his father's test. He set off for the market as his older brother was unloading the straw. When he returned, he carried only a small package.

His brother laughed and pointed to the parcel. "You expect to fill this house with *that*?"

The younger son said nothing but opened his package and took out an assortment of candles. He placed one candle in each room. When he had lit them all, the entire house filled with light.



Hilltop people

You and I face virtually the same choice every day. Every morning a new day stands open before us. We can fill it with many things. We can fill it with the darkness of doubt, fear, and bigotry. Or we can fill our days with actions that will shine like a light to everyone around us.

Jesus once told His followers:

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16, NIV).

When Jesus said, "A town built on a hill cannot be hidden," He may have pointed to the Galilean hill town of Safed (Tzfat). It is not

only visible from great distances (including the hillsides around Capernaum, thought to be the likely sites of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount), but its nearly three-thousand-foot elevation makes Safed the highest city in Israel. So when Jesus said, "You are the light of the world," He may have been comparing His followers to the light that blazed from the highest point in the land and the city from which it blazed.

We pierce the darkness. Strike a single match in the utter darkness of an underground cavern, and the tiny light's power will amaze you. A flickering camp can be seen from miles away on a moonless night. The light of Proxima Centauri, the closest star to Earth, travels through nearly twenty-five trillion miles of darkness before reaching our planet. Light pierces the darkness. It does not shy away from darkness or try to avoid it, as if darkness somehow has the advantage. Light is not so offended by the

Let Your Life Shine

dark that it hides itself. It does not act as if the darkness will somehow soil it or spoil it. It penetrates. It triumphs. It overcomes. Every time.

We provide a guide. Even on the cloudiest night, the light from Safed offered a guide to travelers in Galilee. They needed only to look at the light on the heights to orient themselves and find the way home. So it is with us. We are a guide to those around us who may be wandering and wondering far from home. Even those whose names we don't know may be looking to us and our example: *Why does he seem so gracious and kind? How does she persevere through so many afflictions? Could I find the way to God by watching them?*

We present a target. When Jesus said, "A town built on a hill cannot be hidden," He may have referred not only to Safed's visible location but also to its value as a strategic target. Over the years, the city of Safed has

been both a mighty fortress and a military objective. It was occupied by the tribe of Naphtali after the conquest of Canaan, and was one of the cities fortified by Josephus during the Jewish wars against Rome. Since then, Safed's tactical value has made it a priority of Crusader, Muslim, Ottoman, Jewish, and Arab armies.

Similarly, followers of Jesus will always present a strategic target to those who fear, hate, resent, or misunderstand Jesus and His gospel. Though no one wants to be a target, Jesus simultaneously warned us and encouraged us:

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven,

for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:10-12, ESV).

Gospel witnesses

We proclaim good news. The Jerusalem Talmud identifies Safed as one of five high points throughout Galilee and Judea where fires were lit to announce religious festivals to Jesus' contemporaries. A massive bonfire was kindled in Jerusalem, signaling watchmen on successive mountaintops throughout the country. The Safed peak is thought to have been the site of the northernmost signal fire. It proclaimed the good news of a new month or the commencement of a festival to the Jews of the area — and even to those living in Syria, the northern cities of the Decapolis and the tetrarchy of Philip. Like those fires, our lives proclaim good news to those around us who are bound by sin, bowed by pain, and blinded by darkness.

"In the same way," Jesus says, "let your light shine." It is not something we can generate on our own. It is not something we must struggle, stress, and strive to do. If God has shined His light into your heart and life, do as the children's chorus says: "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine." Just let it shine, today and everyday, spreading forgiveness, healing, and blessing to everyone around you. **BA**

Bob Hostetler writes from Hamilton, OH.





Strangers Bond

by Sandy K. Keeton

I tried diligently to recalibrate my brain away from the evangelical call I was hearing from my Master. Unsuccessful. My plethora of excuses seemed valid to me. Retirement loomed around the corner as old age knocked on the door of my body. However, the words of Dr. Hawkins' sermon took permanent root in my heart: "Get out of your comfort zone. Tell the gospel to those who haven't heard."

Snuggling up in my comfort zone seemed satisfactory for a woman now sporting white hair. I loved teaching the Bible to children at church, but most of my students came from homes where the gospel had been taught. Now teens and children who'd never heard the gospel pulled at my heart's strings.

When I drove by the run-down apartments close to my home in Dallas, I wondered how many of the young people residing there were clueless to truth about our Savior. After wrestling with pillow and conscience several nights, I surrendered, catapulting me to the unknown aspects of apartment ministry.

On my first attempt, there were only five children and me under a tree — with the Holy Spirit of the living God. Before I knew it, twenty young people came to our Bible club. One day I decided to give out invitations to a Bible club, with hot dogs and all the trimmings the next Saturday. I questioned my sanity as I trudged through the summer heat giving out fliers. June had introduced us to degrees in excess of one hundred. With sweat dripping from my brow and a few invitations left, I decided to go up the stairs where I thought more students might live.

As my weary feet reached the top, a woman came out to meet me. She was dressed in a long, yellow garment accented by a black geometric

design. The lovely lady began speaking to me in a language I didn't understand. In turn, I talked to her in my Texas accent, which was foreign to her. She opened her apartment door and motioned for me to enter. Cool air greeted me. This woman handed me a glass brimming with ice water. I gulped it down.

Next, this lady took my hand and led me to the wall in her living area. I noted a calendar hanging there that featured a large picture of Jesus on the cross. While gracing me with her endearing smile, she pointed to Jesus and then to her heart. She repeated the action. I then pointed to Jesus on the calendar and to my heart twice.

We embraced. Here we were, two strangers who didn't understand the words each other spoke, and yet we shared a bond in our love for Jesus. I left her apartment filled with cold water she gave me and the wordless testimony of her belief in our Savior.

To this day, memories of my encounter with this believer still bless my heart. Later I would learn she and her family had escaped from a country where Christians were persecuted. Her children, who are strong believers, became faithful students in our Bible club and helpers in the work. As a result, the Lord swept one hundred children and teens at the apartment complex into His kingdom when they were born again.

I thank Jesus for my divine appointment with a woman who was a stranger to me. I learned that strangers bond when they have the Holy Spirit in their hearts. **BA**

Sandy K. Keeton writes from Dallas, TX.



Questions & Answers



In a recent BA and quarterly, I've seen Sabbath described as a gift. Does this mean that Sabbathkeeping is optional?

Let's begin with the first part of the question. Are we justified in calling the Sabbath a gift?

New covenant Christians consider not only God's commandment but also His intent for the Sabbath. Similarly, we respond not just out of obligation but in delight from the heart. The Church of God (Seventh Day) is a Sabbath-celebrating church because we find in Scripture everywhere that Sabbath comes to us, fundamentally, as a gift. Here's how.

All creation is a gift of God. He was not obligated to create, but did so for His pleasure. Sabbath is a sanctified and blessed part of His good creation. Like work and marriage, Sabbath was made for our pleasure and benefit (origin of gift: Genesis 1:31—2:3).

The Ten Commandments, far from being just arbitrary and grievous rules, were given for *our good* (Deuteronomy 10:12, 13). The fourth commandment, specifically, was intended as a day of remembrance, reflection, and refreshment (intent of gift: Exodus 20:8; 23:12).

Psalms 92 is a festive song for the Sabbath in which we are taught to give thanks to the Lord for His great works (vv. 1-5). Likewise, more than an order to follow, Isaiah declares Sabbath and its Lord causes for delight (response to gift: 58:13, 14).

Coming full circle, Jesus taught us that Sabbath was made *for us*, and not the other way around (Mark 2:27, 28). Because Jesus was Lord of the Sabbath, His ministry demonstrated the gift of Sabbath as a time of worship, teaching, and restoration (living the gift: Luke 4).

These passages emphasize Sabbath as a gift of God *for us*. In it we imitate our Father in His work, and rest and anticipate eternity with Him. But does this mean the commandment is optional? Does our Sabbath-celebrating annul our Sabbathkeeping? No. It may point to a truer observance from a new nature, but God's gifts always require personal responsibility.

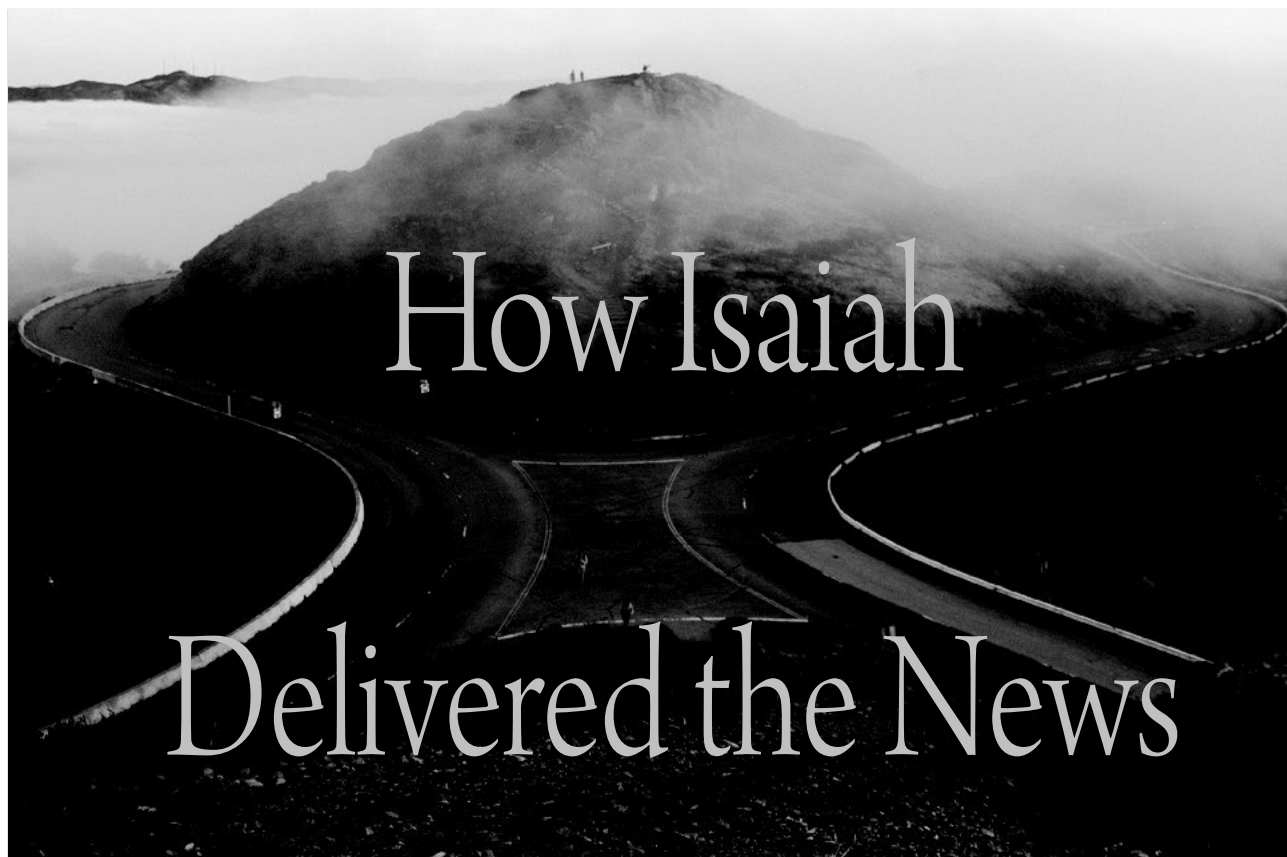
Every good and perfect gift comes from above (James 1:17). Whether these gifts are material or spiritual, we owe the Father our gratitude and obedience in response. Work and rest are gifts from God: "every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor — it is the gift of God" (Ecclesiastes 3:13). While we rejoice in both God's gifts of productivity and refreshment, we are not free to neglect either (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12).

How much more is this true regarding our spiritual gifts: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"; "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" (Romans 6:23; 2 Corinthians 9:15). God's grace in Christ and the Holy Spirit are the greatest gifts of all. While we celebrate His free salvation, we dare not neglect the gift or the faith by which it's received (Hebrews 2:1-4).

Sabbath is similar. We can't enter into God's rest, weekly or eternally, if His good news is not mixed with faith (4:1-10). Sabbath observance, then, is not an elective God leaves for us to decide; His will has been made known from creation to Christ. All that remains is for us to trust and obey, celebrating from the heart — not as a good work toward salvation, but as a joyful response of discipleship in Christ.

For a Sabbath-celebrating people, the gift of Sabbath remains a privilege of grace and a requirement of truth.

— Editor Jason Overman



Lessons for the church in
preaching the gospel.

by R. Herbert

When Jerusalem lay under the shadow of the brutal Assyrian Empire, which had already conquered the northern tribes of Israel, the prophet Isaiah was given the difficult task of taking bad news, as well as good news, to the people of Judah. The book of Isaiah not only records those messages but also shows us an important aspect of how they were delivered.

Sons of the prophet

After an introduction of Isaiah's calling and commission, the seventh chapter of this book

shows the actual messages delivered by Isaiah, and the prophet's two sons are introduced. Isaiah's firstborn son was called Shear-Jashub, meaning "A remnant shall return" (Isaiah 7:3). His second son, introduced a little later, was named Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, meaning "Pillage quickly, plunder quickly" (8:3). In modern terms, these two sons might be said to represent good news and bad news.

At the beginning of the prophet's work, God instructed Isaiah to take Shear-Jashub (good news) with him to meet Judah's ruler, Ahab. He was to prophesy to the king regarding an impending invasion of Judah by two local Syrian kings (7:3). The prophet began, "Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart . . ." (v. 4).

Isaiah doubtless introduced

Shear-Jashub to the king, considering the meaning of his first son's name was one of hope, like the prophet's initial message. Only after this encouragement did Isaiah introduce the bad news that if Judah continued in her rebellious ways, God would bring the Assyrians upon her (vv. 17, 20). This bad news would be symbolized in Isaiah's second son, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, whose name was tied directly to God's coming judgment (8:7).

Both sons were part of Isaiah's message: "Here am I, *and the children the LORD has given me*. We are signs and symbols in Israel from the Lord Almighty . . ." (v. 18, emphasis added here and in the scriptures below). God directed the order of the two sons' roles. Just as the good news of hope and eventual return from captivity was delivered first with

"A remnant shall return," the second, cautionary part of Isaiah's message was symbolized by his second son: "Pillage quickly, plunder quickly."

This duality of the prophet's message is seen throughout the book of Isaiah in the successive good oracles and bad oracles, given in a continuing cycle of bad news preceded by positive news and encouragement. Repeatedly, God established His fatherly role and love for His children before addressing their sins and problems (1:2, 4-17, etc.). Then, after enumerating some of Judah's sins, God gave a positive message again before emphasizing more problems (1:18, 19, 20-31, etc.). Time and again we are given the good news before the bad — even in individual verses: "Zion will be delivered with justice, her penitent ones with righteousness. But rebels and sinners will both be broken, and those who forsake the LORD will perish" (1:27, 28).

Two roles of Messiah

This pattern of encouragement first, then judgment, throughout Isaiah's messages for Judah is also clearly seen in his prophecies of the promised Messiah. Read, for example, Isaiah 9 and 11. They both show the news of messianic love preceding the news of messianic judgment.

These differing prophecies refer to the first and second coming of the Messiah, of course. The good news of the One who would gently help the poor and those in need at His first coming (11:4a; compare Matthew 11:5) is followed by the news regarding the unrepentant: "He will strike the earth with the rod

of his mouth" at His second coming (Isaiah 11:4b; compare Revelation 19:15).

We understand, of course, that Jesus did judge some situations at His first coming (Isaiah 11:3; John 8:15, 16) and that His second coming will eventually lead to universal restoration (Isaiah 35:6; Revelation 22:2). But the stress of Christ's two roles at His first and second advent, as seen in Isaiah's prophecies, fits the same pattern we see in the symbolism of the prophet's sons and his oracles to the nations: first encouragement, then judgment.

cursing (Deuteronomy 28), may have been followed by other prophets in their preaching. Perhaps we see an allusion to this in the words of Christ himself: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together . . . and you were not willing" (Matthew 23:37). This clearly indicates God had spoken loving messages of hope and reconciliation through His prophets, as well as words of threatened punishment.

Perhaps we can apply this principle in how we share the truth with others. Isaiah's

“God established His fatherly role and love for His children before addressing their sins and problems.”

Good news before bad

Isaiah, then, was sent "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor *and* the day of vengeance of our God . . ." (Isaiah 61:2). Because the prophet's book is long, with numerous insights into the way the prophet delivered his messages, we gain a clear view of this good news/bad news principle absent in the works of other prophets that often have less context, and are therefore often seen as prophets of "doom and gloom." But many biblical scholars feel that the principle of delivering good and then bad news, like that of blessing and

approach argues against any presentation of the gospel only in terms of "Repent, the end is near." Certainly we can learn from the format of Isaiah's messages. It reminds us it is not just the news we deliver that is important; it is also how we deliver it. **BA**

R. Herbert is a pen name. He holds a Ph.D. in ancient Near Eastern languages, biblical studies, and archaeology. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



The Holy Spirit and the mission of the church.

by Ramon Ruiz

In the story of Jesus' ascension in Acts chapter 1, the Lord gives last instructions to His disciples. He asks them specifically not to leave Jerusalem until God's promise of the Holy Spirit is fulfilled in them, so they can fulfill the mission God entrusted to them. Verse 8 says:

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

It's interesting that even when there was an urgent need to save souls by preaching the gospel, the Lord asked the disciples to

remain still, until they received the Spirit of God. This simple observation shows that the Holy Spirit presides over the mission of the church. In other words, without the Spirit of God, the work of the church has no meaning. It is something purely human, insipid, insignificant, and incapable of changing the heart of humanity or their environment.

In short, without the Holy Spirit, there is no mission.

According to the apostle Paul, the mission of the church isn't purely human, since it confronts spiritual powers (Ephesians 6:12). As we face this reality, no human power can overcome the great enemy of our souls: sin in any of its manifestations. This is the very reason Christ asked His disciples to make sure the Spirit of God was with them before they started preaching the gospel. The mission is done by the Spirit; the church is the instrument He uses.

Five functions

The Spirit of God performs at least five functions in the mission of the church.

1 He ensures the fidelity and purity of the message being shared, because the Spirit guides us to all truth and justice (John 16:13-15). In a world full of lies, religious syncretism, and cheap philosophies, the truth of the gospel shines with incontrovertible spiritual authority because it comes from God.

2 He convicts the conscience of people. Jesus said, "And when he [the Spirit] is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (v. 8). For a person to accept the gospel, they must first acknowledge they are a sinner and repent. This is the work of the Spirit, not of men.

3 The Spirit provides all that's necessary for the quantitative

and qualitative growth of the church. In Acts 9:31 we read "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied." Beyond plans and systems of evangelization that are undoubtedly important, we must understand that for the numerical growth and healthy development of the church, the vital thing is the presence of the Holy Spirit.

4 The Spirit is with believers who testify even in the midst of adversity. Jesus encouraged His disciples by saying, "And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say" (Luke 12:11, 12). Before the technical preparation of the message, there must be the spiritual preparation of the messenger.

5 The Spirit converts believers not only as evangelists but as witnesses. That's what Jesus said: "And ye shall be witnesses" (Acts 1:8). In any court, witnesses tip the scale for the final verdict of the trial. They are valuable because they have a testimony. In fact, what makes a person a witness is their testimony. The greatest is Jesus, called "The faithful and true witness" (Revelation 1:5; 3:14). What we believe about God, we believe because of the testimony of Christ. Likewise, what people believe about Jesus will be through the testimony of believers.

Power and presence

For many years in the history of our denomination, we have said that the Holy Spirit is not a person. However, we need to say much more of what the Holy Spirit is. In some circles of our international community, it is simply stated that the Holy Spirit is a power, which is unjust. It should be said that the Spirit is *the Power*.

Jesus explained to His disciples the invaluable presence of

has the incomparable privilege of working with God on His side. Only then can the mission be fulfilled.

More Spirit

In a special way, Jesus invites us to ask the Father to give us more of His Spirit every day (Luke 11:10-13). Only then will our evangelizing efforts have the appropriate results. Only in this way will the growth and development of our community be

“The mission of the church is not only a human mission, nor only divine, but divine-human.”

the Holy Spirit: "But I tell you the truth; it is better for you that I go away, for if I may not go away, the Comforter will not come unto you, and if I go on, I will send Him unto you" (John 16:7, YLT). In light of this verse, we can affirm that the Holy Spirit is power as well as the very personal presence of the Father and Son in the life of the believer.

The Holy Spirit is about the Deity acting in the lives of His children. For this reason, we affirm that the mission of the church is not only a human mission, nor only divine, but divine-human. In this sense, the believer

guaranteed as it was in the first century: "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47).

Let's allow the Holy Spirit to preside over the mission of the church. **BA**

Ramon Ruiz is the president of the International Ministerial Congress and writes from Dallas, TX, where he lives with his wife, Rebeca.

Scripture quotations are from the King James Version, unless otherwise noted.





Rescue Mission

(Matthew 28:19)

by Jody McCoy

After forty years of wandering in the wilderness, Israel was finally ready to enter the Promised Land. Moses told them that if they loved and obeyed God, He would drive out the nations before them. No one would be able to stand against them, and every place they set their foot would be theirs (Deuteronomy 11:22-25). I remember hearing that story as a child and thinking *Wow! Why didn't they just run?!*

Like Israel, you and I have been given the mission to advance the kingdom of God on earth. Jesus says through the power of His Spirit in us, not even the gates of hell can stop us (Matthew 16:18). Then He tells us "Go! Run!"

I remember doing evangelism as a young teenager. On Sabbath afternoons our church would visit local neighborhoods. My idea of evangelism was to knock on the door, wedge a tract into the door jam, then run before anyone answered the door. Despite the obvious parallel between Israel's mission and mine, I found my own mission quite intimidating.

Francis Chan gives a balance beam illustration on faith that applies here (find it on YouTube). While standing on a balance beam, he describes a series of personal tragedies that made the world a scary place while he was growing up. Then he lies down and starts hugging the beam, and says that our fears make us forget about our routine. He describes this beam-hugging as the safe life, the life that many people choose.

Then Chan asks what a judge is supposed to write on the scorecard for a gymnast who risks nothing and hugs the beam for her entire performance. A safe life isn't a life of faith; it's a life of fear. Francis ends by saying that you and I will

stand before the Judge one day. He wants to tell us, "Well done," but how can He if we've chosen the safe life instead of a life of faith?

It's easier to talk about than do. That's the safe life. It was more or less what I did for far too long. It reminds me of a quote by Pastor Chuck Swindoll: "Learning more truth is a poor and cheap substitute for stopping and putting into action the truth already learned."

As I matured in my faith, the Holy Spirit reminded me that to be spiritually healthy, I needed to move beyond talk and start doing ministry. It's natural to be intimidated by our inadequacies, but fear is the opposite of faith. Faith relies not on our abilities but on the power of God's Spirit. To overcome our fears, we need to focus not on ourselves but on those in need. Perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18).

We often equate the Great Commission with evangelism, but it's much more than that. It's being a welcoming church; it's fellowshiping; it's discipleship. It's all the things we talk about in our ten-point vision. God gives each of us unique gifts for His work. The Great Commands are loving God and loving others. With His Great Commission, we share His unconditional love with everyone and build the kingdom of God one friend at a time. That's not the safe life; that's the *faith life*. **BA**

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





Image

Be My eyes and be My ears,
Seeing, listening to hear

All those who need Me.

Be My hands and be My feet,
Reaching, walking thus to meet

The souls who seek Me.

Let your heart be so like Mine,
Calling on My love, divine,
That all who pass you on their way
Will turn around upon that day,
And as they turn will thus see Me
Because, dear one,

I dwell in thee. . . .

Sharon Lee Roberts

All We Need

by Amber Mann Riggs

Christian leaders are well acquainted with the word *need*. It permeates the atmosphere of the church as we contemplate our culture. It tugs at our hearts, pulls out our tears, and weighs down our shoulders. At times, it pits us in a race against time that taxes our lungs' ability to breathe.

It seems that as soon as we can point to fruit from our ministry, other needs seemingly wipe it from consciousness. Sometimes we read the words "Go and make," and our gut reflexively chokes out, "I'm trying!"

At times such as this, our greatest need is to burrow deep into the faith that inspired Paul to proclaim that the church is "the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (Ephesians 1:23).

Through the waters

Neither you nor the members of your congregation are ordinary people. On the contrary, you are part of a great tradition of men, women, and children who have allowed God to bring you out of one way of life and, through faith, miraculously crossed a body of water into another way of life.

When Joshua and the Israelites gazed across the Jordan River, they saw both the promise of land and the new way of life it signified. When God dammed up the waters so they could cross, they left a wilderness of needs behind.

During the pivotal account of the Exodus, God emancipated Moses and a procession of weary Hebrew slaves through the Red Sea. Then He took them to a place where He would reveal Himself to them and teach them His ways.

Abraham was considered a stranger in the land of the Canaanites because few people at that time crossed the rivers that separated their land from the region of Babylon. Noah and his family were also brought into a new place as a result of a water passage.

However, this tradition goes back even further, to a time when "darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Genesis 1:2). Out of those waters, God brought life.

And He is still doing it today. When we consider baptism through this lens, it becomes more than a symbolic act. We recognize that we, too, have crossed a body of water into a new place, and that miraculous place is within body of *Christ*.



This same body is making all things new and, beginning with us, is reconciling all of creation to Himself until He consummates history with the physical renewal of *all* things in heaven and earth.

With this confidence Paul stated not only that the church is “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” but that Christ is giving us what we need to do so (Ephesians 4:13).

New life together

Christ has given the church what she needs. Specifically, He has given us one another. However, He has also given us what was not available to the great cloud of witnesses who went before us. Through Christ, He has given us the indwelling Holy Spirit. And this Spirit has gifted *each member* – image bearers who have passed through the waters of baptism to a new way of life. Christ never intended for the weight of the responsibilities of ministry to rest on one or even on a handful of members known as leaders. Rather, it is to be spread out among the priesthood of all believers.

Together we embody the fullness of Christ on earth and carry out the functions of His church. *Together* we build one another up for works of service. And only

together will we “[attain] the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

Thus, of all the physical needs we can point to, what do we need most? We need one another. God has gifted the church with everything she needs to thrive and be healthy: He has given us one another. This impetus is at the crux of discipleship and personal transformation. As God adds to our numbers, we will partner with Him to fulfill His purpose from the beginning of creation to reflect His rule to the whole earth.

Remember, reflect, respond

Feeling overwhelmed? Remember your baptism. Reflect on the unique ways that God has gifted you to build up the church. What type of service for God most connects you with the joy of Christ? Then help your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ remember their baptism. Share with them how you have observed God gifting them to build up the church. Ask them what type of service for God most connects them with the joy of Christ, and help them find a way to more fully engage in that service.

When we read the words “Go and make” with this perspective, we can ask for wisdom to

shape the church into a community that disciples members of all ages into maturely carrying out the functions of the church – the need-meeting operations of Christ. Fortunately, we know that when we lack wisdom, we can “ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault . . .” (James 1:5) until His peace permeates the atmosphere of the church. **BA**

Amber Riggs is dean of administration for Artios Christian College. She lives near Eugene, OR, with her husband, Bryan, and their four daughters. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



Artios Christian College is a diverse community of followers of Christ who are committed to studying God together for the purpose of being Christian leaders who reflect Christ into our spheres of influence. To find out more or to enroll in Artios' introductory Essentials of Vibrant Leadership course, visit www.artioscollege.org.



Loving Like the Master

A radical approach to
our enemies.

by Dr. David Downey

In Matthew 28:19 Jesus told us to go and make disciples. His words resonate with us. We understand that this is a command, but we might wonder how we can do this when so many are indifferent to our message — some even hating us.

Jesus taught us to give without tallying our gifts (6:3), to turn the other cheek when someone strikes us (5:39), and when facing scorn, not to revile in return (1 Peter 2:23). He also shocked us with this command in the Sermon on the Mount: “But I say to you who hear: Love your

enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you” (Luke 6:27, 28).

In these few verses, we hear this radical call from our Savior: He wants us to love the unlovely. If we are to reach the world, it will not be because we think they are worthy of grace, for who is? This challenge commands us to bless those who hate us and mistreat us, and so goes beyond loving the unlovely to rescuing our antagonists.

Like other characteristics of following Jesus, our love for others is not based on what we feel about it, but on what God desires. Nevertheless, we might wonder if it is honest to act loving even if we do not feel that way.

We can start by praying for strength.

Jesus spent all night in prayer before He chose the disciples and then spoke these words in our text in Luke. If we find ourselves love-challenged, we can pray, “Lord, my love for people is insufficient, but *Yours* is all sufficient. Please take what little I have and fill it with all You have.”

Breaking through our own hard hearts so we can reach someone who hurts us will require God’s help, and, like Charles Spurgeon said of prayer, we will need to send up “little darts and hand-grenades of godly desire.”

Four responses

The Jews taught an “eye for an eye.” It seemed fair; they did not take an eye unless it was

taken from them. Jesus took this law much further when He commanded us to respond in four ways to those who are indifferent or hostile: *We are to love, do good, bless, and pray* for them.

Let's look at each in turn.

Love them.

First Corinthians 13, the Love Chapter, comes to mind. The love in this chapter, representative of all biblical love, evokes action over feelings. "Love is patient . . . is not self-seeking . . . does not delight in evil . . . never fails" (vv. 4-8, NIV). Such love finds its effectiveness in the one who loves rather than in the loveliness of the one to be loved. And the first one who loves is the Lord, who abides in us. If we are to love people who seem impossible to love, it seems obvious that we should look for help from Jesus, who impossibly loved.

Do good to them.

The Bible tells us that Jesus "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). Note He did not go about "looking good." He was not bolstering His public image by pretending to care. Rather, He was deeply compassionate, and this showed in what He did. Just before He spoke these words in Luke 6, in fact, Jesus was healing the sick and dominating unclean spirits. This demonstrates that before we can speak so that people will understand, we must invest in their needs.

Nevertheless, we will not always be able to heal, and at times duty demands that we should not even help. Jesus helped many, but He *never* gave free passes. He demonstrated that His love was readily

available, at all times to everyone, but its benefits were conditional. The rich had already received their comfort, those who laughed would weep, and those well spoken of would not receive God's praise (vv. 24-26).

We are long on compassion and wish to "do the most good," but we must continue within the boundaries of the true gospel, even when it results in hatred from those we are trying to help.

Bless them.

In context of His words, Jesus was busy blessing people who faced the brunt of society's indifference: "Blessed are you poor . . . blessed are you who hunger . . . blessed are you when men hate you . . ." (vv. 20-22).

hatred they show us, because we realize something deeper is at work. God holds the tally sheet. He has promised blessing to us, and unfair attacks sometimes indicate that we are His chosen. We lay aside our "right" to be well treated because we know God will put all things right, and in the meantime, we bless others.

Blessing our enemies must mean that we point them to Jesus, since all blessing ultimately is found in Him. Our refusal to take up our revenge, or to be resentful while responding in a Christlike way to assault, points to the One who saved us. Contentment in the face of our enemies' opposition is strong evidence of God's mercy.

“Blessing our enemies must mean that we see everything, even their attacks on us, in a new light.”

Obviously, these blessings went beyond simple well-wishing, for they were deep enough to reach down and pull the unfairly oppressed up to where they should be. Blessing our enemies must mean that we see everything, even their attacks on us, in a new light.

We can bless our enemies by responding without the same

Pray for them.

Prayer for those who spitefully use us takes what Jesus is teaching to its logical conclusion. If we follow His example, we will want them to find peace with God. It would be ridiculous to pray that God would bless someone *for* being nasty.

However, love says it is perfectly

reasonable to pray for people *while* they are nasty.

While He suffered on the cross at the hands of wicked people, the Lord prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Forgive them? Really? For crucifying the Lord of glory?

The aggressors were certainly punished if they did not subsequently repent. Judas suffered because of his betrayal; Peter was judged because of his denial. So these who mocked Jesus without remorse suffered judgment too.

The key phrase is what Jesus said: "For they do not know what they are doing." Jesus was asking God to bring His aggressors to the knowledge of what they *should* do. Matthew Henry said, "This was a mediatorial word,

and explicatory of the intent and meaning of his death: '*Father, forgive them*, not only these, but all that shall repent, and believe the gospel;' and he did not intend that these should be forgiven upon any other terms."

Our prayers for those who mistreat us must include our desire to see them in right standing with God. We do not ask that they would be blessed *in* their sin but they would come to welcome the love of God. Their actions suggest they need this love, and our response can point to where they can get it.

Strong love

Isaiah said of Jesus in one of the My Servant prophecies, "A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not

quench" (Isaiah 42:3). Jesus was gentle with those who were broken, but He also sought them with purpose: "He will bring forth justice for truth." Many tried to break *Him*, but He would not retaliate, because His love for them was too strong.

Our Master challenges us to love those who do not love us. With the help of His Spirit, we will get it done. **BA**

Dr. David Downey
writes from Fort
Worth, TX.



Extra, Extra!

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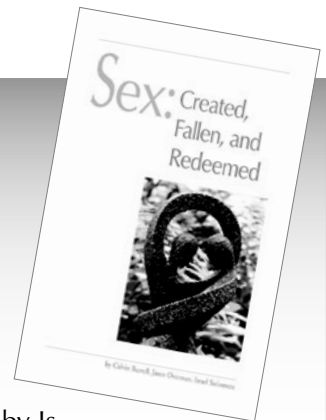
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Sex: Created, Fallen, and Redeemed

In 2014 the North American Ministerial Council (NAMC) appointed a committee to write a study on human gender, sexuality, and marriage. Chaired by Israel Steinmetz, the committee, consisting of Calvin Burrell and BA Editor Jason Overman, agreed to tackle the subject from the standpoint of creation, fall, and redemption.

After much writing and review, a new book has emerged from the committee's study: *Sex: Created, Fallen, and Redeemed*. Chapters cover a wide range of topics, including divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, and singleness. The book can be used for personal reading or for group studies.

We plan to have copies of *Sex: Created, Fallen, and Redeemed* (English and Spanish) available at the biennial convention. Don't miss the special introductory price of \$8 (through September). After that, the price increases to \$9.95. The book will also be available in early July in our online bookstore at cog7.org.





A Sabbath in Paris

by Jason Overman

France is renowned for its churches and cathedrals. As a Christian and armchair historian, I'm fascinated by them. On a recent vacation to Paris, two weeks after the fire at Notre Dame, my family visited a few of the centuries-old Gothic wonders. But the real highlight was the Sabbath we spent with a small congregation of believers at 120 Boulevard Voltaire.

It was only a short subway ride from our apartment, but the rainy morning and our unfamiliarity with the area made finding the church difficult. Exiting the "tube" at a roundabout where six streets converge, my wife Stephanie and kids, Tabitha and Isaac, walked up the wrong street. We explored all six before finding our way — a half hour late — to the big double doors at "120," where Brother Jean Marc was waiting for us.

We were ushered into the building where worship was underway. With the service held in French, Jean Marc's sister, Fabienne, was kind enough to translate for us. The music was led by Sister Roselyne, with two brothers accompanying on guitars. Though we did not recognize the songs, I realized midway through one lovely hymn that where our Lord Jesus is praised, language is no barrier at all. We were at home.

The service proceeded with someone from each family standing to read a scripture or request a song. We were invited to participate. I read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. Here was a "new creation" moment. Although strangers to us, in Christ, and in this place, we were family.

A break before the preaching service allowed us to introduce ourselves. Most of the congregation spoke English fairly well.

Before the sermon, Pastor Phedre asked me to share greetings from the

Church of God in North America and talk about the *Bible Advocate*. Pastor Potorel preached from Malachi 3 and Proverbs 3 on fearing and honoring the Lord in all things, especially our resources. The Sabbath message was consistent with the tone of the whole service: grateful and reverent.

We chanced to visit the day they held their Lord's Supper. Taking communion with these sweet brothers and sisters sealed our fellowship. Next came lunch. Six courses!

Table time like this anticipates the kingdom of God better than anything else we do as fellow disciples of Christ. They wanted to know all about our church and life in the US, and we wanted to know all about life in France. The joy and hospitality were tremendous.

We said our goodbyes and made our way up Boulevard Voltaire to the subway. The street name made me smile. The French philosopher Voltaire, a famous critic of Christianity, reviled the Bible in particular, and predicted that within a hundred years it would be forgotten. Our Sabbath in Paris proved him wrong. God's Word is alive and well in Paris. There at "120" is a living cathedral — not of glass and stone but of grace and truth that is in Jesus Christ.

Read the entire article at baonline.org.





The Ultimate Healing

by Denmark Chihombe

Thanks be to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who, in February 2017, saved me from the cloud of confusion and years of physical pain.

This was also the year of my Lord's favor when He freed me from oppression. In fact, Jesus had begun to prepare me for salvation long before I perceived it myself. In 2011, when I was in college doing my first year studies, a friend of mine tried to persuade me to read the Bible, and she even gave me a copy. I did not take it seriously. I had been oriented in a sect that rejected the Bible completely but believed in God speaking to us only through the "prophets," who were said to be the only ones empowered by the Holy Spirit do so.

When I was employed at a high school as a relief teacher in 2015, a certain man donated some Bibles to all staff members and students. I was given NIV Bibles. I still didn't understand God's plan for me at this time; I simply took the Bibles and kept them. I read them casually. But in 2017 Jesus called me to His glorious kingdom, prompted by my agony.

Painful past

My childhood and teen life had never been pleasant. In 1998 a colleague accidentally injured my knee. The pain from the injury resulted in an operation for tendon realignment in 2003. Thereafter my hip became

painful, forcing me to walk with crutches for close to three years and take multiple doses of medication. Added to this was continuous stomach pain, suspected to be ulcers.

Meanwhile, my family strongly believed in the Johane Masowe eChishanu Apostolic Church. They took me to this sect over the years for the “prophet’s” prescriptions. These included holy water, holy stones, and prescribed fasting, which never helped the pain. I managed to continue my education despite all these challenges. I went to South Africa in 2011-2014 for my studies. The doctors there told me that my symptoms were similar to those of stomach ulcers.

In 2016 I developed a boil on my finger that could not be medically explained. It took nearly six months to heal. Meanwhile, the stomach pains intensified, despite the negative results from laboratory tests and scans. I got so angry that I refused to use the medication given to me. At church the “prophet” insisted I had ulcers. I was puzzled over what could be really wrong.

Seeking and finding

While in agony, I was miraculously drawn to the Bible in February 2017. I embarked on a thorough search for answers in a Book I always thought was of no value. I was led to find out the requirements for successful prayer. The following are the verses I found myself reading:

Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face

from you, so that he will not hear (Isaiah 59:1, 2, NIV).

“For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says” (Mark 11:23).

I could not understand how I was led to these relevant verses that contained specific answers to what I was looking for. Jesus personally replied to my questions through the Bible. This was the first response I got from the merciful Jesus Christ through the Spirit’s guidance.

I prayed, confessed my sins, and asked for healing of my stomach problem. The following morning I woke up completely healed. The pain has not recurred to this day.

From that day on, my health was restored. I had been living a life enslaved by fear of the

unknown. I had become dependent on false gods in the name of “prophets,” but Jesus restored my life through His Word. I am now His forever, freed and forgiven. The words of Christ were fulfilled in me:

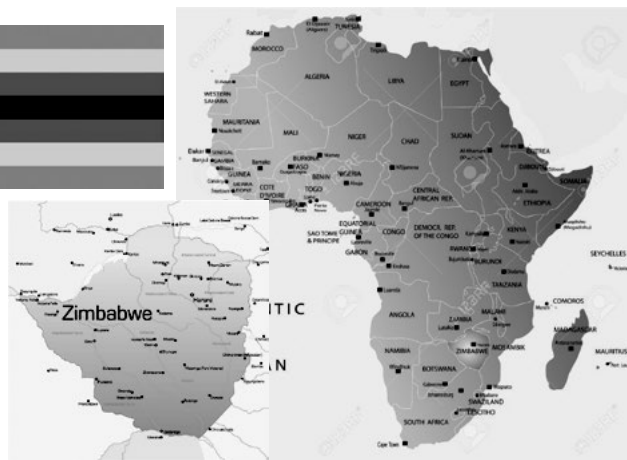
“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Matthew 7:7, 8).

Searching for truth

I now began to search everything about the truth of God, and I realized that most churches are not following the true Word of God. I started keeping the Sabbath alone and decided to find a better church. I went to hear the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, only to find out they did not agree with the Word. I then wrote a document on all

“I surrendered
my life to Christ
and was baptized
on Sabbath,
September 9,
2017.”





Zimbabwe

- Population: 14.4 million
- Capital: Harare
- Land area: 390,757 sq km / 150,872 sq mi
- Official CoG7 congregations: 1
- CoG7 Membership: 25
- President: Tshidzanani Tsambani Malaba

doctrinal findings in the Bible, revealed to me by Christ during my encounter with Him, that conflicted with the common teachings of other churches.

While I was doing further searches on the Sabbath, I came across the website for the Church of God (Seventh Day). I went through the doctrinal beliefs and the history, and most of them were exactly the same as my own findings. Once I contacted the BA Facebook page, a zone representative pastor in the UK contacted me and connected me with the local pastor.

Unfortunately the local pastor told me that the closest church was in Bulawayo, approximately 600 km from my home area. He immediately sent me some Sabbath school lessons and

pamphlets from the Church of God (Seventh Day). I was more interested in finding out if what I had written in my own Bible study notes was the same as what the Church taught. I was surprised to find out that it was exactly the same. I had given up hope and believed that the church I was looking for was only an imaginary one!

The Church of God (Seventh Day) proved to be the reality of the church I expected to find. After a series of communications with the local pastor, I managed to visit the Bulawayo church and attended several services. I surrendered my life to Christ and was baptized on Sabbath, September 9, 2017.

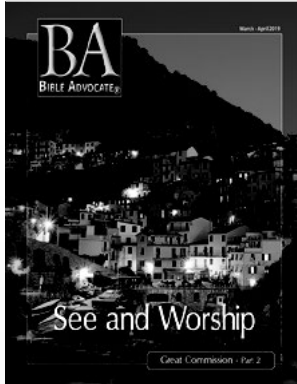
Call to action

I strongly believe that the Church of God is a body ordained to preserve the true Word of God and herald the good news of the gospel. I therefore encourage the Church leadership to put all necessary effort to ensure that the Church spreads to all parts of Zimbabwe so that many will be saved. For this to be possible, I suggest that Church literature be translated into local languages so that the locals can read and understand.

Today I am fit and have no problems with my stomach or legs. God further blessed me with permanent employment in August 2018 at the National Prosecuting Authority of Zimbabwe, where I currently work. Through God's wisdom, I was deployed to Bulawayo, where I have access to the church and interact with the brothers and sisters of the Church of God.

I glorify God the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ for healing my soul and body. **BA**

Denmark Chihombe is a member of the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Zimbabwe. He has participated in mission work to Mozambique and has translated four BAP tracts into his native language of Shona, spoken by 70 percent of the Zimbabwean population. Denmark has also overseen the translation of BA literature into other regional African languages.



More military

I cannot tell you how glad I am to read your answer on carnal warfare ["Mail Bag," March-April 2019]. While we cannot be the judge of other believers' salvation and right standing before God based on whether they share our views on keeping Sabbath and on Christian nonviolence, I appreciate your clear and unwavering answer on that issue. I am grateful to be part of a denomination that does not sacrifice to the spirit of this age when it comes to participating in carnal warfare. Indeed, in an age of fear and of increased nationalism and violence worldwide, it is extremely important for the Church and its spiritual unity to recognize that our exclusive allegiance should be to Christ the King.

You direct your readers toward "the vast Christian literature on gospel nonviolence." Let me quote from the excellent book on that subject by Preston Sprinkle: "Prayer, suffering, enemy-love, and the proclamation of the true gospel (not Caesar's) will do more to tear down the works of Satan than [a] thousand nuclear

warheads. We are to join Jesus in His war, His spiritual war, and our weapons are not worldly like Rome's. Our weapons are divine" (*Fight: A Christian Case for Nonviolence*). May our trust be in God, not in carnal warfare. If God exists and if he is ultimately in control, his people should not fear. God knows how to use the powers that be for his will to be done. We know from Scriptures that God's people will prevail without having to resort to carnal weapons.

D. Y. D.
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Faith and film

I have watched the *Pilgrim's Progress* movie over and over again. It has helped me in my progress as a child of GOD. Thank you for making movies of godly quality that will enhance the life of the believer. GOD bless you abundantly!

C. W.
Online

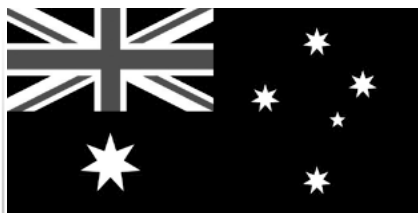
From Sherri Langton, associate editor: Thank you! We're glad you're blessed by The Pilgrim's Progress. And we're glad to feature films and other media that promote Christian values in the Media4U section at baonline.org.



What is Media4U?

It is a section in BA Online devoted to everything media — faith-based and family-friendly films, like *Breakthrough* and *Unplanned*, as well as music, books, and the latest Bibles/Bible resources.

For a CBS.com report on the popularity of films with a faith message, visit <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/films-with-a-message-of-faith/>.



Australia

- Population: 25 million
- Capital: Canberra
- Land area: 7,692,202 sq km / 2,969,976 sq mi
- Official CoG7 congregations: 3
- CoG7 membership: 80
- President: Phil Kordahi

Pacific Rim

continued from page 7

has about seven thousand members. That's really exciting. Then we have a small handful in Indonesia. We went to Malaysia a few years ago. So it's wonderful that we started off with one country, and now we have these groups coming together. Of course, it's exciting to be not just Australia-bound but world-bound.

JK: What do you see as the greatest strengths throughout the Pacific Rim, within the Churches of God?

PK: Well, like I said, it's fantastic in the Philippines with seven thousand members. But I think the strength in the Pacific is that we're close together. We can communicate and travel in that

area; we don't have to travel right across the world. I think that helps. I've just come back from New Zealand, and we're heading to the Philippines soon. It's really important to keep face-to-face communication going. All this technology is great, but, no, I'd rather talk to someone face to face.

JK: What are some of the challenges within the Pacific Rim?

PK: There are some big challenges because we're small in number (of course, the Philippines is large). It's having the finances and people to do the work. But small can be good as well. I believe that while the world is getting darker, and more secular, that means that the people who love God and are of God are getting brighter. God's children are shining their light.

JK: It really gives weight to Jesus' words "You are the light of the world."

PK: Exactly right! So I'm not negative in that area, and I also think we can say that we can always try harder.

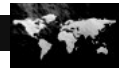
JK: Secularism is on the rise in the Western world, and Australia is no exception to that. How do you find the challenges with secularism affecting the journey of the Church of God in our work to evangelize?

PK: I see two areas. In Australia, wealth is important — having cars and houses. To Australians it's more important than searching for God. We see the opposite overseas. I think that's a big problem where we have too much and we don't rely on God. I once heard a minister say, "He can't give me anything." And I'm thinking if a minister is thinking that, what's the world thinking? I think that's one of the big challenges.

But also, I think the challenge is for the churches. I'm not saying we're special, but we're different. If we observe most of the churchy things like some of the holidays and some of the beliefs, we would have a lot more people. But then we wouldn't have the truth. God talks about a "little flock" (which could be quite large). I think we are on the right track. We have that friction. But never give up, and always keep shining your light.

JK: Of the ten-point vision, which point do you most easily gravitate to?

PK: First one! *Christ Centered, with Bible Based!* As I've said before, I'm a stickler for the Word.



JK: Which one would be the least likely you would pick, perhaps noting that it takes more work, or having to think about it more?

PK: Witnessing (*Engaging in Witness*)! Yes, because, if we're honest about it, we can share easily enough, but it's that response from the other side. They seem to have "blocked ears." And that could be part of God's understanding, and will, but we still need to share the truth/gospel.

JK: Does it reflect on secularism?

PK: I think so. Like I said, why do you need God when you have everything? You see that the poorer a person is, the closer they are to God. That doesn't mean we've got to sell everything, but at the same time, it's very hard to encourage somebody who has everything in life and is busy. "Why don't you come to church? Why don't you want to listen to what Jesus wants you to know? What about eternal life?" They just say "No. Why worry about it now?" Even Christians say that sometimes. "Lord, don't come back until I've paid my house off." I've heard that said!

JK: Society and the world have impacted parts of the body of Christ, rather than the church being the pioneer of reflecting Christ to the world.

PK: Yeah. "Lord, let me get my university degree first."

JK: So, throughout the Churches of God throughout the Pacific Rim, what do you see as the greatest need? Other than, of course, finances?

PK: I think if we have more people, we can do more things. I think the greatest need is trying to share with other churches and other countries that we have to be more united and understanding what the ten points are.

JK: Looking now toward the next five or ten years, what's your personal vision throughout the Pacific Rim — what you would like to see?

PK: I want to see Australia grow. We've just had an opportunity through a young man from New South Wales who is very eager. We're hoping to start a group there. I'd like to see that we grow in areas like Fiji and on some of the smaller islands. I look at it this way. Where the Lord will take us, we'll go. So my vision is "Lord, show us the way." Sometimes we try to make the way, and try to push it that way, and it doesn't work. I think it comes down to asking the Lord to show us the way.

JK: One of the challenges we face in many of the Churches of God is the attrition of youth to a secularized world. Do you have

that burden in your heart to minister and reach out to the youth of the day into the next generation, preparing them to take over from where we've left off?

PK: I'm getting old. I'm trying to encourage the youth to encourage the youth. Sometimes the youth listen to each other more than an old fellow like me. I'm hoping I can be encouraging. As you've seen, there are youth in the church, and they've been very supportive. In the Adelaide church I think hopefully you've seen that. Not only encouraging them, but we've been doing courses. They've just finished an Old Testament course. The youth are standing up and being counted. We hope that will grow and grow. And you know what? They'll be bringing more people into the church than the oldies.

JK: I think there's a message in it for all of us. Pastor Phil, thank you very much for your comments. I really appreciate it, and may God bless and strengthen you and encourage you.

PK: Thank you, John.

Philippines

- Population: 106,126,000
- Capital: Manila
- Land area: 300,000 sq km / 115,831 sq mi
- Official CoG7 congregations: 84
- CoG7 Membership: 8,000+
- President: Bienvenido "Jhun" Ramos

Source: *Encyclopedia Britannica*





GC Ministries News

ARTIOS • MISSIONS • PUBLICATIONS

Welcome, Kurt!

Artios is excited to announce the addition of Kurt Lang to the team as assistant dean of English Academic Affairs. He will oversee the English language faculty and maintain the existing academic programming, much as Santiago Chavez does as assistant dean of Spanish Academic Affairs. Israel Steinmetz remains as dean of Academic Affairs, but will devote more time to resource and curriculum development and other new ventures and initiatives.

Kurt is a graduate of LifeSpring School of Ministry and a respected instructor of several Artios courses. He brings to the team over twenty years of leadership experience at the local and denominational levels, along with his commitment to equip leaders for a vibrant 21st century church. Please join us in welcoming Kurt, and begin thinking of ways to collaborate with him for the benefit of the Church.



Translation Oversight Department

I am pleased to announce the formation of a new General Conference Translation Oversight Department within the GC Publications ministry. This department directs and facilitates efficient, high quality, and timely English/Spanish translation services for GC congregations, districts, and ministries, as well as for our North American Ministerial Council (NAMC).

Martha Muffley heads the department, which consists of Ruben Beard, Sylvia Corral, Raul Gonzalez, and Crist Romero. Among other things, the department oversees translation needs and quality



control, establishes minimum standards of excellence, creates a pool of biliterate translators, and selects teams for projects.

I am confident that this new department will greatly enhance our commitment to be *One Church* and *United in Fellowship*. Please support this effort with your offerings, your prayers, your use of the department's services, and (if you are biliterate) your abilities. There's no doubt about it: We are better together!

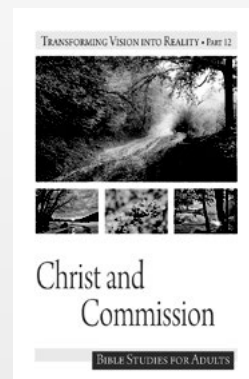
— Loren Stacy
GC President

Christ and Commission

The biblical imperative to make disciples applies to all Christians. To accomplish this mission, we must be willing vessels, useful to our Lord in proclaiming the gospel and expanding His kingdom. Collaborating with members of our own church and the greater Christian community is a key theme expounded in the fourth quarter lessons, as well as the need for our conduct to match our message.

In this quarterly our collective and individual callings are emphasized as necessary components in the overall mission Jesus handed down to His church. The overall objective in each lesson aims to educate the church regarding her biblical mission, cultivate urgency in readers to engage in the work of the ministry, and equip Sabbath school students to evangelize their communities and edify the church.

To order, visit our online store at publications.cog7.org.





Sharing the Good News?

I was working at my college's bookstore as a cashier. A young woman caught my eye as she waited in line; she seemed nervous, and she had nothing in her hands to purchase. When she finally stood before me, eyes down, she snatched a single pencil from a display and placed a nickel on the counter. I rang up her purchase, handed her the receipt, and said, "Thank you."

And that's when it happened. The woman hesitated as she began to walk away, then suddenly turned and blurted, "Do you know that you're a sinner and you're going to hell?" In an instant, she was through the doors, out of the store, and gone forever.

Why did she do that? I can only imagine. It was 1971, give or take, and the Jesus Movement was in full swing in Southern California. Campus Crusade for Christ was active at my college, and my best guess is that someone had told this young woman that she needed to "witness." I admire her for her attempt. Can you imagine the courage it must have taken for her to tell me, a complete stranger, what she did? And in front of many others? But what she told me was hardly good news. What if I hadn't already known Jesus? What if I really was the unsaved, bound-for-hell sinner she thought me to be? "Wait a minute!" I might have shouted after her. "Am I doomed? Is there no way out? Help me!" But she was gone.

Even as I chuckle over this young woman's attempt to witness to me so many years ago, I relate to her nervousness and awkward approach. I have walked in her shoes. I grew up thinking that it was my responsibility to "save" my friends. Somehow, I thought, I should know

the right things and be able to say the right things to "make" them become Christians and be saved. I had no understanding of the Holy Spirit's work in bringing people to faith in Christ. No, if my friends did not become Christians, it was, I thought, completely my fault. But I didn't know the right things or how to say the right things. The young woman was more courageous than I; too often, I didn't even try.

I have come to greatly appreciate Christ's expression of the Great Commission He gave His followers in Matthew 28. Grammatically, it is one command ("make disciples") linked to three participial phrases introduced by *going*, *baptizing*, *teaching*. I understand Jesus was urging us to go about our lives holistically. Our commitment to Jesus can and should be so much at the heart of who we are and how we live that evangelism isn't a special event or occasional effort, but rather, the normal expression of who we are in Christ. Coming and going, working and playing, speaking and listening — all of life can be our witness of Jesus. Befriending people and deeply sharing our Christ-centered lives with them is far more effective in making disciples than any impersonal drive-by evangelism campaign we might imagine.

I wonder if the woman in the bookstore ever thinks of me and wishes that she had shared with me, not only my dire situation but also God's gracious solution. Romans 6:23 does that: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

— Loren Stacy





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