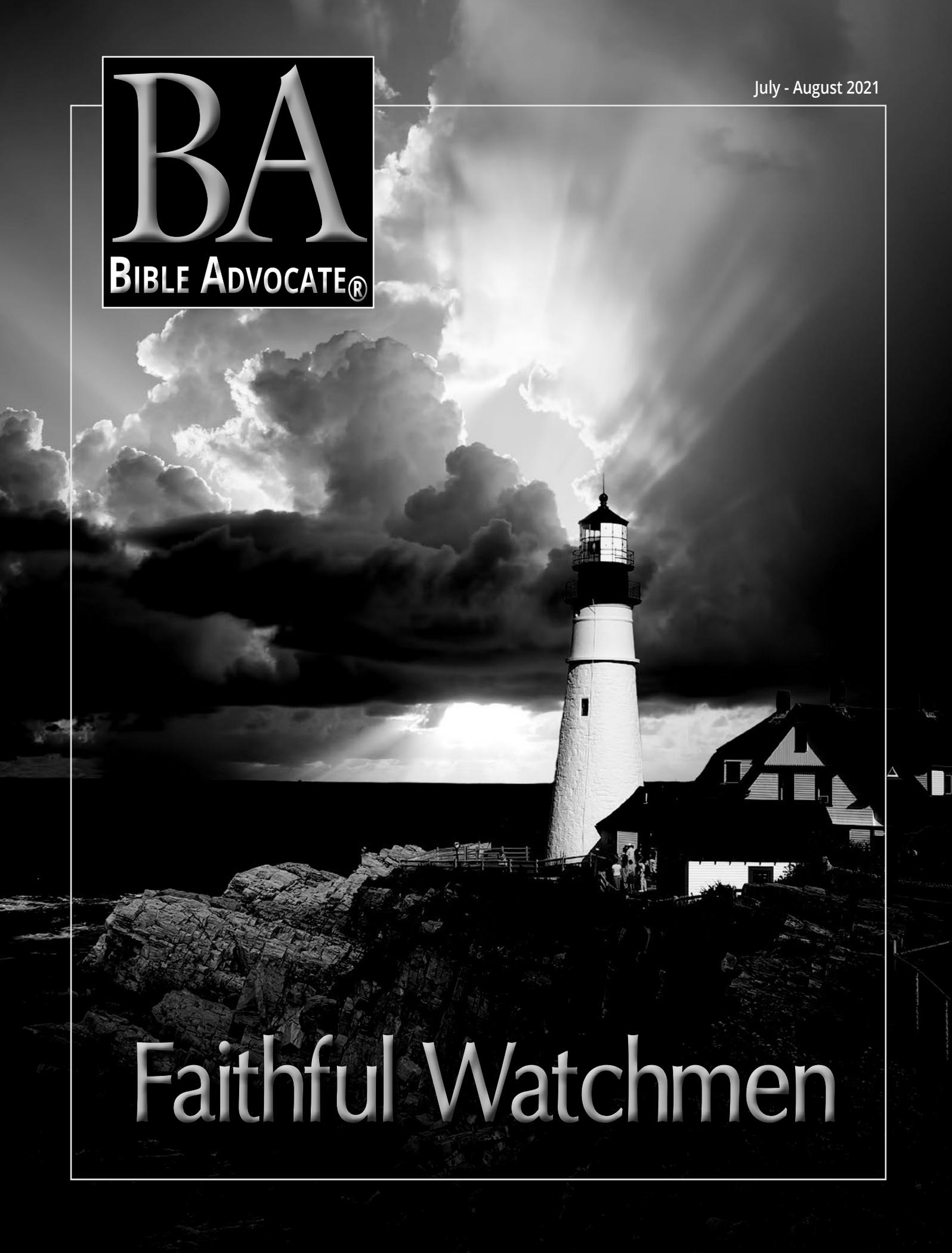


BA
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Faithful Watchmen



2021: Faithful



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Watch Out!

I hope you are benefiting from our “Faithful” theme. The topic and the times we live in make me think about the role of the watchman in the Bible. That post required faithful vigilance to sustain a faithful people.

Israel’s prophets were such watchmen (Jeremiah 6:17; Hosea 9:8; Habakkuk 2:1), alert to every threat against God’s people: “I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent” (Isaiah 62:6).

Watchmen did not offer opinions, nor were they beholden to the interests of the popular or powerful. They watched for warning, and the words were not their own: “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me” (Ezekiel 3:17). The threat came from both within and without – moral failure or godless foe, and both equally destructive. The watchmen were as likely to warn about the one as the other.

But faithful watchmen are also vigilant for God and what He might do, ready to announce His arrival and works. Isaiah wrote “Your watchmen shall lift up their voices . . . How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news . . . who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” (52:7, 8).

Believers today are watchmen to God’s people and the world. Our tireless focus is preaching the gospel of Christ. He reigns! So “warn and teach everyone” as “watchful and thankful” (Colossians 1:28; 4:2, NIRV). Our times of threats and temptations call for faithful watchmen: steadfast, brave, strong; not asleep but alert and ready to speak (1 Corinthians 16:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:6).

“Watch out! . . . watch yourselves” (Luke 12:15; 17:3, NIV). That’s what Jesus said. I hope we are not distracted by lesser allegiances. Don’t keep silent, watchmen. Warn those without and within, announcing the good news that Jesus reigns and is coming again.

“Blessed is he who watches” (Revelation 16:15).

— Jason Overman





Guarding ourselves from the enemy within and without.

by Marcia Sanders

Picture a castle perched high on a hill, massive walls surrounding it as protection from invading forces. There's only one way into that castle: through the huge drawbridge, controlled by a watchman who determines if that bridge should be lowered. The watchman must be loyal to the king, highly educated as to who is friend or foe. The person should be determined to serve his king, since opening the gate to the wrong person or persons could mean destruction to all inside.

As a child of God, you have

such a watchman guarding you: your mind. Our minds are set to carefully protect our souls by questioning, assessing, and considering every idea and thought: *Will this please God? Will this thought or action draw me closer to God, improve my witness? Or will it bring harm to the cause of Christ in my life?*

We can fix our minds on God's will for our lives and keep the rottenness of sin out only when we focus on the Cross, on the sacrifice that Jesus made for each of us:

Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).

The Cross-eyed watchman has eyes *fixed* on Jesus, making

every choice in life based on that sacrifice.

Mind, affections, will

But that isn't always easy to do, given the interplay of the mind, affections, and will.

The mind is the first and, arguably, most important stage in combating the devil and his attempts to draw us away from Christ. Two other stages are also involved in this process: our affections/desires and our will/actions.

Only after the mind gives its approval do our affections and lusts take up their job and long for what the mind has said is good. This craving, once initiated, can be challenging to ignore. That's why Paul tells us, "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things" (Colossians 3:2). We must focus our affections on

the one true God. Remember the words of those famous three Hebrew captives when faced with the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:17, 18)? Their watchmen were clearly on duty because their affections were focused on the God they served, thus keeping their drawbridge firmly closed against the temptation to worship a foreign leader.

In the third stage of this process, the will initiates action on what the mind has authorized and the affections have longed for. The will says, "If the mind said it's OK and you really want it, then I'll make it happen." Off goes the will to accomplish its intended purpose.

If our minds have been trained correctly through the Spirit and Scripture, all is good. However, if we allow ourselves to believe that a sin is good or permissible, then our affections crave that deception, and our will makes that wrong action happen.

Satan's bait

Even with Spirit and the Scripture, why do we still sin at times? How can the devil get by our watchman? James 1:14, 15 says, "Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

Notice that word *enticed*, defined by Merriam-Webster as "to attract artfully or adroitly or by arousing hope or desire." Some appropriate synonyms are *allure*, *bait*, *lure*, *seduce*, and *tempt*. Basically, when we sin, we have been caught by Satan's bait; we have swallowed his lure.

Just as the successful hunter or fisherman carefully considers the right bait to tempt their intended target, so Satan knows the bait most likely to seduce each of us into sin. Just as one bait doesn't work on all types of fish, so different enticements are used by the devil to trap unsuspecting Christians.

One common decoy the Deceiver often tries is to tell us that there won't really be a punishment, or, if there is, that punishment will be slight. Remember the serpent's words to Eve? "You will not surely die" (Genesis 3:4). The serpent didn't try to tell Eve it was OK to eat from the tree of life — just that God wouldn't really punish her. We hear that en-

from its duties by the deceit of sin. This occurs when it has not been properly trained and/or strengthened to distinguish right from wrong.

Enticing. The *affections* are enticed and entangled. Once the mind has given its approval, the lust, strong desires, or devotions immediately begin to crave the bait.

Conceiving sin. The *will* gives its consent; thus, the conception of actual sin. We've moved from thinking about the sin to actually committing it.

Birth of sin. This takes place in actions, words, and thoughts, disrupting our way of life as sin is born into it.

“ We can keep the rottenness of sin out only when we focus on the Cross. ”

ticement used frequently in our culture: "Do you really think that a loving God would condemn people?"

Five missteps

To help us better understand what happens, author Kris Lundgaard has written *The Enemy Within*. In it he breaks down five stages of the sin process described in James 1:14, 15.

Dragging away. The *mind* (*watchman*) is dragged away

Death by sin. Enslavement to sin is spiritual death. The flesh's actual goal is a hardened life of sin that leads to eternal death.

Bible examples

One model of a man with a faithful watchman who correctly handled sin's temptation was Joseph. Remember his time in Potiphar's home? He was a handsome young man who appealed to the boss's wife. She did her best to entice Joseph, but his

mind was on high alert. His response to temptation should be ours: “How then could I do such a wicked thing and *sin against God?*” (Genesis 39:9, emphasis mine). Joseph’s mind had been well trained, as described in 1 Peter 1:13: “Prepare your minds for action” (NASB). He acted and fled the temptation. He recognized sin and effectively guarded his castle.

As we know, this response, albeit correct, did not *appear* to end well for Joseph. He was still accused and punished for a sin he did not commit. He spent years in jail, but still he followed

Basic training

Shortsightedness (“sin for a season”) is an all too common affliction in today’s culture. We don’t keep our eyes on the prize, choosing immediate gratification over long-term rewards. So how do we train our minds to be good watchmen, to be alert, to be ready to reject Satan’s temptations and, when necessary, to run from a situation?

We train our minds by walking in the Spirit every day, moment by moment, in dependence upon God, remaining sensitive to His voice and obeying Him.

Just as the castle watchman

“We train our minds by walking in the Spirit every day, moment by moment.”

what he knew was right. Joseph’s mind was a well-trained watchman, focused on living a holy life, and God rewarded his faithfulness.

Another person whose mind was fixed on following his God was Moses. He was commended because he “chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin” (Hebrews 11:25). Moses’ mind also correctly identified the right path to follow, and his affections were fixed on that holy path.

had to be educated by those more knowledgeable than he to know who was friend or foe, so must we be educated in God’s Word through the Holy Spirit, our Teacher, to recognize sin when it appears (John 14:16, 26).

Here are just a few of the many verses that instruct us on how to train our minds.

- 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:16: *Study* to show yourself approved and to rightly divide the Word of truth. All Scripture is given by God and is good for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness.

- Proverbs 16:3: *Commit* your work to the Lord, and your thoughts [plans] will be established.
- Proverbs 1:7: *Reverence* the Lord; that’s the beginning of knowledge.
- Proverbs 3:5: *Trust* in the Lord; don’t depend on your own understanding.
- Psalm 27:14: *Wait* for the Lord, and *He* will give you strength.
- Psalm 1:2: *Delight* in the law of the Lord.
- 2 Chronicles 7:14: *Humble* yourself and seek God’s face.
- Joshua 1:8: *Meditate* on God’s Word.

At the cross

The Cross reminds us of how far God was willing to go to rescue us from sin. The question now is “How far are we willing to go to serve Him and give Him full control of our lives?” What better demonstration of God’s love for us do we have than the sacrifice of the Cross?

If we are to be faithful Cross-eyed watchmen, it all starts with a mind fixed on Jesus. “[He] will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in [Him]” (Isaiah 26:3). **BA**

Marcia Sanders

writes from Fort Smith, AR, where she attends the Church of God (Seventh Day) with her husband, Randy. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise noted.





How to be confident watchmen, whatever the weather.

by Dr. David R. Downey

Philippians is a wonderful book. We have heard references to this letter of Paul's many times and know familiar verses:

He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ (1:6).

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him [Christ] and given Him the name which is above every name (2:9).

What things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ (3:7).

When I taught this book recently, I titled the series "Great Expectations." This is an apt description of the confident tone of Paul's epistle. Paul is calling on the congregation in Philippi to be certain of their faith while they served. They should build their faith on the stability of the ship in which they travel, rather than on any certainty of good weather.

In chapter 1, Paul recounts many challenges — bad weather — not the least of which are his *bonds*. But in verse 20, he says he holds an "earnest expectation" in the gospel. This phrase is taken from a compound Greek word, *apokaradokia*, which describes a person whose head is erect, on a neck stretched out, with attention to the goal ahead. In the Greek classics, it is used to describe the watchman who, in the words of scholar K. S. Wuest, "peered into the darkness, eagerly looking for the first gleam of

the distant beacon which would announce the capture of Troy."

The apostle expresses this confidence while his circumstances suggest reason to fear. Additionally, though Paul's boldness is producing boldness in others, some are preaching the gospel while others are *using* the gospel (vv. 15-17). Wicked people were even using the preaching of Jesus to undermine Paul. I can think of few things baser than using the words of Christ to advance a personal agenda through the defaming of another person. Paul says, nevertheless, Christ is being preached and for that, he is rejoicing and he *will* rejoice! (v. 18).

Grieving

We all have had times when we've had to determine to rejoice and maintain our confident

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Seven Love Letters

Messages to the churches in Revelation hold truth for us today.

by John Klassek

Have you ever received a love letter — one that was honest? Probably not. Love letters usually express deep affection and extol the virtues of another.

Jesus sent seven such letters to churches mentioned in Revelation. In them He made numerous observations, revealing honesty about His people's spiritual condition and readiness for His return. Jesus' comments are harsh in places, but they can be seen as love letters because of the covenant between Him and the church, compared in Scripture to

that of a groom and his bride.

Some years after Jesus ascended to heaven, Apostle John was exiled on the island of Patmos. There, in vision, Jesus dictated to him seven love letters addressed to the churches in Asia Minor. He is coming back for His bride, who "has made herself ready" and is clothed in fine linen (Revelation 19:7, 8). Therefore, these letters tell us everything about how we are to live as the church, anticipating the return of Christ.

Church, good and bad

Reading Revelation 2 and 3 is like reading someone else's mail. In doing so, we gain important and compelling insight into Jesus' will and the risk factors that can beset the very nature of church life, even to the point where Jesus regarded His church as hardly authentic or recognizable.

We might better appreciate the exhortations as Jesus reached out to the emerging first century churches of God. What endearing similarities do we bear to those who pioneered in faith? What were they commended and criticized for? What were their strengths and assets, their weaknesses and liabilities? What might we learn from them?

Ephesus (2:1-7). The church at Ephesus was known for her toil and patience. Believers there could not bear evil and hated the false teachings of the Nicolaitans, but they had abandoned their first love. Thus, they are sadly remembered as being the loveless church. Imagine that with Jesus' love for His bride, He had to contend with this *lovelessness!* Despite it, for those who overcame, Jesus promised the tree of life.

Smyrna (2:8-11). The church at Smyrna was known for her tribulation and poverty, slander by false religion, suffering, imprisonment, and death. Jesus gave no rebuke or correction. Instead, aware of their suffering, Jesus promised the overcomer that they will not be hurt by the second death.

Pergamum (2:12-17). Believers in Pergamum existed in a climate where Satan's throne was. They were commended for holding fast to Jesus' name, keeping the faith. Ironically, embedded in the church were the teachings of Balaam, inferring idolatry and sexual immorality. And unlike the church in Ephesus, some embraced the false teachings of the Nicolaitan doctrine. To those who overcame, Jesus promised a new name.

Thyatira (2:18-29). The church at Thyatira was commended for her works, love, faith, service, and patient endurance. Yet she tolerated a prophetess with a Jezebel spirit that led to seduction, idolatry, and the deep things of Satan. Even to those who overcame, Jesus promised authority over the nations and "the morning star."

Sardis (3:1-6). The Sardis church had a reputation of being alive, but was dead. Consider a part of the body of Christ ready to die! Surely the Groom wants a bride alive and vibrant and responsive. Thus, the call to repent. To the overcomer is the promise to be clothed in white garments and to have their name written in the book of life. Jesus promised to confess their name before the Father and His angels.

Philadelphia (3:7-13). This church was known for her works. Hers was an "open door," and she was noted for her "little power." Still, believers in this church had not denied Jesus' name and, like Smyrna, patiently endured through trouble with false religion (the "synagogue of Satan"). Jesus promised to keep them from worldwide trials. The overcomer would be "a pillar in the temple of my God" and would be given "my own new name."

Laodicea (3:14-22). Finally, the church at Laodicea was sadly known for being lukewarm. Though she considered herself rich and prosperous, Jesus de-

Ears to hear

All seven churches received the recurring admonition "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). We do well to follow the same admonition.

Some have viewed the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 as symbolic of seven eras of church history: Ephesus as the first century church, Laodicea being the church prior to Christ's return. Maybe; maybe not. Others see these congregations as representative of Christianity at any given time in history.

Regardless of how we view

“What would Jesus commend us for? In what area would He correct us?”

scribed her as "wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked." What a damning appraisal for the bride of Christ! Jesus invited these believers to find riches in Him, to dress in white, and be healed so they could see. We see Jesus knocking — from the outside! Would anyone open the door? Philadelphia had an open door; in Laodicea the door was closed. Yet to those who overcame, Jesus promised to share His throne with them.

the churches, within any Christian community are those who pray and those who do not; those who read their Bibles and those who think they know what it says. There are those who know Jesus and those who don't; those who are judgmental and those who extend grace. Jesus' wheat and tares parable comes to mind. Some look like Christians; others are.

The commendations and corrections directed to these first century churches should be a

clarion call for us today. What would Jesus commend us for? In what area would He correct us? What specific promise might He make to us, now, collectively?

Are we a loving people — loving the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength? Are we alive, full of our first love? Or do we just put on a good act? Are we faithful? Is our door to Jesus always open, or is it conspicuously closed? Do we have genuine fellowship with Him? Are we

are full of honesty, revealing sins and failures. The good news is that all ends well. Revelation describes an outcome that is powerfully reassuring:

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready . . . “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (19:7, 9).

“Whatever the culture has become, the church must be like her Lord Jesus Christ.”

hot and alive, or lukewarm and dead? Do we tolerate, or even embrace, false, unbiblical teachings?

The marriage supper of the Lamb will bring Christ and His bride together as one forever. Now is the time to examine how His bride is doing. Is the church beautiful, radiant, and dressed in white? Or is she still stained by sin, self, and Satan?

In the end

When we reread Jesus’ letters to the seven churches, they are not like the usual love letters a groom writes to his bride. They

Jesus’ words for the church bear His heartfelt, candid, honest conviction, designed to move every heart and soul to repentance and renewed faith. Note three elements of Jesus’ appraisal: encouragement, correction, and promises, all underlined with a call to really, really listen.

The past seventy or so years have provided fertile ground for broader Christianity to flourish. In many places the church has bloomed and grown to reflect her Lord and Savior. But in other places, Christianity has become lukewarm and tolerant of evil, complicit and silent in the face of wickedness, with public idolatry

and sexual sin. All of this adds to unbelievers’ distaste of Christianity.

Whatever the culture has become, the church must be like her Lord Jesus Christ. The call is to repent, to change. Thankfully, in almost every faith community, now as well as two thousand years ago, holy and faithful people are triumphing in the name of Jesus while enduring terrible trials. “[You] have not denied my name” is Jesus’ powerful affirmation of His bride’s testimony and identity (3:8).

In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus asks, “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (18:8). That question applies to us as well. Will the Son of Man find us living in faith? Will the Groom find His faithful bride, dressed in fine linen, resplendent and radiant? We can be confident that if we are obedient, we will be “worthy to stand before the Son of Man” on that glorious day.

The love letters written millennia ago have served their purpose. The next step in our faith journey is receiving the wedding invitations: “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:9). **BA**

John Klassek

writes from Western Australia, where he lives and pastors with his wife, Rebecca. Scripture quotations are from the *English Standard Version*.



Questions & Answers



Do Christians lose salvation when they sin?

We do *not* lose our salvation by sinning. If we did, none of us could remain saved very long. More than a few scriptures affirm the reality of sin's presence in us all — our entire earthly lives (1 Kings 8:46; Psalm 53:3; Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:23). The plainest New Testament text in this regard is 1 John 1:8, written to believers in Jesus: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

In the next chapter, Apostle John goes on to say that God's perfect will is for His children *not to sin*: "these things I write to you, so that you may not sin" (2:1). This is the earnest desire and goal of every Spirit-born Christian. But we're not there yet. Sin no longer *reigns* in our lives (Romans 6:12), but it still *remains* (7:17) in our thoughts (Mark 7:21-23), words (James 3:2), and/or deeds, either by commission or omission (4:17).

That's why 1 John 2:1 goes on to say, "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." That's also why our Lord taught His followers to pray, "Forgive us our debts" just as frequently, it seems, as we pray for daily bread (Matthew 6:11, 12). This side of eternity, Christians are not yet perfect, but we are forgiven!

Jesus paid for all our life sins by His death on the cross. If we confess them and trust Christ as Savior, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus"

(Romans 8:1). The Savior who died for our sins according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3) is the same risen and ascended Lord who now intercedes for us at God's throne in heaven (Hebrews 7:23-27). This assures all who trust Christ alone with a faith that works through love (Galatians 5:6) that a wonderful outcome awaits us when we stand before the judgment seat.

Many more verses like those above and below (find and read them all, please!) promise salvation to all who hold fast to the Lord Jesus Christ — and are held by Him — until the end. They point to the truth that we are not lost by any mere sin of human weakness. On the other hand, our willful, sinful refusal to trust Jesus as Savior to the end, or to obey Him as Lord, puts at risk any claim we make to salvation (Matthew 24:12, 13; Colossians 1:23; Hebrews 2:2, 3; 3:12-14; 10:26-29, 35-39). If our salvation is lost, it would be only by our negating, undoing, and denying the faith and repentance by which we received it at the start — i.e., by a full-stop rejection of the God we once came to know personally in Christ.

We return to 1 John 1:9 for the final summary and definitive answer to your question: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Praise be unto God for His marvelous mercy to love, accept, and forgive us at the start, and His glorious grace to keep us loved, accepted, and forgiven unto the end (Jude 24, 25).

— Elder Calvin Burrell



The Joshua Model

A giant of the faith teaches us about courageous leadership.

by Kelsey Gjesdal

If I could time travel and meet any Old Testament character, Joshua would be a contender on my list. The contrast between Joshua and his generation is clearly seen in one of the Bible's most significant chapters.

In Numbers 13, twelve spies were selected to scout out the Promised Land. Joshua was one of them. When they returned, ten spies spread fear among the Israelites:

"We are not able to go up against the people, because they are too strong for us." So they brought a bad

report of the land which they had spied out to the sons of Israel, saying, "The land through which we have gone to spy out is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are people of great stature" (Numbers 13:31, 32).

But Joshua, with Caleb, delivered a different message:

"The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us—a land which flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the Lord; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection is gone from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them" (14:7-9).

Joshua and Caleb were the opposite of the other spies, not fearing the giants in the land and not complaining against the Lord. They believed God would keep His promises. They spread a message of hope because God was with them. While their generation died in the wilderness due to their complaining and fearfulness, Joshua and Caleb stood courageous upon God's promises and lived to see Israel conquer the Promised Land.

Called to courage

Joshua was selected to lead the way into that land. When he first took leadership over Israel, the Lord gave him an inspiring message. He promised to be with Joshua as He was with Moses and to never fail nor forsake him (Joshua 1:5). Then the Lord gave Joshua this charge:

“Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the Law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may achieve success wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not be terrified nor dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go” (v. 7-9).

When I read this battle cry and study Joshua’s life, I am inspired. I find myself asking if I am being a Joshua in my day or if I am cowering in fear, relying on my own strength instead of God’s. He told Joshua three times to be courageous and not fear, and twice promised to be with him. The courage God commanded did not come from Joshua’s strength or leadership skills; it came from God’s presence.

Likewise, our courage cannot come from our own strength or talents. It comes from our Father, who has promised to never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

Called to lead

Along with courage, Joshua displayed amazing leadership. At the end of his life, he gave a speech that closed with these famous words:

“If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today

whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served, which were beyond the Euphrates River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (24:15).

In response, the Israelites vowed to also serve the Lord. Joshua led by example, and his example impacted the next generation.

Are we doing the same? Effective leadership does not live by the “Do as I say, not as I do” motto; that is not appropriate for the Christian life. We are to be known by our fruits (Matthew 7:20) and imitate Christ as an example for others (1 Corinthians 11:1).

If we want the next generation to be bold for Christ, we must be bold and stand strong as Joshua did. We must look ahead and be courageous parents, pastors, teachers, older siblings, or any other leadership position God has given us.

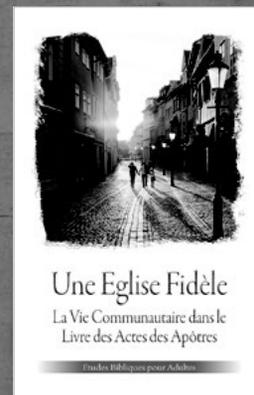
The question for me, and hopefully for all of us, is “Am I leading by example?” May we find courage in the Lord, strength in His Word, and be leaders who imitate Christ. That is how we impact the next generation — and change the world. **BA**

Kelsey Gjesdal

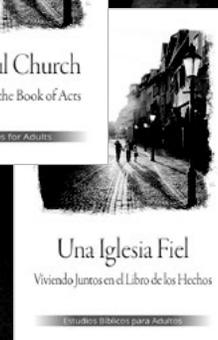
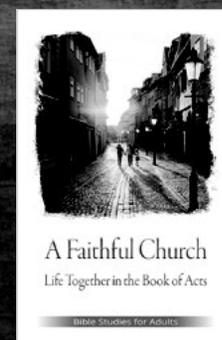
lives in Albany, OR, with her parents and three siblings, and attends the Marion CoG7. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.



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Faithful Parent Power

by **Christopher L. Scott**

What would you do to get help for your child who was sick and near death? In John 4 we read about a royal official whose son was sick and who likely had exhausted his local contacts and resources to heal his son. The man was desperate for help.

This royal official was in Capernaum and heard about a man named Jesus, who was performing miracles. Jesus was in Cana, twenty miles west of Capernaum. The official would have to walk seven hours uphill to reach Jesus. (Capernaum was located 700 feet below sea level, and Cana sat at the foot of some mountains 300 feet above sea level.) The father was committed to finding help for his son.

Once the royal official found Jesus, “he went to Him and began asking Him to come down and heal his son” (John 4:47). The word *asking* means that the man was begging, imploring, pleading with Jesus. The Lord briefly responded that the father was just looking for a sign and miracle like everyone else in order to believe Jesus was the Son of God. The royal official asked Jesus again, “Sir, come before my child dies.” Jesus replied, “Go; your son is alive” (vv. 49, 50).

The passage says that the man believed the word of Jesus. As he started walking home, his slaves met him with the news that his son was alive. When the father asked when the son’s health began to improve, the slaves told him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him” (v. 52) — the same time Jesus had told the father, “Your son is alive.”

This story teaches us to never underestimate the influence of a faithful parent. Many times when I was a teenager and young adult in col-

lege, my mom gave me a Bible, Christian music CDs, Christian books, and other gentle reminders, pointing me back to God. I know she prayed for me and did her best to guide me into a loving relationship with Jesus Christ. She was committed to me and encouraged me in my faith journey.

That royal official was committed to his son. How committed are we to our children, nieces, nephews, and grandchildren? Not only was this young boy’s life saved, but he was given an example to follow. His dad walked for seven hours uphill to find a Jew he likely had never met, hoping to heal his son. After that, the boy knew what true commitment to family looks like.

Furthermore, he learned what faith looks like. John concludes this story with a note to his readers that because of the actions of this royal official and Jesus’ miracle, everyone in his household believed in Jesus (v. 53).

Edgar Guest once wrote, “I’d rather see a sermon than hear one any day.” That boy, along with the servants, saw commitment that day. In his book *Bringing Up Boys*, psychologist and author James Dobson wrote that though children probably won’t remember what you say, they will likely be impacted for the rest of their lives by what you do. Our children learn about our faith and commitment by what we do. How are our actions guiding them to a relationship with God? **BA**

Christopher L. Scott writes from Moses Lake, WA. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.





Is Free Speech Important?

by Dr. Erwin W. Lutzer

Free speech laws in Western nations have supported Christians in spreading the gospel throughout the world. Free speech is a special gift that is underappreciated by all of us. But historically, for most of two thousand years, the church has had to survive without freedom of speech. Opposition to free speech began early in the history of the church. Shortly after the church was birthed, to preach in the name of Jesus was considered forbidden speech; it was hate speech that carried the penalty of imprisonment and sometimes even death.

Take time to reread Acts 4. Peter and John performed a miracle in the name of Jesus. But the authorities were not pleased.

For this the two were arrested. When asked to defend themselves, Peter boldly proclaimed that the miracle was performed in the name of “Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified . . . for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (vv. 10, 12).

No political correctness here. “By your agreement, you let Jesus be crucified, and if you don’t believe in Him, you have no salvation!”

When Peter and John were threatened and warned to no longer speak in the name of Jesus, they answered, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” (vv. 19, 20). Take it or leave it — your threats will not keep us from preaching the gospel!

The martyrs before us have shown that it is not necessary to have free speech in order to be faithful. Richard Wurmbrand, in *Tortured for Christ*, wrote about parents who taught their children the Christian faith. “If it was discovered that they taught their children about Christ, their children were taken away from them for life — with no visitation rights.”

Of course, our speech must be with grace, seasoned with salt. Free speech does not mean that we speak judgmentally to our nation as if we are free from our own weaknesses and sins. We give reason for the hope within us with respect, meekness, and fear (1 Peter 3:15).

One of my heroes is the sixteenth century reformer Hugh Latimer. When asked to preach in front of King Henry VIII, he struggled with exactly what to

continued on page 26

■ [Focus on the Faithful]



by Jason Overman

Habakkuk is a little book written by a little-known prophet. His name might mean “to embrace,” but we aren’t even sure about that. Nor when the obscure book at the back of the Old Testament was written — perhaps during the evil reign of Manasseh, or closer to Babylon’s siege of Jerusalem, from the mid-to-late seventh century BC.

What we may be certain of is that Habakkuk wrote during a time of national moral decline and that his message would be among the most theologically important and influential in all the Bible. Thanks to the singular statement of God in the middle of his prophecy — “the just shall live by his faith” — and the dark context it is embedded in, this little book resonates to this day.

Questions and answers

Habakkuk is unique among the prophets of Israel. Unlike such watchmen as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, and Isaiah, who

spoke *for* God to warn the nation, Habakkuk spoke *to* God about the nation. He was troubled by what he saw and had no answers, only questions. Where was God in the moral crisis that Judah faced?

O LORD, how long shall I cry,
And You will not hear?
Even cry out to You,
“Violence!”
And You will not save.
Why do You show me
iniquity,
And cause me to see trouble?
For plundering and violence
are before me;
There is strife, and contention
arises.
Therefore the law is
powerless,
And justice never goes forth.
For the wicked surround the
righteous;
Therefore perverse judgment
proceeds (1:2-4).

Questions: *How long, God? Why, God?* The burden of the prophet was a cry to the covenant God of Israel regarding the iniquity and trouble he witnessed in the land. The law was abandoned and injustice abounded. Violence defined the

time. Only Psalms and Proverbs use *violence* (Hebrew: *hamas*) more than little Habakkuk. It was a contentious time when the wicked bullied the righteous. This moral calamity spelled doom for the nation. Where was God? Would He save?

Into the prophet’s concerns and questions, God replied: “Look among the nations and watch — be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days which you would not believe, though it were told you” (v. 5).

God’s answer to Habakkuk first reasserted His inscrutable sovereignty over Israel and all nations. The wickedness of Judah would be judged. The Chaldeans were coming and with them, a terrible brutality that would scoff at and overrun all kings (vv. 6-11).

But this sobering news only raised more questions for Habakkuk. At the mercy of unimaginable, cataclysmic forces beyond his control, he recognized that God had appointed Babylon for correction. He asked, “Are You not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? . . . Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, and hold Your tongue when the wicked devours

Habakkuk

a person more righteous than he?" Why did the holy and pure God of Israel let all this evil go unchecked? Would He let His people die? Would this treacherous, godless Babylon "continue to slay nations without pity?" (vv. 12, 13, 17).

Habakkuk put the question to God, then received God's answer.

I will stand my watch
And set myself on the
rampart,
And watch to see what He will
say to me,
And what I will answer when I
am corrected.
Then the Lord answered me
and said:
"Write the vision
And make it plain on tablets,
That he may run who reads
it.
For the vision is yet for an ap-
pointed time;
But at the end it will speak,
and it will not lie.
Though it tarries, wait for it;
Because it will surely come,
It will not tarry.
"Behold the proud,
His soul is not upright in him;
But the just shall live by his
faith (2:1-4).

Habakkuk's questions were many, but God's answer was simple. *Trust Me!* Whatever the circumstances, *believe!* This is the character of the righteous and the sign of true life in a world of decay and death. The message of Habakkuk is that YHWH, in His sovereign time and power, will bring full justice and end all violence.

"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea . . . But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him" (vv. 14, 20).

A hymn of faith

Centuries later, Habakkuk's message of a living faith in the face of every question and calamity would become the cornerstone of New Testament teaching about the sovereign work of God in Jesus Christ. At the appointed time, "The just shall live by faith" was proclaimed from Israel to Rome under the shadow of another wicked empire. It was the cornerstone of the gospel that Jesus is Lord, despite all appearances (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). The nations rage, but God saves

through Jesus those who will believe.

Habakkuk ends his little book with a beautiful hymn of faith in the face of our personal questions and national calamities:

Though the fig tree may not blossom,
Nor fruit be on the vines;
Though the labor of the olive may fail,
And the fields yield no food;
Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,
And there be no herd in the stalls —
Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.
The LORD God is my strength;
He will make my feet like deer's feet,
And He will make me walk on my high hills (3:17-19).

Let's hear and embrace the message of the faithful watchman, Habakkuk. Proclaim "The just shall live by faith." Amen! **BA**



Leading

by Whaid Rose

Jacob holds the distinction of being the only person who wrestled with God and survived (Genesis 32:28). He not only wrestled with God but also strove with everyone around him, beginning in the womb with his twin brother, Esau (25:22).

At birth, Jacob grabbed Esau's heel (v. 26) and later tricked him out of his birthright (vv. 29-34). Finally, he stole Esau's blessing from him in a plot that involved deceiving their father, Isaac (27:1-29).

Jacob didn't realize that God had controlling interest in his life. There was a broken world God planned to redeem by creating a new nation out of which would come the promised Seed, who would crush the serpent's head (3:15). Jacob then stood at the threshold of the birth of that new nation, but God had to reshape his heart.

Reaping

God turned what Jacob thought would be a brief hiatus at his uncle Laban's place into a

twenty-year boot camp! There he found himself under the command of three drill sergeants: the law of the harvest, the trickery of Laban, and the providence of God. Jacob's question to Laban, "What is this you have done to me?" (29:25), is a reminder that we reap what we sow. Being tricked into marrying Leah was the first of several such reminders as the schemer was out-schemed.

Furthermore, God intended for Jacob to see in his scheming uncle a mirror image of himself. This highlights God's providence, the Christian doctrine that affirms His activity in the world's affairs, superintending all things according to His divine purpose and for His own glory. Both Testaments affirm this: "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (50:20). "All things work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28).

Such scriptures definitely relate to us. Where is history headed? Is our tattered existence all there is to life, or is it part of a bigger story? And what do we make of the brokenness of our world — mass shootings; social, racial, and political unrest; and

COVID-19? Providence helps us with such questions.

Unknown to Jacob, God was providentially working the growing tensions between him and Laban to lead him to the place of surrender. Things grew bad enough that Jacob ran away (Genesis 31:17-21). Once again, he left another broken relationship behind. But on this run, he was anxious, not only about the sordid trail he left behind but also about what was ahead of him. They say time heals all wounds, but Jacob was suspicious that the gash in his brother's heart had not yet healed. As far as he knew, Esau still planned to kill him.

Wrestling

So Jacob resorted to old habits. To his credit, he spent time pleading with God for his life and the safety of his family (32:9-12) but spent far more than his time strategizing an escape plan should Esau attack. He sent messengers ahead with gifts of appeasement and rehearsed with his servants exactly what they would say to his offended brother (vv. 13-21).

Then came the moment of

with a Limp

Jacob's epic God encounter. A casual reading of Genesis 32:24-26 could give the impression that Jacob clung to the heavenly visitor all night, pleading for a blessing. But a closer observation of the text shows Jacob resisting. It was dark, after all, and as far as he knew, the intruder was his brother Esau. Fearing for his life, he resisted valiantly, and the angel's determination to not let him go resulted in a one-of-a-kind wrestling match.

At some point in the night the angel figured that the only way to subdue Jacob was to hurt him. So he touched the socket of Jacob's hip, throwing it out of joint. Something about that touch made Jacob realize he was in the presence of God. Only then did he start clinging to the angel, so much so that at daybreak when the angel sought to depart, Jacob refused to give him leave, crying, "I will not let You go until You bless me!" (v. 26).

Again, we see a connection here. God wants us to want Him. He retains controlling interest in our lives, not for the sake of control but to leverage our eventual outcome. What He gets out of the deal is the person we

become. The becoming process involves dealing with the issue of our identity. The question "What is your name?" (v. 27) is to confront Jacob with the brutal fact about himself: He had been a supplanter his whole life!

Resting

God's grace is greater than our failures, so He gave Jacob a new name: "Israel, for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed" (v. 28). That wrestling match took place at Jabbok (Yabboq in Hebrew), which means "emptying." Emptied of himself, Jacob now had a new name and a new way to walk. He walked with a limp the rest of his life as a regular reminder that he was strongest when he was weak, that the best blessings come, not in striving and running but in resting, and that heart-shaping is a requirement for spiritual leadership.

The following lines from the pen of an unknown author capture this well:

When God wants to drill a man/ . . . And skill a man/ . . .
When He yearns with all His heart to create so great and

bold a man/ . . . Watch His methods, watch His ways!

How He ruthlessly perfects/Whom He royally elects!/How He hammers him and hurts him,/ And with mighty blows converts him/ Into trial shapes of clay which/Only God understands.

While his tortured heart is crying/And he lifts beseeching hands!/How [God] bends but never breaks/When his good He undertakes; . . . God knows what He's about.

Jacob finally found this to be true and may have regarded his limp as the best thing that ever happened to him. It marked his turning point; may it be ours too.

BA

Whaid Rose, former president of the General Conference, is dean of the Artios Center for Vibrant Leadership, and pastors the Newton, NC CoG7 congregation. He and his wife, Marjolene, live in Denver, NC.





Grace Darling

It was a dark September morning. There was a storm at sea. A ship had been driven on a low rock off the shores of the Farne Islands. It had been broken in two by the waves, and half of it had been washed away. The other half lay yet on the rock, and those of the crew who were still alive were clinging to it. But the waves were dashing over it, and in a little while it too would be carried to the bottom. Could anyone save the poor, half-drowned men who were there?

On one of the islands was a lighthouse; and there, all through that stormy night, Grace Darling, the daughter of the lighthouse keeper, had listened to the storm. In the darkness of the night, above the noise of the winds and waves, she heard screams and wild cries. When daylight came, she could see the wreck, a mile away, and the men clinging to the masts.

"We must try to save them!" she cried. "Let us go out in the boat at once!"

"It is of no use, Grace," said her father. "We cannot reach them." He was an old man, and he knew the force of the mighty waves.

"We cannot stay here and see them die," said Grace. "We must at least try to save them."

Her father could not say, "No." They set off in the heavy lighthouse boat straight toward the wreck. But it was hard rowing against such a sea, and it seemed as though they would never reach the place.

At last they were close to the rock, and now they were in greater danger than before. The fierce waves broke against the boat, and it would have been dashed in pieces, had it not been for the strength and skill of the brave girl.

But after many trials, Grace's father climbed upon the wreck, while Grace herself held the boat. Then one by one the worn-out crew [was] helped on board. It was all that the girl could do to keep the frail boat from [drifting] away, or broken upon the sharp edges of the rock.

Then her father clambered back into his place. Strong hands grasped the oars, and by and by all were safe in the lighthouse. There Grace proved to be no less tender as a nurse than she had been brave as a sailor. She cared most kindly for the ship-wrecked men until the storm had died away and they were strong enough to go to their own homes.

The ship-wrecked men would never have been saved if Grace had not kept vigil that night. Even though she could not see, she listened carefully that she might understand the state of those men and determine how best to save them. We, too, are to be faithful watchmen, praying for God to lead us to someone who may need our help. Is there someone God wants you to encourage or help today?

From Fifty Famous Stories Retold by James Baldwin
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/18442/18442-h/18442-h.htm>

A Special Oil Lamp

Jesus said, "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return . . ." (Luke 12:35, 36, NIV). Make this oil lamp as a reminder to watch and be ready. You will need: an orange, a knife, olive oil, matches or a lighter, a plate.



Directions

(Have an adult help with this part.) Cut around the circumference of the orange all the way through the peel, but not through the flesh (the part you eat).

Carefully pull off the top half (where the stem comes out) of the orange peel from the flesh of the orange. Be careful to leave the white "stem" in the middle, in place.

Fill the orange peel about halfway with olive oil, wetting the stem with olive oil thoroughly as well.

(Have an adult help with this part.) Put the orange peel on a plate. Then, light the stem using a match or lighter. It can take a good 20 to 30 seconds to get the "wick" to light. Your oil lamp can burn up to six hours. Never leave it unattended. Leave it on the plate because it can get hot.



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Leaving a Legacy

How Paul's letter to Timothy is a pattern for a lasting testimony.

by Annie Laura Smith

The second epistle of Paul to Timothy is a letter from a man facing execution. In it he gives a personal testimony as a valedictory — a leave-taking, a farewell — that exalts life.

At the time of writing, Paul was awaiting execution for a crime he was innocent of. His friends had forsaken him, and those who had supported his cause were being persecuted. Yet in his letter to Timothy, written from the dungeon of a Roman prison, Paul expressed hope for those he would leave behind

and a belief that the church would eventually triumph.

Paul's messages

What messages did Paul leave for "Timothy, my dear son" (2 Timothy 1:2) in this valedictory?

- The Lord will return (4:1).
- The Lord is faithful (vv. 17, 18).
- Preach Jesus with unceasing diligence (v. 2).
- Endure suffering and sustain your faith (2:3, 11-13).
- Beware of false teachers, and handle the Word correctly (4:2, 3).
- Pray and give thanks (1:3).
- Be gentle (2:24, 25).

What message would you like to leave your children? Perhaps the following scriptures that relate to Paul's message will help you to develop the content for

your valedictory. You can add other points and scriptural references that are important to you.

The Lord will return. "For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels" (Matthew 16:27). Could you reaffirm your belief that the Lord will return so that your children can see the depth of your faith?

The Lord is faithful. "But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one" (2 Thessalonians 3:3). How has the Lord been faithful to you? Cite a special incident.

Preach Jesus with unceasing diligence. Do you believe in Jesus as the Samaritans did in John 4:42? If so, have you told others about Him? "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Timothy 4:2). How can you encour-

age your children to continue this message?

Endure suffering and sustain your faith. “Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:20, 21). How have you sustained your faith? Would you explain if it were through prayer, church attendance, and/or Bible study? Have family members and friends helped you to sustain your faith? Are there other factors that have helped you through difficult times?

Beware of false teachers, and handle the Word correctly. “But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them — bringing swift destruction on themselves” (2 Peter 2:1). Have you had to combat false teaching and, if so, how did you do it? What would you advise your loved ones do to avoid false teachers? Some outside the church would lead young people astray. You can help your children recognize the right model for teaching: “Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God” (2 Corinthians 2:17). Have you ever encountered someone misquoting the Scripture or changing the meaning to suit their own use? How did you address such a situation?

Pray and give thanks. “Ask and it will be given to you; seek

and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7). “Give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). How has your prayer life sustained you? Is a gentle reminder in order, that you need to not only ask but also give thanks?

Be gentle. “But the fruit of the Spirit is . . . gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22, 23). How did you learn to be gentle and patient? Was it by example from someone? Cite an incident of gentleness and patience that made a difference in your life.

Personal testimony

You do not need to be facing death as Paul was or graduating from high school to write a



valedictory. You might want to explain the following sentiments as your personal testimony:

What have your children or loved ones meant to you?

How have they added to the fulfillment of your life?

What have they taught you?

What would you like them to remember about you?

How has God been faithful to you in allowing them in your life?

In her 1952 valedictory, a young graduate expressed the hopes and dreams of her gradu-

ating class during a turbulent time in our nation’s history. She asked the audience, “Do you provide a supportive family environment with proper discipline, respect, praise, and most important of all — love? Can we tell our children how important respect and faith are at home because that is where values are learned? Can we assure them of our love and praise them for their accomplishments? If our children followed our examples in their activities and in relating to others, would their actions be guided by discipline, respect, praise, and love?”

Our respective valedictories can leave our children and loved ones our legacy of values in a personal testimony that we hope

will sustain them as they have us. We can then affirm with Paul: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7). **BA**

Annie Laura Smith writes from Huntsville, AL. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



Great Expectations

continued from page 7

expectation despite negative circumstances.

A few years ago, I suffered the loss of my mother. She was a fine woman and committed Christian. But before her death, she had recurring TMI's (small strokes) that preceded dementia, and she had declined for years in assisted living. My mother finally had the major stroke that we feared, severe enough to take her ability to communicate, move, and breathe easily.

For well over a week my mother lingered. We eventually began praying for her release because we did not think she could come back to a quality of life that we hoped for her. We sat by her, sometimes holding her hand, watching her labor for breath.

During this difficult time, I prayed that my mother would gently go home, but when that did not happen, I sought understanding from the Lord. He reminded me of the words of Job: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15).

From that day until her death on New Year's Day, I repeated these words to myself. God did not slay Mom; the broken condition of this world did that. I realized that the sad, lingering condition my mother suffered is the opposite of God's desire but is the legal ramification of sin.

The result is that I will trust Him in stormy weather because He is a reverse image of the worst we see. Where there is lingering death, He offers eternal

life. When people show hate, we can long for true love. As despair increases, it showcases the hope within our reach. And when we are inclined to lack resolve, God offers energy.

Just like Job the sufferer, Paul shows that Christ is magnified in his body in life, but even in death (Philippians 1:20).

Encouragement and perseverance

In addition to trust, God taught me other lessons through my mother's death. Since that

“ I will trust God in stormy weather because He is a reverse image of the worst we see. ”

difficult week, I have repeated these very words of Job to offer hope to other people who are suffering. I spoke them in my sermon for Mom's funeral and write them today in this article. When I was raw in discouragement, God used this experience to make me sensitive spiritually so that He might teach something valuable.

My mother is now safe in the arms of Jesus. We rejoice because her pain is over and her

eternal joy has just begun. Nevertheless, we have to keep rowing on, sometimes through storms and difficulties in a world that is at the least negligent and often antagonistic toward faith.

Paul knows this well, but he says that according to his *earnest expectation* — and yes, *hope* — he will preach boldly. Then he speaks these familiar words: "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (v. 21). This is a mouthful even for Paul. Christ is the ship that sails confidently through troubled waters. When Christ is our life, then physical death is only victory. Christ as our life means everything that what we suffer can have meaning and redemption. When we die to ourselves and live to Christ, hope overrides all of our "deaths." We then receive incentive to continue to live faithfully — contentedly (4:11).

Christ magnified

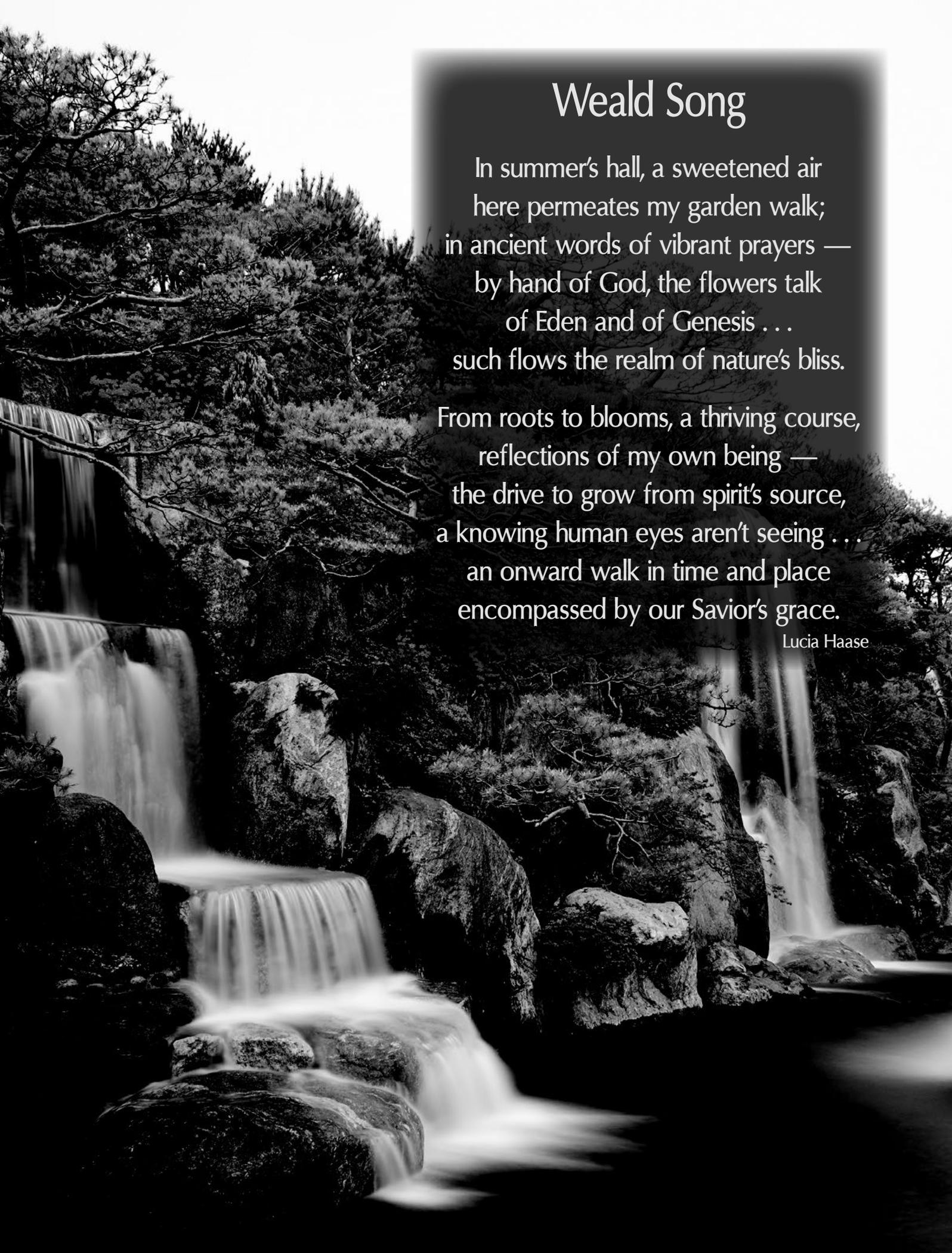
As finite people, we struggle to grasp the infinite, but here it is: *Jesus is the sum of all things, and everything else is in Him* (Colossians 1:16, 17). One day "Every knee should bow . . . and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Philippians 2:10, 11).

In the meantime, I hope to be that watchman who eagerly peers forward, awaiting redemption to live at a level of faith that Paul showed on a constant basis.

BA

Dr. David Downey writes from Burleson, TX.





Weald Song

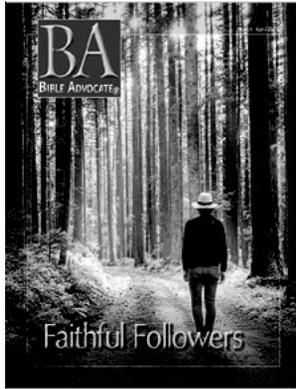
In summer's hall, a sweetened air
here permeates my garden walk;
in ancient words of vibrant prayers —
by hand of God, the flowers talk
of Eden and of Genesis . . .
such flows the realm of nature's bliss.

From roots to blooms, a thriving course,
reflections of my own being —
the drive to grow from spirit's source,
a knowing human eyes aren't seeing . . .
an onward walk in time and place
encompassed by our Savior's grace.

Lucia Haase



Readers Write



Faith literature

Dear friends in Christ at the Bible Advocate Press. A few days ago, I had asked the chaplain here at Stafford Creek to send me some faith-centered literature. He had sent me your *Bible Advocate* Magazine. The issue is dated from March to April 2021, called Faithful Followers.

I found your magazine encouraging, inspirational, and enlightening. I am writing to your ministry today to request a complimentary subscription, and I would like also to request the following literature from your ministry. The second quarterly of the Bible Study for Adults, *A Faithful Disciple: Following the Master with Peter*. And I also would like your ministry to include any updated tracts of Christian baptism and the Lord's Supper.

I just wanted to thank you for your service in Christ's ministry.

L. B.
Aberdeen, WA

Editor's note: Thank you for writing, L. B. I am happy to hear that the BA reached and ministered to you where you are. Your request for literature has been processed and is in the mail. Enjoy!

Spiritual benefit

To each of the brothers who write the articles, who answer

our questions, to each member of [the] team, thank you. Rest assured that each of the articles published in the *Bible Advocate* are of great benefit in my spiritual life. God continue to bless and help you in every aspect of your life.

M. A.
Email

Is Free Speech Important?

continued from page 15

say. You'll recall that Henry had the reputation of chopping off the heads of his enemies, including two of his wives.

As it turned out, Latimer boldly declared God's Word, and although Henry spared his life, Henry's daughter, Queen Mary (Bloody Mary), had him burned at the stake in Oxford. As he was dying amid the flames, he called out to Bishop Ridley, who was also consigned to the flames with him, and is quoted as saying, "Master Ridley, play the man; we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out."

The secret of boldness? Fear God more than the flames. Fear Him more than your reputation. Let us be done with fainthearted, tepid leadership. Ours is the day to "play the man" with bold, uncompromising truth and love, risking it all for God.

We can expect views that differ from those of the thought police will be boycotted, shamed, and outed. But we will not be silenced. We will endure the shame, the ridicule, and the penalties.

We will be heard, and we pray that the church will speak with one voice. **BA**

Dr. Erwin W.

Lutzer is pastor emeritus of the Moody Church, where he served as the senior pastor for 36 years. He is an award-winning author as well as the featured speaker on three radio programs heard on more than 750 national and international outlets. Scripture quotations are from the *English Standard Version*.



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LEA 111 Essentials of Vibrant Leadership July 25 - August 29

Do you need assistance with improving your leadership skills? Considering all that has been going on this past year, has it been difficult to be active in your church? Has your church family needed much from you, yet you feel lacking in leadership skills? If you need training to help you in this area, consider enrolling in Essentials of Vibrant Leadership.

Register here: <https://my.artioscollege.org/en/courses/1343>



Zoom Sabbath School

BA Editor Jason Overman joined the Bethel Church of God (Seventh Day) in Boston, MA, on May 1 to lead the discussion on Lesson 5 of The Faithful Disciple quarterly. Says Jason, "I was grateful for the invitation to share with the brethren in Boston and blessed by the fellowship."

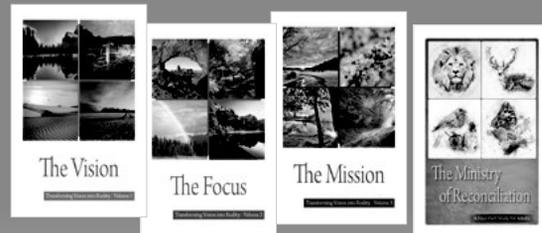


Virtual Graduation

Artios Christian College will hold a virtual graduation ceremony honoring the classes of 2020-2021 on August 7 at 4:00 p.m. (Pacific), 5:00 p.m. (Mountain), 6:00 p.m. (Central), 7:00 p.m. (Eastern).

We invite the membership of the General Conference to join us for this ceremony. You may participate through our Facebook page or our YouTube channel:

<https://www.facebook.com/ArtiosCollege>
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On Mission... in India

by Elder Jacob Rao

India is one of the ancient civilizations in the world, located at the center of South Asia. It shares borders with several sovereign countries: China, Bhutan, Nepal, and Pakistan in the north and northwest and Bangladesh and Myanmar in the East. India also shares maritime borders with Sri Lanka.

India is the second most populous country in the world (China is first), with a population of 1.366 billion, and is one of the largest democracies in the world.

National diversity

India remains one of the most ethnically diverse countries.

Apart from its many religions and sects, it is home to innumerable castes and tribes, as well as to more than a dozen major and hundreds of minor linguistic groups from several unrelated language families. The majority of the population is Hindu, but religious minorities, including Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains, still account for a significant portion of the population.

Despite continued domestic challenges and economic inequality, India has made significant progress in developing infrastructure and a highly diversified industrial base — one of the largest in the world. Indian scientific and engineering personnel are employed in many foreign countries.

Though the country's population remains largely rural, India has three of the most populous and cosmopolitan cities in the world: Mumbai (Bombay), Kolkata (Calcutta), and Delhi. Three other Indian cities — Bengaluru (Bangalore), Chennai (Madras), and Hyderabad — are among the world's fastest-growing high-technology centers. Most of the world's major information technology and software companies now have offices in India.

Sabbath movement

Vagiri (V. J.) Joseph first brought the Sabbath to India. He was one of the seventy elders chosen in a worldwide draw at Salem, West Virginia, on November 4, 1933, to serve the Church

of God in India. The Indian headquarters were established in Jonnalapalem, Penumentra, W. Godavari, South India.

Elder Joseph's younger son, Vagiri J. Utham Rao, continued to serve the Church under GC Missions Abroad from Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, till 2003, when he passed away at age 83.

Church planting and development

Elder Vagiri Jacob Sudhakar Rao was ordained as a pastor of the Church of God (Seventh Day) in December 1999. Initially, the Church was concentrated in the two states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Later, with the cooperation of Elder William C. Hicks, former Missions Director, Jacob Rao arranged the first-ever All India Pastors Conference at Hyderabad in 2001. About twenty senior pastors attended, representing the congregations from different states in India.

It was decided to form a national board, and the Association of the Churches of God (Seventh Day) was formed in 2003. In his pioneering efforts, Elder Jacob Rao travelled extensively throughout India, Myanmar, and Nepal. He took the initiative of the enrollment drive and planting of new churches. Today we have more than three hundred congregations in more than twelve states in India: Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Punjab, Mizoram, Assam, Meghalaya, West Bengal, Orissa, Jharkhand, etc., and neighboring countries of Myanmar and Nepal.

Elder Jacob Rao now serves the Church as Zone 4 (Asia) representative of the Interna-

tional Ministerial Congress (IMC) and as the general secretary of the Association of the Churches of God (Seventh Day), India. He took voluntary retirement from a construction job and has been in full-time ministry since 2010.

Since 1967, the Church was also developed in northeast India by Pastor George L. Hnamte in Lunglei, Mizoram. The Golden Jubilee of the CoG7 Mizoram Conference was celebrated in Aizawl. The Secretary of the IMC, Elder John Klassesek, also attended the function.

Need for training

Most of the pastors in India are now old, so young people need to be trained. To accomplish this, we need to set up a formal Bible training school in India. In 2013, the first and last visit of Elder Calvin Burrell and Bryan Cleeton, we had submitted the proposal for setting up a formal Bible training college in the centrally located state of Andhra Pradesh. But due to lack of financial support for developing the infrastructure, no progress has been made. We have been conducting the on-line monthly pastors' conference-cum-training every month, but this is not sufficient. We need a formal training curriculum to equip our pastors



to preach the gospel to millions of unsaved people in our country and in Asia.

We want to build a prayer hall-cum-training center in a central location in Andhra Pradesh. This would help us to have a better training facility with provision for conducting group training programs and pastors' conferences, in addition to expanding the church planting activities in this area.

- Cost of land: USD \$5,000
- Cost of construction: USD \$10,000

I appeal to individual sponsors/churches to support construction of the Bible college in India and support running the Bible training college in India.

Needs for development

We are thankful to IMC president, Elder Ramon Ruiz Garza, for sanctioning payment of a



India

Population: 1,330,637,000 (est.)

Capital: New Delhi

Land area: 1,222,550 sq mi /
3,166,391 sq km

Official language: Hindi, English

Religion: Hinduism (80 percent), Islam
(14 percent), Christianity (2.3 per-
cent), Sikhism (1.7 percent)

Congregations: 327

Pastors: 130

Members: 11,188

President: T. V. Rao



small monthly subsidy under Cristo Viene for our pastors in India. With the financial support of Elder Loren Stacy, president of the General Conference, every month we are paying the monthly subsidy to sixty pastors in India. The average monthly subsidy is USD \$30 per pastor, or an average of USD \$1 per day/ per pastor. Most of them work at part-time jobs in the agriculture fields or at some shops/establishments. Last year during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown period, our pastors suffered financially due to lack of jobs.

I appeal to our church leaders and members worldwide to pray for our poor pastors in India



who tirelessly work to preach the gospel of Christ to millions of unsaved people. Many of the pastors travel by foot to reach the remote villages. They do not even have bicycles. We request our brothers and sisters to sponsor a few bicycles/motorcycles for our pastors. If we provide better means of travel and communication (mobile phones), our younger generation of pastors can work more efficiently and do more church planting in new areas. There is great scope for development of new congregations in India.

With the growing number of church plantings in new states like Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand, and new areas in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana states, construction of small church buildings is needed. The cost of construction of a new church building is approximately USD \$10,000. We want to construct at least one church in each of these states.

Thanksgiving

I take this opportunity to thank Elder Jason Overman, editor, *Bible Advocate*, for inviting me to write this small note on the present situation of missions in India. I also thank Elder Ramon Ruiz Garza for his vision and leadership in guiding the Church worldwide even during the critical pandemic situation last year.

I thank Brother Bryan Cleeton for his unceasing prayers and support for the ministries in India and in Asia and for visiting India. He personally saw the poor and pitiable condition of our pastors and churches. I also thank Elder Calvin Burrell, former director of Missions Abroad, for visiting India in 2013 and for extending his support to its ministries during his tenure.

I am also greatly indebted to Elder Whaid Rose, former GC president, for his support during his tenure. In that time, the churches in India made rapid and remarkable progress in new church planting.

Last but not least, I thank wholeheartedly all our brothers and sisters of our churches/congregations in the US and Canada for their prayers and support for the ministries in India and in Asia. God bless you all.

Jacob Rao, M.Th., D.Min. is married to Vagiri Deena, and has two daughters, Saranya and Veronika. He lives in Hyderabad, Telangana State, where he has pastored since 1999.





Stand Firm

People who study the apostle Paul's armor of God passage most often focus on the pieces of that spiritual armor: the belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shield of faith, etc. However, I ask you to consider the *reason* Paul gives for putting on that armor. In Ephesians 6:11 (NASB95), Paul writes: "Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil" (emphasis mine). Verse 13 continues that theme: "take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm." And then verse 14 begins, "Stand firm."

Are you picking up a pattern? "Stand firm" is not limited to Ephesians 6. Paul encourages the Galatians to stand firm (5:1, NIV), as well as the Philippians (4:1) and the Thessalonians (2 Thessalonians 2:15). James also encourages believers to stand firm (5:8), as does Peter (1 Peter 5:9). Standing firm spiritually is a major theme of the apostles' teaching.

My favorite "stand firm" passage is 1 Corinthians 16:13: "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong" (NIV). This verse consists of four terse commands, each closely related to the others.

Command 1: Be on your guard. In Greek, this command is expressed in one word: *gregoreo*. In its secular usage, this was a military term meaning "Be alert! Be vigilant!" Paul borrows this command from the military and applies it to our spiritual warfare against the lies and enticements of the world, the flesh, and the devil. "Watch out!" he commands throughout his inspired writings. Watch out for false teachers and false gospels. Watch out for temptations to stray from focusing on Jesus. Be on your guard!

Command 2: Stand firm in the faith. Paul uses "the faith" here exactly as Jude uses it in Jude 3: "Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people" (NIV). In other words, the faith in which we are to stand firm is the good news about Jesus, that Jesus himself preached: In Jesus, the kingdom of God has come.

Command 3: Be courageous. As in Command 1, this term in the Greek is one word: *andrizomai*. A more accurate translation might be "Act like men!" Courage is part of that, but the emphasis seems to be upon maturity. "Exercise a *mature-in-the-faith* courage!" is Paul's command. Maturity in the faith is a theme throughout 1 Corinthians. In 14:20, Paul has just pleaded with these believers "do not be children in your thinking . . . but in your thinking be mature" (NASB). To stand firm in the faith, one must be mature in the faith.

Command 4: Be strong. A bit more Greek? This command is a verb in the passive voice. Passive verbs receive rather than perform action. A better translation than "Be strong!" is "Be strengthened!" The spiritual strength we need to stand firm in the faith is not something we can create ourselves. It is something God creates within us as we submit to Him in Christ. Be strengthened!

Four spiritual imperatives: Stay alert! Stand firm! Behave mature! Be strong with God-given strength! That's a recipe for Christian faithfulness.

— Loren Stacy



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