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**Wonder and Worship**



## 2023: Come and See



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## Who Is Jesus?

Welcome to 2023! “Come and See” is our theme this year. That’s the invitation Jesus gave in John 1:39. What do we find when we follow? Who is this Jesus? Where is He taking us? What are we becoming along the way? That’s what this year is all about.

At a recent evangelism training event, I was asked to write down on a blank piece of paper “what Jesus means to me.” The more I pondered the question, the more profound it became. Eternity hangs on the answer. On one hand, we don’t get to impose our “meaning” on Jesus. He is who He is, and not just who we would like Him to be. But that is the way of the world today. Truth is merely the meaning we make. The real Jesus is too often obscured by the subjective meanings we conjure.

On the other hand, I realized that what Jesus means to me is formed by the witness of the Bible. Back in John 1, we find Him called the Lamb of God. I am a sinner, and He is my Savior. He is called Rabbi. He is the Master, and I am His disciple. He is called the Christ. He is King, and I am His servant (vv. 36, 38, 41). That’s what Jesus means to me — because that’s who He truly is.

But most revealing of all is what John says first about Jesus. He is the Word who was with God and who is God. He was made flesh and dwelt among us to declare the Father to us: “I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God” (1:1, 14, 18, 34). The Jesus the Bible reveals to be the revelation of God himself is the Jesus I have come to know. His meaning has shaped my own.

The actual answer to what Jesus means carries eternal weight. It is not just what Jesus means to me but what He means for the whole world. In the answer is the source of all wonder and worship, for at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God. Amen.

— Jason Overman





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# Fear of the Lord

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Come and see the  
holiness of God.

by **Jody McCoy**

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The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding (Proverbs 9:10).

From Adam to Noah, God related to humanity as a single community unified by a common language. They were governed, not externally by God's law but by their conscience. Paul speaks of this internal governance in Romans 2:14, 15. Even without a written law, the people knew right from wrong. Adam and Eve knew it was wrong to

disobey God. Cain knew it was wrong to murder his brother.

As the years passed, this community lost their fear of God, perhaps by mischaracterizing God's longsuffering as moral ambivalence. Instead of living obedient lives in gratitude for God's grace, they succumbed to all sorts of evil desires. When we arrive at Noah's day, we read:

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart (Genesis 6:5, 6).

How sad! God created humans in His own image as the pinnacle of His earthly creation. He gave them the unique privi-

lege of returning His love by freely choosing to obey Him. Instead, humans used that freedom to reject God's love by losing their fear of Him and disobeying Him. They corrupted each other until all in the community but one had decayed into a universal rejection of God's love and goodness.

God grieved over their choice, knowing the fate they had chosen for themselves. As Noah labored for decades building the ark, his work became God's daily warning to turn from sin before it was too late. Instead, the people mocked Noah, defying God's warning until the day His holy judgment came with the Flood. At that time, the breath of life God had given them was taken from them as they sank into the deep.

## God is holy

The troubling question is, “How could the entire world become so depraved?” Scripture doesn’t say, but it’s reasonable to infer that humanity had adopted a “herd morality,” a mindset that believes “As long as I follow the crowd, I’ll be OK.” We all get a safety-in-numbers feeling from being in a group. If everyone is doing it, how can I be held individually responsible?

The Flood is our warning that “safety in numbers” provides no escape from God’s judgment. Though God is longsuffering and loving, God is also holy. He will not tolerate sin forever.

Let’s say you’re walking in a city park with a gentle breeze blowing through the trees and squirrels playing in the thick grass. As you head for the pond to feed the ducks, you’re tempted to take a shortcut across the grass instead of following the meandering paved trail. You’re about to step onto the grass when you notice a sign that says, “Please stay on the trail. City Ordinance #1215.”

That’s the scenario. Now ask yourself three questions:

If I’m the only one in the park, would I ignore the sign and walk across the grass?

If I’m in a crowded park and no one else is walking on the grass, would I do it then?

If I’m in a crowded park and everyone else is walking on the grass, would I walk across the grass?

Perhaps you’d resist the temptation to walk across the grass in the first two scenarios, but what about the third one? This is the power of influence. What-

ever others do influences what I do, even when I know better. Likewise, what I do influences what others do, for better or for worse. Most of us tend to follow the crowd, without realizing the crowd is also following us. My choices affect those around me.

Now let’s say that everyone else is walking on the grass, and a park policeman arrives just as you step out onto the grass. He asks if you saw the sign, then gives you a ticket. Do you feel a sense of injustice that you got a ticket when everyone else was doing it too?

This feeling that “I’m only doing what everyone else is doing” is the herd morality. It’s the feeling that I can’t be held individually responsible for my actions if

too. They no longer felt personally accountable to their Creator.

## God is personal

Our human nature is intriguing. We don’t want to be held individually accountable for following the crowd, yet we still want to be treated as individuals. We can’t have it both ways. Either God sees us as individuals, or He doesn’t.

Do you remember when Abraham negotiated with God? God was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because no hope remained for the people to ever turn to God. Their continued existence would only corrupt others who still had hope.

Abraham was concerned about his nephew, Lot, and

“When you alone remain faithful while all those around you are doing wrong, God sees.”

I’m just one of the herd.

But are you right to feel unjustly treated? The fact that others also did wrong only adds to your guilt because your example encouraged them to do wrong. It’s true that they are just as guilty as you, but not all wrongdoers get caught right away.

The people of Noah’s day probably felt the same way. They were safe to disobey God because everyone else was doing it

negotiated with God: “What if there were fifty righteous people there? Would You destroy the righteous with the wicked? What about forty? What about thirty? Twenty? Ten?” It appears that Abraham was asking God, “Do You just see masses of people, or do You see individuals?”

God replied that if ten righteous remained in the city, He would spare not only the righteous but also the entire city

for their sake. God's answer indicates that He sees each individual — and more. He also sees their potential influence. As long as a righteous influence exists, there is still hope. But by silencing all such influence, the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah had extinguished all hope of their redemption.

God is a God who cares for individuals, who creates a moral law to protect the rights of individuals. What you do matters. When you alone remain faithful while all those around you are doing wrong, God sees.

We each make our own choices. Your choice has meaning, especially when the crowd is going the other way. There are eight billion people on earth, yet God knows every hair on your head (Matthew 10:29-31). The fact that most others are making the wrong choice changes nothing. Because He wants the best for you, He cares about the choices you make. That's who God is.

## God will judge

If we hate injustice, stealing, lying, cheating, rape, murder, sex trafficking, child abuse, political corruption, and immorality, how much more does God, who sees the hearts of everyone, hate evil? Psalm 7:11 tells us that "God is angry with the wicked every day."

Praise God that He will not tolerate evil forever. He has appointed a day when He will judge the world (Acts 17:31), on the day of the Lord's wrath (e.g., Zephaniah 1:14-18). Jesus will be revealed and, in flaming fire, take vengeance on those who neither know God nor obey the gospel

(2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). God is holy, and God will judge.

In 2 Peter 3:3-14, Peter describes the world in the last days. He says scoffers will come, walking after their own lusts, openly doubting God's past judgment in the Flood and God's future judgment at Christ's second coming. It's a repeat of the world that mocked Noah before the Flood.

Peter goes on to say that even if a thousand years or more pass before Jesus comes, don't interpret this delay as moral ambivalence. God will bring the judgment He's promised. His delay is His longsuffering because He wants everyone to repent and turn to Him. But for those who persist in evil, the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. Knowing God's promise that He will destroy the world by a

consuming fire of holy judgment, what manner of persons should we be in all holy conversation and godliness?

Scripture categorizes people into those who fear God (His children) and those who don't (the world). "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil" (Proverbs 8:13) because sin brings God's holy judgment. It is right for us to fear God's coming judgment on those who embrace sin and be moved by compassion to warn them. **BA**

**Jody McCoy** is the executive director of the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day). He writes from Austin, TX.



## Membership Notice

All members of the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day) who will be at least 18 years of age as of July 11, 2023, and who wish to vote during our 2023 convention, should register for convention no later than **May 1, 2023**. They must indicate on the form their intention to vote. Because of the time it may take to validate some memberships, we cannot guarantee that those who register later will be able to vote.

Additionally, because of the time it takes to process membership applications, this deadline also applies to anyone wishing to become a member before our 2023 convention. **No new memberships will be issued the week of convention (July 10-15, 2023).**



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# Worship Wars

by **Cindy Arora**

And he [the false prophet] makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed (Revelation 13:12).

God rescued Isabella\* from a homosexual and destructive lifestyle. Looking back, she realized how even the music she had listened to glorified corruption. The lyrics honored what God calls evil and drew her deeper into darkness. She was literally worshiping the enemy of her soul by singing along with his mantra.

Worship is exactly what Satan has always desired. He wanted to be like the Most High God (Isaiah 14:14). He sought to get Jesus to worship him during His wilderness temptations (Matthew 4:9). Even today, he continually seeks to be worshipped.

God alone is worthy of worship. He rules the universe from His heavenly throne (Revelation 4). God shines forth brilliance and beauty and is surrounded by a rainbow of mercy (v. 3). Light and power emanate from His throne, and the four living creatures continually worship around it. The twenty-four elders fall down before the throne. Heaven vibrates with the worship of God.

This is the worship war. Satan longs to receive the praise that God alone deserves. Currently, the war rages in the heavenlies and in individual hearts, like Isabella's.

God created us to worship Him (Isaiah 43:21). Yet Satan is always tempting us to honor things or people rather than God. Who has your heart in this worship war? There is no middle ground; we are either in God's camp or the enemy's. Whose priorities do we follow? Whose songs do we sing? Who is winning the war in our hearts?

One day, that war will explode onto the earth. Satan will empower his false prophet to make the earth worship him (Revelation 13:12). Once his worldwide worship is established, Satan will demand worship by death threats and economic pressure (vv. 15-17).

Don't panic! I have good news. Jesus has already triumphed over Satan at the cross (Colossians 2:15). God will pour out His wrath upon Satan and his minions, ridding the earth of his evil forever (Revelation 14-19).

Finally, the war will be over! We will no longer struggle to keep God first in our hearts. God will dwell among the people He loves, wiping away our tears (Revelation 21). Forever, we will sing our uninhibited worship to Him. I look forward to that day!

Come, Lord Jesus, come! **BA**

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**Cindy Arora** writes from Redmond, WA. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.



\*Name has been changed.



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What we learn about God  
from the prophet Isaiah.  
by Ubong Edet

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And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" (Isaiah 6:3).

From Isaiah's time until today, trying to explain the person and holiness of God has been a complex undertaking. The prophet Isaiah wrestled with explaining it. He was privileged to get a glimpse of the awesome, terrifying throne room of God (Isaiah 6:1-4). So he wondered "How can a sinful man like me talk about God's holiness? How can I possibly describe the infinite Creator?"

What makes this so difficult is one theological aspect of God's character: His *transcendence*. That means He is wholly unlike us, wholly independent of the material universe. So any attempts to describe Him will come up woefully short. All we can do is scratch the surface.

Since God is transcendent, He cannot be known by our own efforts. Therefore, another theological aspect of His character is His *immanence*. We could not know God all by ourselves, so He chose to reveal Himself to us, as He did to Isaiah. He showed us as much as our little minds could grasp about who He is.

That's what God did with John the Revelator. The same scene He granted Isaiah to see, He granted to John. As John was taken up in vision, he drew attention to the throne of God (Revelation 4). He saw God there

and from it, flashes of lightning, rumblings, and peals of thunder symbolizing God's action — in particular, His judgments on the earth. The brilliance of the throne room was overwhelming, with glimmering crystals and fiery reds. John saw a rainbow around it that shone like an emerald. He also saw a sea of glass before the throne and twenty-four elders seated on thrones around it.

As John looked, the four living creatures sat around the throne, each of them with six wings and full of eyes all around and within. They echoed the words of the Seraphim in Isaiah 6: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" (v. 8).

How often did these four living creatures say these words? John says day and night — without stopping. Of all the attributes they could have used to describe



the Lord, the four living creatures chose holiness. They called to one another, “Holy, holy, holy,” using repetition to emphasize this singular attribute. God’s holiness is His only attribute repeated in triplicate.

In the entire Bible, Isaiah 6 is the only place that speaks of the seraphim, making them a mysterious order of angels (see sidebar). They have six wings and are pictured flying in God’s throne room. Their wings cover their faces and feet perhaps because God’s glory is too intense to view and because of the holy ground they tread, as Moses experienced (Exodus 3).

## Defining ‘holy’

What does it mean that God is holy, holy, holy? The Bible gives several answers.

**1. God cannot sin.** Numbers 23:19 says, “God is not a man, that He should lie.” It is logically incorrect to say God can do everything; God *cannot* sin. His motives are pure. His actions are right. His plans are perfect. Since God cannot sin, we can trust Him completely.

**2. God hates sin.** Proverbs 8:13 says, “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate.” Remember that to hate sin, we need to get closer to God.

**3. God will judge sin.** Hebrews 9:27 says, “As it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.” God’s justice flows from His holiness because He is all good and will one day judge all sin. Only one of two people will take the judgment for sin: the sinner on judg-



Seraphim are the angelic order identified only in Isaiah 6. Like the living creatures in Revelation 4, but unlike those seen in Ezekiel 1, the seraphim have six wings. A pair covers their face, two more their feet, and with two wings they fly. The seraphim also differ in reference to their single “face” (Isaiah 6:2), whereas the living creatures in Ezekiel and Revelation are described as having four faces: man, lion, ox/calf, and eagle. Primarily, their role appears to be to worship God, calling attention to His holiness and majesty and transcendence. They are also involved as agents of purification, taking the burning coal to Isaiah and announcing his forgiveness (6:6, 7). The seraphim are amazing beings that remind us of God’s awesome creative power.

— Ubong Edet

## True Worship

What is the proper response to such a holy, sinless God? Worship, according to Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4. One of the things we see in those chapters is that the angels’ full-time job is to worship God. If worship is done correctly anywhere, it is within His throne room. There, God will be worshipped as He should be, with the total focus on Him — who He is and what He has done — and not on us.

This must be the aim of our worship. Is God the focus, or are we? Is His name honored, or our own? Is the song we sing true? Is the prayer we pray authentic? Does it please God? From the angels we can learn an important lesson about the nature of true worship. It is extolling, lifting up God’s character. True worship is God focused. The angels gaze on Him and rejoice in who He is.

The question we must ask ourselves is if our worship is worshipful. Does it exalt ourselves or our God? God seeks praise and glory for all the things He has done. He is the Creator. He is the Redeemer. He is the King. If someone else tries to take glory for themselves, it is unjust and robs God. “I am the LORD, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images” (Isaiah 42:8).

— Ubong Edet

ment day or Jesus, who took the judgment for sin on the cross.

## Woe is me!

Considering God's view of sin, it's time we look at ourselves for personal and communal revival. Two things are needed for our spiritual lives to spring up: *an awareness of the holiness of God and an awareness of our depth of sin.* Isaiah expressed this:

"Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (6:5).

Isaiah was given an amazing opportunity, but he wasn't proud that, out of all the people in the world, he was chosen for this privilege. When he saw the glory of the Lord, he was overwhelmed by the weight of it and the weight of his own sin. He understood the deep wickedness of his own heart. Sometimes woe is used in the Bible to denote an inescapable distress or a feeling of grief so serious that words can't express it.

People think that their sin is not serious, because they use the wrong standard: themselves. We realize our sins are serious only when we encounter the standard of God's holiness.

Isaiah experienced that holy standard, and in comparison with God's, he came up short. Like God's writing on the wall to Belshazzar, king of Babylon, He told Isaiah, "You have been weighed and found lacking." Isaiah wasn't close. Neither are we. By ourselves, we are hopeless.

Isaiah understood the depth

of his sin when he was commissioned as a prophet. As far as we know, the Bible doesn't tell us that he was especially sinful. Compared to those around him, he was holier and more righteous than most. But seeing God, he came face to face with himself, and he didn't like what he saw. He knew guilt.

## Found guilty

Guilt is not a nice feeling. In the world today, people seek to escape feelings of guilt. But the Word of God is a mirror that shows His holy standards and how we fall short of them and how His Spirit convicts us to repent of our sin and guilt.

Some sins the Bible says we are guilty of are pride, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, covetousness, idolatry, anger, and wrath; malice, blasphemy, filthy communication, lying, selfishness, and unfaithfulness; gossip, discontentment, stubbornness, drunkenness, envyings, unforgiveness and unsubmitiveness, hate, hard-heartedness, homosexuality, abortion, swearing, ungratefulness, lack of mercy. We are lovers of self, mockers,

thieves, tax evaders, busybodies, etc. (Romans 1; 2 Timothy 3).

When Isaiah saw God, he saw himself in this list, and he was overwhelmed by it. Have you come to the point where you can say, "Woe is me!"? Before we can move forward to where God wants us to go, we must first face our holy God and, like Isaiah, say, "Woe is me! I am unclean."

The good news is God did not reveal this to Isaiah to rub his face in his own guilt. He did it to show Isaiah the way of escape. The only true escape is through the mercy and forgiveness of God in Christ.

Yes, God is a holy God. One day we will join the billions of people at the throne and praise Him for His holiness that cleanses us from sin. Amen! **BA**

**Ubong Edet** is the president of youth ministry in the Church of God (Seventh Day) Calabar District, Cross River State, Nigeria.



COMING SOON!

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IN SPANISH!

# Questions & Answers



**How** do we reconcile the Bible's teaching of a God of love and a God of wrath?

**There** is no reconciliation to be made in God's nature. God's love and God's wrath exist in the context of one another. As surely as a mountain's peak cannot exist without the valley deep, so God's love cannot exist without His wrath. The height of God's love, expressed in what is good and compatible with His design, highlights God's wrath expressed in judgment of everything that is not good or defies His design. The love of God and the wrath of God are but views of the same attribute of God from different perspectives: His holiness.

The sovereign God is the supremacy of holiness (Isaiah 6:3). As God is holy, so those who are in the light are made holy by Him (Leviticus 19:2). But those outside the holiness of God receive His wrath: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18).

Most important, what is impossible with man is possible with God. He provides His holiness for us if we believe and receive His divine design in Christ Jesus (Matthew 19:26; John 1:12). Because God is holy, He sent His holy Son to die in our place and take the punishment, judgment, and wrath as our substitute — to sanctify (make holy) His people.

Only by the wrath of God expressed by the sacrifice of His only begotten Son do we experience the love of God. Christ's payment satisfies God's judgment for the sins of those who express their faith in God to redeem them from a hopeless end.

He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:5, 6).

As God is holy, so the children of God have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Hebrews 10:10).

Amazingly, those in Christ are holy in Him — with *His holiness*. Those not in Christ are not holy. "In Christ" means receiving God's love. Those who are not in Christ receive God's wrath. It is not reconciliation of God's nature but rather reconciliation of us with God's design for creation. If God did not exercise His wrath, He would violate His love to make all things holy, even as He is holy.

While God's wrath must exist for the expression of God's love, the Bible teaches that it is conditional and limited in relation to His eternal and essential attribute of love: "For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime" (Psalm 30:5, NIV). "In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer" (Isaiah 54:8, KJV; cf. Exodus 20:5, 6).

God's love demands that the Creator not be indifferent to evil and suffering. Quite the opposite. God's love justifies or commands God's wrath. Simply put, divine wrath is the "other side" of divine love and must exist for the holiness of God to be realized. For God to not express His wrath at the corroding and awful impact of human sin would mean He is not a God of love.

— Elder Chip Hinds



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# Wholly . . . Holy . . . Holey

by Marcia Sanders

David was confused. His pastor had said we were to “be holy as God is holy,” but David wasn’t sure what he meant or even which word he meant: W-H-O-L-L-Y, H-O-L-Y, or H-O-L-E-Y. He was pretty sure it wasn’t that last one. That was like the old socks Mom made him throw out for their many holes.

When David looked up *wholly* in the dictionary, the definition talked about being full or complete. That could describe God. He is definitely complete; He doesn’t need anything. He created everything, so what would be left for Him to want?

\* \* \*

Then David thought about the cover of his Bible: the *Holy Bible*. So what does *holy* mean? Back to the dictionary.

*Aw, this must be it*, he thought. It said, “. . . worthy of complete devotion as one perfect in goodness and righteousness.” Sounded like God, all right. Did *not* sound like David.

“It’s like, in what universe am I worthy of complete devotion, or perfect?” David wondered as he sat on the front porch talking to Skippy, his chocolate lab. He thought about the times he tried to be good — tried his hardest — but something would happen to mess it up. He’d get angry or do something that upset others, like not turning in his homework or telling his friend, Jason, he’d come over after school (forgetting he’d promised Dad he would mow the lawn).

*Nope*, David thought, *I am nowhere near perfect, so I can’t be holy like God*. Skippy just looked at him with those adoring eyes, making David think he could do nothing wrong in the eyes of his four-legged friend. Even if he forgot to feed him,

Skippy was still there, loving him completely. *I wonder if there’s a lesson there*, David thought, considering how Skippy loved him unconditionally.

David’s mom and dad also loved him unconditionally, although they got upset when he messed up. His dad always said that you have to work hard to accomplish anything in life. Maybe he needed to work harder at being holy.

\* \* \*

Mom came out to the porch to see why David had been sitting so quietly. As he shared his thoughts, she smiled. “This is one time that hard work won’t help. Let’s look at some Bible verses. We’ll start with Ephesians 2:8, 9: ‘For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.’ So

*continued on page 15*



There is a sense of excitement about next year's GC Convention as members look forward to meeting after four long years. While COVID interrupted our 2021 plans, anticipation for this convention is high. If you have not already done so, highlight July 10-15 on your personal calendar and go to [cog7.org/convention](http://cog7.org/convention) to learn all the details. Registration is open in early January.

**Location.** The beautiful town of Covington, Kentucky, is directly across the Ohio River from Cincinnati. A little-known fact is that the Cincinnati Airport is actually located in Covington, so the airport is listed as CVG. A couple of our reserved hotels look across the river to a view of downtown Cincinnati. Both the Bengals' and Reds' stadiums sit on the edge of the river, and riverboats and barges frequently pass under the picturesque bridges. Walkways line the river, and paintings of historic events in Covington history are displayed along the path.

**Hotels.** Three hotels provide options for families. To meet our commitments, please make your hotel reservations through the hotel portal (Passkey) on the convention website. This link will provide detailed information about each hotel. Remember that only reservations made on the convention website count toward our hotel commitments.

*Marriott Riverside:* This is the official convention hotel, connected to the Convention Center by a walkway. Convention registration will be located within the Marriott. After you register there, walk across the covered walkway to convention activities. The Marriott has been newly renovated, and a

continental breakfast will be provided. Room rates are \$140, plus tax and parking.

*Embassy Suites Riverside:* This hotel is adjacent to the Marriott. Rooms rates are also \$140, plus tax, and include breakfast.

*Holiday Inn Riverfront:* Located approximately one mile from the Convention Center, this hotel is near several family-friendly restaurants. Covington offers a shuttle that runs every 15 minutes between the hotels and around town. The cost is \$1 per trip. Room rates at the Holiday Inn are \$119, plus tax, and include breakfast.

Remember that details about each hotel are accessed through the convention website.

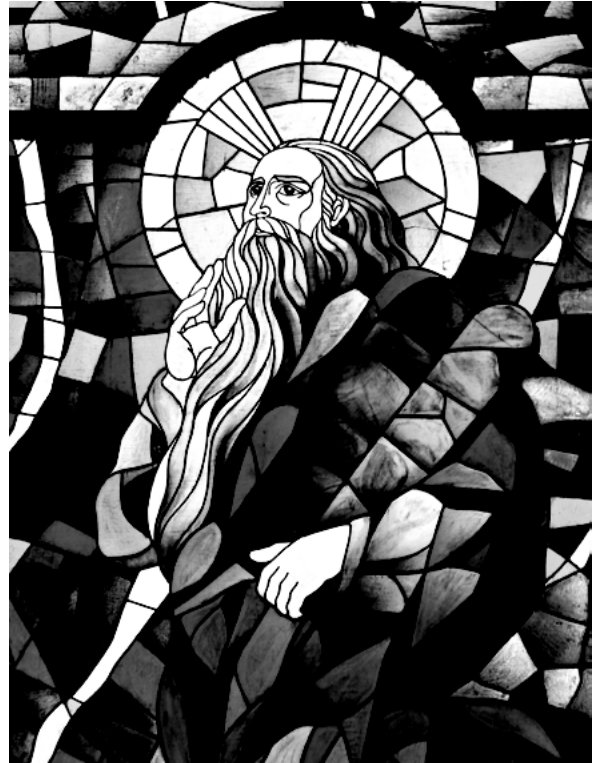
**Meals.** As in previous years, meals will be offered at the Convention Center for those of you wishing to purchase tickets. Menus are posted on the website, so you can choose meals that work for you. Your assistance in meeting the food and beverage minimum is appreciated.

**Program.** Morning sessions are reserved for Conference business and elections of leadership. Various workshops highlighting our GC Ministries theme, "Come and See," as well as motivation for our Christian walk, will fill our afternoons. Adults can choose from approximately 30 workshops. Each evening will draw us into God's presence with inspiring songs and uplifting sermons.

Nursery care will be provided, as well as children's, youth, and young adult programs.

*continued on page 30*

# Before the Big Break



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Learning to trust the  
God of Elijah.  
by **Bonita Hele**

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Imagine the most powerful man in a country. He is the king. He has some major resources. His rule stretches far and wide. And he is evil — so evil that it was said he “did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him” (1 Kings 16:30).

The passage goes on to say:

And it came to pass, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took as wife Jezebel . . . and he went and served Baal and worshiped him. Then he set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal

. . . Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him (v. 31-33).

Now imagine another man called by God to confront this powerful and wicked king: the prophet Elijah. Picture yourself in his place. You feel the unmistakable call of God to speak against blatant evil, but you know what that call might mean. Would you trust God?

Would I? It’s hard to say whether I would have had the faith to do what Elijah did. Elijah was called to not only confront Ahab but also curse the very land in the presence of Ahab, saying, “As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word” (17:1).

God’s prophet was in a difficult place then, but the God he worshipped did not leave Elijah to fend for himself. He led him

to a place he could hide, near a brook called Cherith, and added, “You shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there” (v. 4).

The rain had ceased throughout the land, but God had given Elijah a great place to wait until everything was normal again. He even had a few birds as his personal waiters for breakfast and dinner. Elijah might have thought, *I’ll just wait it out until the rain comes or Ahab has a change of heart or he dies — whichever comes first.*

But none of those things happened. Instead, the brook began to dry up. The water, once flowing and bubbling over stones and clefts, turned into a thin, shallow creek. Elijah must have watched the receding waterline with great concern as it went down, down, down, finally dwindling to barely a trickle. And still no word from God.

## Waiting

Has that ever happened to you? You've made a decision. You know God was in it. You felt His guidance and direction. So you move forward, feeling on top of the world.

Then He says, "Wait here" and leads you to a quiet place. You look around. Nothing much is happening. In fact, nothing at all — except that all you hoped and dreamed for appears to be dwindling all around you. Broken dreams. Misplaced hopes. And you have no choice but to wait and hold on a little longer.

Will you worship?

Will you pray?

Will you keep trusting, clinging to the only One who has led you this far?

It is in the waiting that we often find a greater faith than we ever had before, a greater strength than we thought was possible. A deep sense of worship that comes only through times you cannot see beyond the dwindling brook. A faith that comes only through times we have nowhere to look but up, to the place our help comes from.

Elijah went on to perform some amazing feats in his service to a God of wonders and majesty. In the chapters that follow, he called down fire from heaven. He slew hundreds of idol-worshipping false prophets. He brought someone back from the dead. He never tasted death but was instead taken into heaven.

But first, before his big break, Elijah waited. First, his faith grew. First, he was still and learned to recognize God's voice, not in the thunderous skies and quaking ground, but in the gentlest of whispers.

There, he learned that our God is truly a God of wonders and that He is worthy of worship.

## Trust

Maybe you're not quite sure yet. That's OK. Your brook might not be dry enough.

Just wait a little longer. And trust. The God who led Elijah to a river in the desert, and then through the wilderness into a period of greater accomplishments and success than he ever thought possible, will do the same for you.

This is the promise of the God who is worthy of worship:

"He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do . . . And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it" (John 14:12-14). **BA**

**Bonita Hele** writes from Fresno, CA.



**Check out this issue's  
Online Extra:  
Jessica's Legacy  
by Heidi Khalil  
Visit [baonline.org](http://baonline.org).**

# Wholly . . . Holy . . . Holey

*continued from page 12*

your salvation comes only as a gift of God. You can't work hard enough to be holy."

"But," David protested, "I want to be holy so God will love me."

Mom smiled. "It doesn't work that way. Holiness is not the way to God. God is the way to holiness." She continued, "Remember John 3:16? You memorized that one last year. 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life' (NASB). He has already shown how much He loves you."

"So," David said slowly. "I can't earn my way to God by being good?"

"No, when you accept the sacrifice His Son made for you and give your heart completely to Him, then God's Spirit will teach you about holiness and how to be more like Him."

"Wow, thanks Mom!" David smiled. "That helps a lot. Now, one more question. Can I have some of those cookies I smell?"

**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 *English Standard Version*, except where noted.



# Getting to Know Our God

## The Four G's of

**1. God is GREAT**  
(vv. 3-8)

- God is powerful
- God is sovereign

**God is our Creator**

...

**Jesus as the ...  
Greatness of God**  
(Matthew 8:23-27)

- Who has power?

**Jesus is our Creator**  
(Colossians 1:16)

**2. God is GOOD**  
(vv. 7, 8)

- God is perfect
- God is faithful

**God is our Judge**

...

**Jesus as the ...  
Goodness of God**  
(Mark 10:17-22)

- Who is good?

**Jesus is our Judge**  
(Acts 10:42)

**I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name  
Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your**



from Psalm 145 ...

# God's Nature

**3. God is GRACIOUS**  
(v. 8)

- God is loving
- God is forgiving

**God is our Redeemer**

...

**Jesus as the ...  
Graciousness of God  
(Luke 5:18-26)**

- Who can forgive sin?

**Jesus is our Redeemer  
(Titus 2:14)**

**4. God is GLORIOUS**  
(vv. 5-12)

- God is wonderful
- God is majestic

**God is our King**

...

**Jesus as the ...  
Glory of God  
(John 2:1-11)**

- Who is wonderful?

**Jesus is our King  
(Revelation 19:16)**

forever and ever. . . .

dominion endures throughout all generations (Psalm 145:1, 13).

# Where

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by Loren Gjesdal

The North American Ministerial Council was held in Covington, Kentucky, recently. During that time, the community surrounding the council was hosting an event called Blink. Each night prominent buildings were lit with laser light shows, and just outside the meeting area a large drone swarm created a three-dimensional display that morphed from one image to the next, delighting onlookers.

One nearby building, lit with lasers, featured impressive architecture, including tall spires. One nice evening my wife and I decided to see this particular display for ourselves. After taking in the light show, set to music, we were told that the building was open to tour, so we went inside.

The exterior display of sound and light was quickly overshadowed by the ornate decoration of the high ceiling. It was supported by massive columns, surrounded by stained glass windows. At one end was an amazing pipe organ, and at the other end an elaborate altar featuring statues of Jesus, the apostles, and Mary. We found ourselves in a

large Catholic church. We were filled with mixed emotions of awe and discomfort.

Jesus was on prominent display in the building, but He was just one part — and a relatively small part — of an elaborate display meant to create a sense of wonder. The awe, however, seemed directed more toward the institution of the church than toward the Son on the cross.

It made me think about my church and our worship service. Who is at the center? Where is our attention directed? Is there any sense of awe and wonder?

## Wonder in worship

The prophet Ezekiel knew something about the proper focus of our worship. His vision of God's throne is bewildering, for sure, but one response comes through loud and clear. Standing in the presence of God filled him with not just awe and wonder but with reverence and fear. Observe Ezekiel trying to describe what he saw:

Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance; and on that which resembled a throne,

high up, was a figure with the appearance of a man. Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and there was a radiance around Him. As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking (1:26-28).

God's purpose in sending His Son to die was not simply to forgive our sins but to remove the barrier that had separated the Creator from His creation. Jesus tore the veil so that we could enter into the presence of the Holy without being destroyed.

The question that struck me as I stood gawking at the architecture and decoration of the Catholic church was whether there is left in us any awe and wonder at the amazing privilege we enjoy in Jesus. I wondered whether our worship service directs our hearts toward reverencing God

# is the Wonder?

or reverencing something less.

Most of our churches do not boast gold-gilded columns, ornate stained glass windows, or giant pipe organs. But maybe we do feel pressure to produce an inspiring worship service, with a full band of skilled musicians playing the most popular songs or to livestream a service with good lighting and production values. There is a danger that our efforts may aim to impress visitors with our church rather than with our Savior.

Let's consider Jesus' promise: "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself" (John 12:32). Jesus was speaking of the cross, of course. But I think the parallel to the priorities of our local church is valid. If our heart's focus is on increasing the honor and reverence of Jesus' name, He will be present, working to draw Spirit-convicted hearts to their Savior.

## Changing focus

The Reformers attempted to redress the Catholic Church's self-exaltation by restoring the preaching of God's Word to the center of the church service. Statues were removed and sometimes all decoration and musical

instruments as well, for safe measure. The clear proclamation of Jesus' life and teaching was to receive the main focus of attention, and the individual's response in song and prayer was to be the ornamentation of the sanctuary.

In our local church, we are looking at refreshing the look of the sanctuary, updating the A/V equipment, and including more instruments in the song service. In each one of these efforts, our best motive is to express reverence for our Savior, to better communicate the gospel, and to increase participation in worship.

Our challenge, however, is to not be enamored with a sound and light show, or to be proud of our facility. If done well, all these fade into the background, removing potential distractions so that the gospel can be more clearly heard, Jesus more fully known, and our Savior more sincerely worshipped.

## Pastor's desire

My prayer for the local church where I serve is that we would long to enter the presence of God each week, to be in awe of the One we are meeting with, to be overwhelmed by the price of the privilege. My encourage-

ment to the worship team each week is to not seek to impress anyone with their skill. Rather, they should invite each person in attendance to express love, gratitude, and reverence to the Creator, who gave His Son to reconcile us to Himself, and lead by example.

My prayer is that anyone who attends any of our services will leave saying, "Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place" and wish they could have stayed a little longer in His presence, impatient to wait another week to do it again.

When someone leaves any CoG7 church, may they be thinking something greater than "That sure is a nice facility" or "I enjoyed the songs we sang." May their hearts still be singing of God's majesty and mystery, His awesomeness and holiness. **BA**

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**Loren Gjesdal** is co-director of Artios Christian College and co-pastor of the Marion Church of God (Seventh Day) in Oregon. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.





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Moses and the promise  
of a Prophet like him.  
by Dorothy Nimchuk

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**I**magine! Still climbing mountains at age one hundred twenty! Moses had an appointment to keep with the Lord on Mount Nebo. After forty years of wandering, the children of Israel had reached the doorstep of the Promised Land. Leadership of the people had already passed to Joshua.

It must have been a bitter disappointment for Moses to have come so far and not see the goal. But it was an opportunity for him to look back on what God had done and what He would do in the future.

### Looking back

During the climb, Moses possibly reflected on God's call to lead the exodus from Egypt, Pharaoh's refusals to let them go, the Red Sea crossing, and the subsequent drowning of Egypt's armies. He may have remembered how the people feared the thunder, lightning, trumpet sound, and smoke as God descended on Mount Sinai to speak to them. They would rather that God speak to them through Moses.

"And the LORD said to me: 'What they have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My

name, I will require it of him'" (Deuteronomy 18:17-19).

Moses thought of their early wilderness years when God planned for them to take the land of Canaan. Of the twelve men sent ahead to spy the land, only Joshua and Caleb returned with a good report, ecstatic over the wonderful provision the land afforded for both man and beast. The others' report of giants and guaranteed defeat held sway. Their refusal to fight brought forty years of wandering. Everyone twenty years old and upwards would die in the wilderness, except for Joshua and Caleb.

Moses remembered that at Kadesh his sister, Miriam, died. Also, he would never forget that fateful day when he and Aaron severely tried God's patience at the waters of Meribah. God had said, "Speak to the rock." In anger, Moses struck the rock twice

and exclaimed, "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" (Numbers 20:10). In so doing, they usurped the glory that rightfully belonged to God.

"I am the LORD, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images" (Isaiah 42:8).

At Mount Hor, God directed Moses to take Aaron and his son, Eleazar, to its top, divest his brother of his priestly garments, and dress Eleazar in them, thus passing on the position of high priest. Aaron died there on the mountain. Now, as Moses reached the heights of Nebo, he realized it was his turn. First, however, God had a "come and see" (show and tell) planned for Moses.

## Looking forward

From the top of Mount Nebo, Moses could look 2,600 feet down its steep slopes into the Jordan Valley below. Mount Nebo was thought to be the highest point of the Pisgah range of the Abarim Mountains that extended from the Moabite plateau toward the Dead Sea. The area had marked the southern limits of the territory of King Sihon, but had been assigned by lot to the tribe of Reuben when the land was taken from the Amorites.

From this vantage point on Pisgah's heights, God allowed Moses to view all the promised inheritance beyond the Jordan, north to south and east to west: fertile soil covered by fields of grain; pastureland blanketed with flocks and herds; ready-made

homes and cities — all theirs for the taking. Though in top form, with his eyes not dimmed nor his vigor diminished, it was time! Moses died there on Nebo, and the Lord buried him in an unknown, unmarked grave in a valley in the land of Moab.

Though Moses suffered the consequences for his outspoken actions, he remained a man of faith who led his people through many perils and brought them to the brink of their promised home. We find his name recorded among the heroes of Hebrews 11, his faith assuring him a place in the kingdom.



When Miriam and Aaron thought to challenge their brother's leadership of the Israelites, the Lord said to them:

"Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; he is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; and he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak

against My servant Moses?" (Numbers 12:6-8).

Centuries later, the Prophet "like unto Moses" came to His own, but they did not receive Him. He still speaks to hearts and minds today.

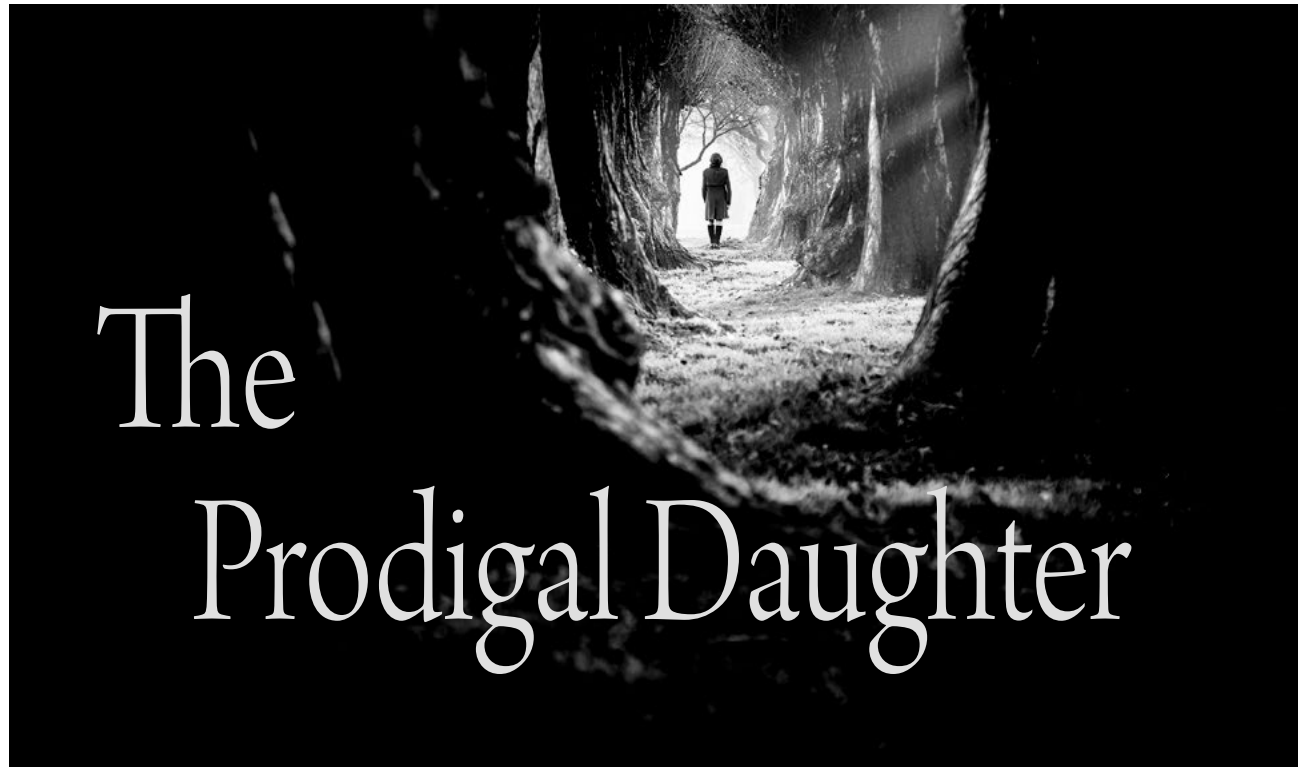
What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called,

not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? (Romans 9:22-24).

The riches of God's glory, revealed in Christ, are extended through the indwelling Holy Spirit to all who embrace salvation in Jesus and worship the Father in Spirit and in truth. **BA**

**Dorothy Nimchuk** writes from Medicine Hat, Alberta, where she lives with her husband, Nick.





# The Prodigal Daughter

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The truth of Christ silences  
the lies of the world.

by Lauren Olson\*

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**A** longer title for my life story could be “A prodigal pastor’s daughter finds her way home after thirteen years in a gay relationship.”

All my family and friends were terribly shocked when I left my husband for a woman. It took me a long time to learn that what I thought was love, really wasn’t.

## Forsaking Jesus

My mother led me to Jesus at age four through the Wordless Book, an evangelistic tool for children. My father attended Bible school and seminary during most of my childhood years. We

were poor, but we had a close church family. The church we grew up in was legalistic, but I loved Jesus, studying the Word and hearing His sweet whisper in my heart.

I had a few “crushes” on female teachers in my growing-up years. When I was fifteen, a female Bible student was overly affectionate with me. That confused me. As I grew, I liked boys, but I also had a few minor same-sex crushes. Years later, when my marriage began to deteriorate, I sought out a gay relationship. I found one, and it led me to end my marriage.

It’s been hard to revisit this period of my life when I wasn’t walking with Jesus. My kids were small when I left my husband. I felt they would be happier if I was happy (the cultural lie at the time).

My new partner and I had a “good life” over the years we

were together: good jobs, a lovely home, great friends, and trips around the world. We were role models in the gay community. We joined a gay church and attended there for ten years. We sang gospel songs and believed Jesus was on our side. I believed that the Bible had some good ideas, but I also thought that God was bigger than the Bible: *God is all about love, right?* However, I had pushed Jesus out.

## Alerts

At times, things would nudge my mind, causing me to question my lifestyle, but I would ignore them and continue on. I didn’t think I could leave my lifestyle and stick to it.

Huge alerts got my attention: my daughter’s serious illness, disillusioning experiences in the gay church, and disturbing things in my gay friends’ lives and

lifestyles. I had also developed a new fear of death. As I saw world events unfold, I wondered about Bible prophecy.

Another alert came through problems in my gay relationship. It had dramatic ups and downs — high highs and low lows. Over time, I felt as though I were walking on eggshells with my partner, just as I had in my marriage to my husband. I felt I was in bondage, unable to leave but miserable staying.

I began attending Al-Anon meetings and found a name for my problem: *codependency*. One of the Twelve Steps was to try to make conscious contact with God as we understood Him. As I quieted my heart, I began to realize that I had made my partner a god. Trying to please her had taken over my life and pushed Jesus out.

All these alerts culminated in my going to an ex-gay ministry one spring weekend in the late 1980's. I responded to the altar call and tearfully came back to Jesus. A beautiful sense of cleansing, forgiveness, and joy filled my heart. I went home to my gay partner and moved out a few days later.

I'd love to say all went well after that, but my faith failed in the following months. I didn't make time to be in the Word and prayer to nourish my walk with Jesus. I felt lost in a huge church, and I was afraid to tell anyone about my past. I also couldn't find a support group.

After that first year, I missed my partner and eventually went back to her. We lived together for a year, but it was a terrible time. I was trying to "serve" her and Jesus at the same time. This

time, when I moved out, it was for good.

### Finding freedom

Fortunately, I found an ex-gay ministry that provided a safe place where I could be open and honest. They offered prayer, hope, and healing. People there helped us understand the roots of identity issues, such as unmet childhood needs, bullying, abuse, and other life experiences. When I hear how our culture uses the term *reparative therapy* to dismiss the power of God to change lives, my heart sinks. This ministry made such a difference for me in finding freedom.

I learned that sexuality and

my gay relationship is Romans 1:25: "[People] worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator" (KJV). I learned that as Christians, we must keep our eyes on God, the Creator, because anything He created could become an idol.

One of the most helpful resources for my struggles was a little booklet by Lori Rentzel called *Emotional Dependency*. A couple of times I've felt myself drifting into emotional dependency over the years, but thankfully I haven't struggled with sexual thoughts or temptations. The alarm bells went off when I found myself needing to "be there" for someone or needing to feel needed.

“The noise of a relationship addiction can drown Jesus out.”

identity issues are "not a sexual problem, but a relationship problem." As I thought about my gay relationship, I realized that what I regarded as love was really a neediness, a type of emotional bondage. Its dramatic ups and downs created instability, and my need for affirmation made me captive to her every emotion. My heterosexual marriage had problems, but I had felt much calmer and freer in it.

A scripture that has been important to my understanding of

I've learned that the noise of a relationship addiction can drown Jesus out. I need to be honest with myself, calm down with the Word and prayer, and quiet myself to hear His voice during these times.

Often, Jesus nudged me to establish boundaries. Sometimes it was painful to distance myself from a friend, but I knew God loved them more than I ever could. *Who am I to play God in their life?* I knew that over time, I would be relieved and happy

to have escaped a relationship addiction, and it would also be in their best interest. Jesus really does fulfill His promise to set us free, and we will be free indeed (John 8:36).

Jesus has been healing my identity through the years, teaching me who I am in Christ, and that I am a beloved child of God.

He has done a “new thing” in me (Isaiah 43:19).

### Abundant life

During COVID-19, I wrote my memoirs for my family, including six grandchildren. I shared this part of my life because I wanted them to know the freedom Jesus

can bring. He instructs us to let the next generation know about His faithfulness (Psalm 89:1).

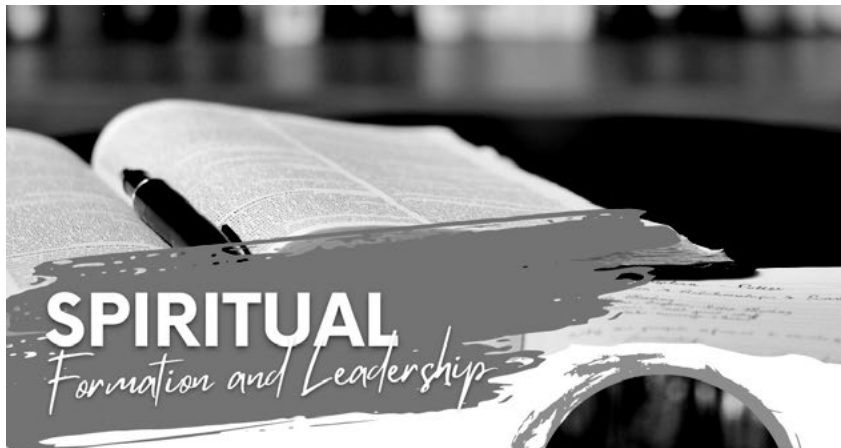
God has shown me His love through His care, provision, and protection in many wonderful adventures, friends, and prayer partners during these years of following Him. Mission trips to Africa, Cambodia, and Honduras provided opportunities to share stories of God’s love and faithfulness to me. Jesus truly gives us the abundant life He promised (John 10:10)!

When I was at that ex-gay ministry, I longed to know if one could leave the gay lifestyle and not look back. Today, I can answer with a resounding “yes” and testify that it’s so worth it! I only regret those thirteen lost years and the pain it brought to my family. Thankfully, they have been so gracious to forgive me, and I praise God for the joy and blessing they are to me.

During these last three or four years, in spite of the challenges of aging, COVID, and health issues, I have had more time to be in prayer and in the Word. As a prodigal daughter returned home, I feel that His whisper is getting louder in my heart. May I always have ears to hear it. **BA**

**Lauren Olson** is a freelance writer, mother of two, and grandmother of six. She loves being a grandparent, traveling, reading, writing, and being in the outdoors. She also enjoys writing family history books for her family.

*\*Name has been changed.*



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## Winter Morning

A forest sparkles bright in dawning sun  
amid new-fallen snow this day begun.  
There's stirring movement here  
throughout the trees  
in rustling boughs . . . a sermon in the  
breeze  
in quiet celebration of God's ways.  
The faithful trees stand sure in utmost  
praise —  
the woodland thriving patient for the  
Spring  
as from a bough — a blood-red  
cardinal sings. . . .

Lucia Kiersch Haase



## Council in Kentucky

The North American Ministerial Council (NAMC) met in Covington, Kentucky, October 10-15. We are grateful to the pastors, licensed and credentialed ministers, and observers who gathered — and to all who made this meeting possible.

The council took the following actions:

- Elected these officers to a two-year term on the Executive Committee: Daniel Flores, president; Wayne Hrenyk, vice president; Monico Muffley, secretary.
- Elected the following members to a four-year term on the License and Credentials Committee: Steve Kyner, Noe Reyes, and Andy Hassen; elected the following members to a two-year term: Jhabel Chagollan, David Lozano, and John Lemley.
- Elected the following members to a two-year term on the Nominations Committee: Eddie Villalba, Santiago Chavez, and Brian Franks.
- Received reports of the License and Credentials Committee, the Study Committee on Old and



New Covenants, and the Study Committee on the Role of Women.

One of many emotive times during council was the “Pastoral Appreciation Moment.” We remembered twenty-two pastors who now sleep in the Lord, as well as the service of forty credentialed ministers and ninety-four licensed ministers. We also recognized twenty-seven certified local pastors and one hundred and twenty-four local leaders.

We thank all women, including pastors’ spouses, who attended this event. They gathered every day to hear the Word of God and pray together.

We experienced a wonderful time of fellowship, worship, and instruction in God’s Word, reminding us that we should be imitators of God (Ephesians 5:1). Let us closely follow Jesus every day (Matthew 16:24). Let us be a church that thinks like Jesus, speaks like Jesus, teaches like Jesus, preaches the gospel like Jesus, has compassion like Jesus, suffers like Jesus. Let us be an example in everything so we can say with a clear conscience, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1, NIV).

— Daniel Flores  
NAMC President

*Thanks to these people who took photos at the NAMC meetings: Reuben Corrales, Gabriel Perez, Martin Ramirez, and Jamin Teran.*



## BAP: Reality Check

The bad news is that inflation and other problems in the economy are forcing us to give in and raise the prices of materials we publish or offer through the Bible Advocate Press and/or our online store. We've resisted a price increase for some time, but the rising costs of paper and other necessary materials, and those for shipping and mailing, mean we have to pass along at least some of those increased expenses to those who purchase our products. Almost immediately, Sabbath school lessons and other Bible study materials and products will cost 15 percent more than they currently cost. We wish the situation was otherwise, but we must deal with the realities of our own ever-increasing costs.

The good news is that General Conference members and congregations formally affiliated with the General Conference may receive a 10 percent discount whenever they place an order with Bible Advocate Press or in our online store. For example, when you or a representative of your congregation places an order by telephone, one of the questions you will be asked soon will be, "Are you a member of the General Conference?" or "Is this order for a congregation that is formally affiliated with the General Conference?" If the answer is yes, the total cost of the order will be reduced by 10 percent.

Or if you or a representative of your congregation places an order via our website, soon there will be a box on the checkout page where you affirm your General Conference membership or that you are placing the order for a General Conference-affiliated congregation. When that button is clicked, the total cost of the order will be reduced by 10 percent. Those who truthfully affirm their formal affiliation with the General Conference will receive this price break, which will be unavailable to those who are not General Conference members or affiliated congregations.

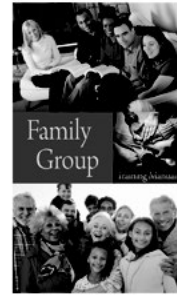
We hope that this financial advantage offered to our members and affiliated congregations will take a little bit of the sting out of this unfortunate, but necessary, increase in prices. If you have any question about whether or not you are a member of the General Conference, or whether or not your congregation is formally affiliated with the General Conference, please ask your pastor or district superintendent to verify your status.

"A false witness shall perish" (Proverbs 21:28).

— Loren Stacy

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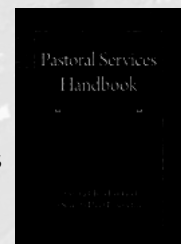
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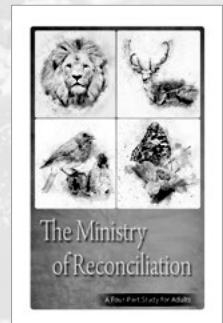
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# Be Holy!

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## Celebrating the holiness of God by imitating Him.

by Ramon Ruiz

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Among what God expects of His children is a non-negotiable aspect of character: holiness. This trait was introduced in the Old Testament and carried through to the New. If we follow after God, we must be holy as He is.

But what is holiness? And how can we possibly imitate this aspect of God? The Bible gives us guidance here.

### Biblical precedent

From early on in the Old Testament, we find what the people of God should be and the corre-

sponding reason. Leviticus 11:44, 45 is just one of many texts with a call to holiness:

For I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth. For I am the LORD who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy (cf. 19:2; 20:7, 26; 21:8).

In the New Testament, Peter directly quotes the sentiment in his first epistle: “But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (1:15, 16).

It is no coincidence that the entire fourth chapter of Revela-

tion has the holiness of God as its central theme. It is celebrated in a liturgical setting, where not only the redeemed but also the entire creation glorifies God for being “Holy, holy, holy” — the Lord God Almighty (v. 8).

John, the author of this last book of the Bible, has a vision in which he sees an open door in heaven, where the temple of God is located. He is invited to go up to witness the unmatched superiority of the only existing God (4:1), opposed to the “lord” (Greek: *kyrios*) of the Roman Empire, Caesar, and to any other lord who claimed to be worshipped.

The description in Revelation 4 is wonderful. There are no human features on the one who is seated on the throne, because everything about Him

is divine (vv. 2, 3). The twenty-four elders appear dressed in *white clothes* because they have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, and they have *crowns* on their heads because they are kings and priests, something God promised to every believer. The twenty-four elders cast down their crowns before Him in an act of full submission and worship (v. 4), and God makes His presence audibly known through natural phenomena (v. 5).

Verses 6 and 7 describe the splendor of God's throne. Before it is a sea of glass (like the fountain located in front of the tabernacle of Israel), and four living creatures appear as representatives of all the living beings of creation. The climax of John's vision is in verses 8-11. The four animals constantly celebrate God's holiness, affirming that the Lord is holy, almighty, and eternal, as opposed to other lords whose kingdoms are corrupt, finite, and oppressive.

Upon seeing this, the twenty-four elders bow down before the One who is seated on the throne. They cast down their crowns before Him and declare, "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created" (v. 11).

From what is said here, there is not even the slightest possibility of comparison between the lords of this earth and the only Lord, Creator, and Sustainer of the entire universe. In short, it is declared in the heavens: God is the only Lord!

## Imitators

How wonderful and fearful, then, that this holy God should invite us to be holy as He is holy. This holiness of God is not just a theme of study, reflection, and recognition. It is a subject of celebration for every believer, and the best way to celebrate His holiness, aside from our true worship, is to imitate it.

That idea may seem to be utopian and unattainable because the flesh is opposed to God's holiness and sin abides in every human being. However, by the power of the Holy Spirit that God gives to every believer, it is understood that sin is the exception and holiness is the rule. John the apostle affirmed this when

chose us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love."

Paul uses three key terms here. The first is the verb *choose*, from the Greek *eklectos* (to select). This selection is not for being better than others or wiser or richer, because we know that every human is a sinner. But God chooses the people that He knows will fulfill the purpose for which He calls them, and that purpose is holiness.

The second term is *saints*, from the Greek *hagios* (separate). It implies that believers are human beings just like everyone else, but in spirit, soul, and body, they are paradoxically different. The

“The best way to celebrate God’s holiness, aside from our true worship, is to imitate it.”

he said, "We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him" (1 John 5:18).

In addition, the theme of holiness is addressed in the Pauline epistles as a demand for the entire church. For example, in his letter to the Ephesians, he literally refers to the believers as *saints* (holy ones). In verse 4 of the first chapter, he speaks of the work that God does in them: "He

difference lies in the lifestyle they lead, making sure to stay away from sin to imitate God by living in holiness.

The third expression, *without blame*, is from the Greek *amomos* (without fault). It is derived from the old covenant sacrificial system, where the animals that were offered to God should not have any physical defects for fear of being rejected. Thus, believers are called to live spiritually without the stain of sin.

Is this possible? The answer is yes, as long as we remain in Christ. Just as the apostle John said: "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1).

### Contrasting society

It seems that the subject of holiness is old-fashioned. The postmodern era we live in and transhumanism that is already at the door opt for a lifestyle full of relativism and superficiality in everything that is done. This includes human relationships and, of course, the relationship with God.

But the church is different. She knows she is called to be a contrasting society and to navigate against the current. She is ready to be rejected — not for committing crimes or practicing injustices but for refraining from any practice that does not agree with the Holy Scriptures. She celebrates God's holiness, proclaiming that He is the only Creator and Savior of the universe. **BA**

**Ramon Ruiz** is president of the International Ministerial Congress and pastors the Melbourne church in Dallas, TX, with his wife Rebeca.



They have one son, two daughters, and several grandchildren.

## 2023 GC Convention

*continued from page 13*

**Area attractions.** In addition to the Creation Museum and the Ark Encounter, the Cincinnati and Covington areas offer several family-friendly attractions:

- Nationally ranked zoo
- Amazing aquarium
- National Underground Railroad Freedom Center
- Mainstrasse, a nineteenth century German village
- Cincinnati Reds baseball
- Water parks and many other sporting and entertainment options



*Special pre-convention excursion:* Join us on a group trip to the Ark Encounter on Monday, July 10. Drive yourself or ride the bus with fellow convention attendees. Check out the full-size ark with its three decks of beautiful craftsmanship. Exhibits show how Noah, his family, and the animals

may have lived on the ark. After the tour, visit the unusual petting zoo (included in the ticket price). Other attractions are on site, like a zip line, for an additional fee. Food ranging from snacks (like popcorn) to a buffet-style restaurant are located on-site. Visit [arkencounter.com](http://arkencounter.com) to view a map of the attraction, and plan what you would like to see!

**Volunteer options.** Did you know that our convention would not be possible without our many volunteers? Over 200 individuals served in various capacities to make Convention 2019 a success. Will you be available? Here are a few ways you can serve:

- Nursery, children, or youth programs
- Ticket collection at meals
- Hosting for workshops to support the speaker as needed
- Escalator monitors
- Usher/safety personnel

Check the complete list when you register, and offer your services.

Are you ready to register? Again, that web address is [cog7.org/convention](http://cog7.org/convention). Register before **April 30** to receive the early bird discount. Can't wait to see you in Covington, Kentucky!



## Sovereign God

During the pomp and circumstance following the death of Queen Elizabeth II, her full title was sonorously intoned by various officials. In England, she was Elizabeth II, “by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of Her other realms and territories Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith.” Because she was queen, she was also known as sovereign. In a monarchy, the sovereign is the head of state, the supreme ruler to whom each of their subjects must pay their due respect.

I was pleased to learn that before accepting her position, the then young Elizabeth visited her family’s royal chapel. There she humbly knelt at the altar in personal acknowledgment of and submission to the only true Sovereign, almighty God. This was appropriate. Elizabeth became sovereign over the British Empire because she was born into the right family at the right time. Her uncle the king abdicated the throne, her father became king, and Elizabeth was his direct successor. Almighty God, however, is Sovereign, always has been Sovereign, and forever will be Sovereign. And God is Sovereign not just of a portion of the kingdoms of man, but of everyone and of everything that exists or has existed or ever will exist.

God is transcendent; He exists outside of time and space and creation as we know and experience it. He is holy. He is other.

God is not sovereign and holy because He has achieved some standard by which sovereignty and holiness are measured. He himself is that standard. He himself is that measure. Therefore, whatever God does or allows is good and right and fair and just. It may not seem so to us. Those who deny God or resist Him demand, “If there is

a God . . .” or “If God is good, why is there evil in the world? Why do the wicked seem to prosper, while many who are righteous suffer and die?”

My answer? I don’t know. What I do know is that while I am incapable of fully understanding God, whatever God does or allows is, at a level I can’t comprehend, good and right and fair and just. Why? Because God is all that He says He is. And God is Sovereign. He doesn’t answer to me or to anyone. We answer to Him.

Isn’t it good that almighty and sovereign God is good and right and fair and just? What if such a powerful and unchallengeable being was evil and capricious and unloving, like so many of the false gods devised by the imaginations of humanity? What if God was against us, rather than for us? That’s too horrible to contemplate.

The bad news is that humanity is in rebellion against God and therefore faces God’s judgment. Those who fail to acknowledge their Sovereign are called “children of wrath” because the wrath of God will engulf them (Ephesians 2:3). The good news is that sovereign God is gracious, and, in Christ, He has chosen as His own those who believe, now and forever.

I found it touching to watch the great and small of the British Commonwealth bow, curtsy, salute, or in other ways indicate their respect for Queen Elizabeth as her coffin passed by. If such respect is appropriate for an earthly monarch, what should be our response to our almighty and eternal Sovereign? Gratitude and obedience! Wonder and worship!

— Loren Stacy



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