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BA
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Life and Glory



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2023: Come and See



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A Future and a Hope

According to Crosswalk.com, the two most searched Bible verses are John 3:16 and Jeremiah 29:11. I bet you can quote the first one, but do you know the second? It reads, “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (NIV throughout).

Both verses are about God’s plans. Their popularity reveals our human hope for a secure future beyond the instability and insecurity of the present. Careful Bible students might warn us of taking Jeremiah 29:11 out of context. After all, it’s part of a larger letter from Jeremiah to the exiles in Babylon about how to endure in that country as strangers in a strange land until God brings them back to Jerusalem. It’s a letter of hope, reminding them that, though their present is disorienting, it is also a temporary reality. Their future and God’s plan is to bring them back home.

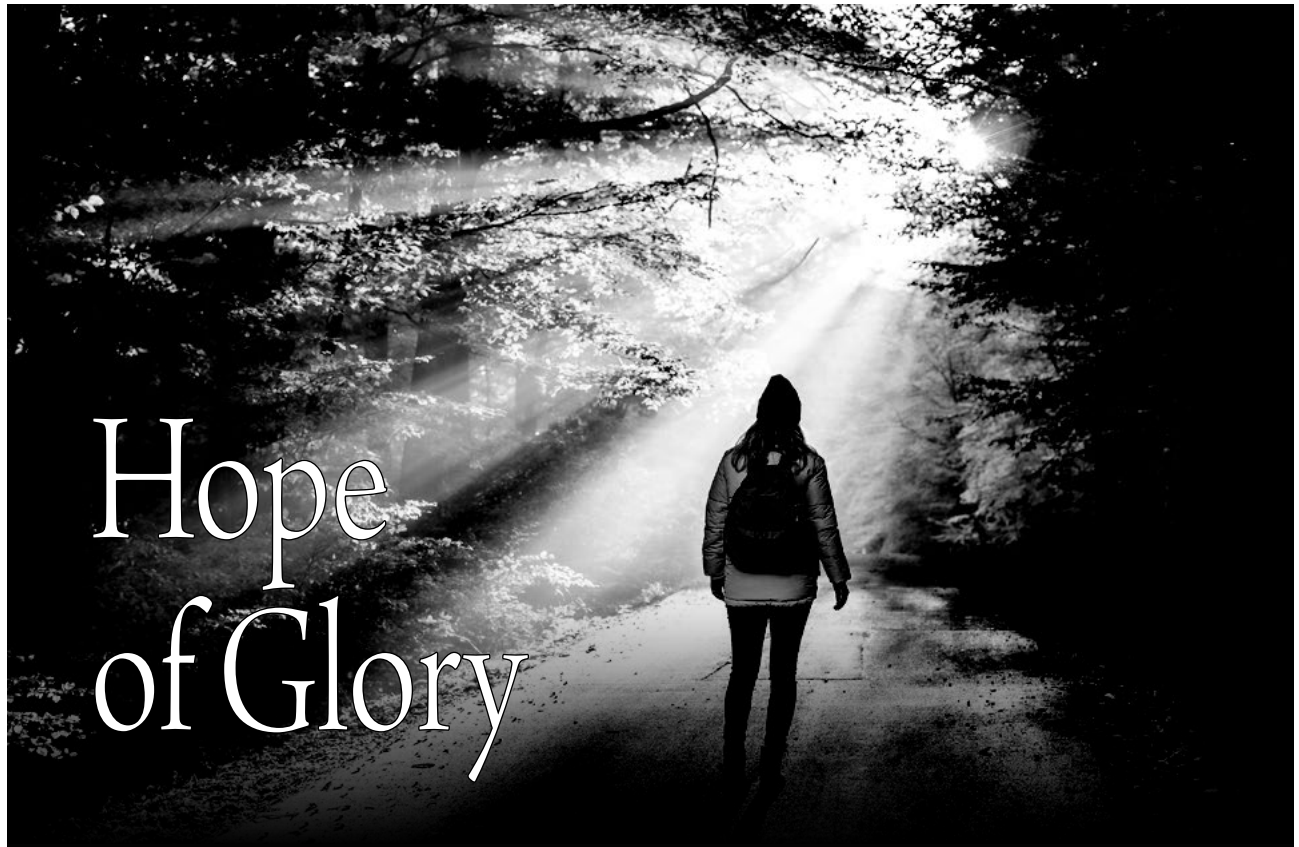
This context makes Jeremiah 29:11 more relevant to us, not less. We, too, are exiles and strangers in a strange land, awaiting a better city to come: the new Jerusalem. Jeremiah 29 leads us naturally to John 3:16. God’s ultimate plan was to deliver us from the bondage of sin and death and bring us to His eternal kingdom through Jesus. The message of both texts is of faith, hope, and a good future, for God’s plan has always been to bring us home to Him!

We conclude our 2023 “Come and See” series, looking to this future — a wonderful and eternal day to come. As the world falls apart, we live confidently with the understanding that God’s plan is sure, and already underway, where His people seek His kingdom first. For we are “longing for a better country — a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them” (Hebrews 11:16).

I am not ashamed to call you my brethren in the hope and future that we share in Him. Moreover, let’s not be ashamed of the gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16), the good news of salvation for all nations. God’s good future is for all, and it begins today for all who believe. Let’s share that message with this lost and fearful world. Amen!

— Jason Overman





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Come and see the
bride-to-be.

by **Jody McCoy**

The longest single narrative in the book of Genesis, and in the entire Pentateuch, isn't about Noah or Jacob or Joseph, or even Abraham. It's about Rebekah (chapter 24). Why would this narrative be about a young woman instead of one of the patriarchs? Let's investigate.

Facing a choice

In this account, Rebekah is a young woman living an ordinary, uneventful life. Then one day, a stranger shows up as she's drawing water from a well. He asks her for a little water to drink. She gives him a drink, then offers to draw water for his camels too. He gives her gold jewelry and asks to go to her father's house. There he tells her family that he

is a servant, and his master has sent him on a journey to find a wife for his son. If Rebekah returns with him, she'll become his bride. If she chooses not to go, he's cleared of his oath to his master.

Her family asks her, "Are you willing to leave with this man at once?" (v. 58, CEV).

Rebekah is aware that the choice she's making will change her life forever. The servant is asking her to leave her family and home and travel to a foreign land she's never seen to marry a man she's never met. It's an act of faith, and she's willing to do it.

Faith story

The next day, Rebekah embarks on a long journey that will last several months. With many

hours to reflect as she travels, one would expect this young woman to begin questioning her own judgment. It's also likely she asked Abraham's servant to tell her more about the man she is going to marry and about his family. Let's listen in on what he might have told her.

"The father of the man you're marrying is my master, Abraham. Many years ago, he was given the same choice that you were given. God told him to leave his family and go to a land he had never seen. God promised to bless him there so he would become the father of many nations. And like you, Abraham chose to follow God. Along the way, he discovered, as you are, that this journey of faith has many peaks and valleys.

"At first, you were excited to leave your routine, ordinary life for the possibilities of a bright new future. But now you're missing your family and you fear the unknown world that awaits you. You're concerned that you've made a mistake. That's understandable. You've just made a choice that will change your life forever, without knowing who, what, or where. But that doesn't mean your choice was impulsive and foolish. On the contrary, you based your choice on my assurance of what I know. I know you've made the right choice because I know the one who waits for you. The journey of faith is a relationship. It isn't about what you know; it's about who you know. You've chosen to trust me, and I am worthy of your trust.

"The man you're marrying is Isaac. He's the son that God

promised to Abraham long before he was born. At that time, Abraham's name was Abram, and his wife's name was Sarai. For the next ten years after God's promise, Abram and Sarai remained childless. After such a long time, Abram reasoned that they'd never have a child and that his servant Eliezer would inherit God's promise. It seemed to Abram that God's promise was intended for Eliezer, not for him.

"Abram's concerns about his own inabilities drew him down into one of the dark valleys of his faith journey, so God visited him again. He reassured Abram that His promise for descendants

as innumerable as the stars was for him, not for another. Abram chose to believe God.

"Then God brought Abram outside and told him to count the stars, if he could. That's how innumerable his descendants would be. Abram believed what God said, so God credited it to him as righteousness.

"That's what God wants from you: trust.

"To remove any lingering doubt, God confirmed His promise to Abram in a sacrificial covenant. This act resolved Abram's doubts, but not Sarai's. In His promise to Abram, God had said nothing about Sarai, who had been barren for years. Like Abram, Sarai reasoned that God's promise must have been intended for her handmaid, not for her. So Sarai gave Hagar to Abram as a surrogate mother. Nine months later, Ishmael was born.

"However, this wasn't God's good will for her. Abram and Sarai were united in a marriage covenant. In God's eyes, they were one flesh. Therefore, God's

promise of a son to Abram was for Sarai as well. By leaving it unsaid, God gave Sarai and Abram the opportunity to trust Him. He wanted the best for both of them, and He would provide. But they had failed to trust God in that. This failure will trouble the family you're joining far into the future, but God will be faithful to the nation they become. God has made a covenant with

“The journey of faith is a relationship. It isn't about what you know; it's about who you know.”

this family, and He is faithful to His covenant even when we fail Him.”

The servant continues:

“Another fourteen years passed before God spoke with Abram again. By now, Abram was one hundred years old, Sarai was ninety, and Ishmael was thirteen. This time, God told them that they would have a son together. Neither of them could believe it at first. Abram knew that both he and Sarai were dead in their ability to have children

redeemed from certain death when God provided a lamb to take his place. God’s covenant blessings are upon the man you are to marry. Therefore, when you enter the marriage covenant with Isaac, you also enter this covenant with God. As his bride, you will become the mother of countless generations as numerous as the stars. This is the glorious future that awaits you.”

Another bride

Moses wrote this account of Rebekah over three thousand years ago. Yet when we read it, we realize that we’re reading our own story. The Father sent His

“Genesis tells us of the search for a bride for Christ, the search for you and me.”

at their advanced age. Nevertheless, God was faithful to His promise. Within a year, Sarai, now called Sarah, gave birth to Isaac.

“Rebekah, know this. From within the realm of human ability, the man you are to marry should not exist. His birth is a miracle.

“And there’s more. When Isaac was a young man, God told his father to take his son to the land of Moriah and offer him as a sacrifice. On the third day of their journey, Isaac was

unnamed servant (the Holy Spirit) to seek a bride (the church) for His Son (Jesus). The Holy Spirit has asked us to leave our old life behind to travel to a new home and “marry” a Man we’ve never met. By accepting Jesus as Savior, we’ve entered into the covenant to become His bride (Ephesians 5:23, 31-33). And our glorious eternal future with Him has already begun (2:4-9)!

The first book, Genesis, tells us of the search for a bride for Christ, the search for you and

me. Colossians 1:26, 27 describes the glorious mystery hidden for ages and now revealed: Christ in us, the hope of glory. First John 3:1-3 says that all who have this hope in Christ purify themselves, as Christ is pure. And the final book, Revelation, reveals our glorious eternal future when the new Jerusalem, filled with those redeemed by Christ, becomes His bride:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (Revelation 21:1-4, KJV).

Are we ready to accept, in faith, our role in this glorious plan? **BA**

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



A Book and a Blanket



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by Dorothy Nimchuk

On lazy summer days of childhood, I loved nothing better than to grab a book and a blanket and retire to the backyard to read. Oftentimes, I would simply watch the clouds, fascinated by the many faces portrayed there as my imagination soared, unearthing other treasures that kept changing shape and size overhead.

Imagination! Such a wonderful gift! A favorite Bible verse comes to mind: “O LORD my God . . . who makes the clouds His chariot, who walks on the wings of the wind . . .” (Psalm 104:1, 3).

Books! Travel, adventure, stories (truth or fiction though they be) provided entertainment, knowledge, and enjoyment. For far more years than I care to recall, my choice of books tended to be stories. Over time, I’ve learned to depend on the best Book ever written, the Word of God, penned by some thirty-eight to forty authors inspired by the Spirit of God. Recorded therein are multiple prophecies regarding the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ the righteous, who would deliver humanity from its sinful state.

Delve into the Gospel accounts of His life and ministry. Catch the flavor of life in the times when He walked the highways and byways of Galilee and surrounding areas. The apostle John, that self-declared “disciple whom Jesus loved,” ends his account on the following note:

This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also

many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen (21:24, 25).

The Bible has been rightly called “His Story.” From beginning to end, you can find reference to Jesus’ part in creation; His role as the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”; His birth, ministry, arrest, death, resurrection, and ascension; and the wonderful news that He hasn’t abandoned His people but will come again to redeem His own.



Clouds! I love the poetry of the Scriptures expressed in clouds. Note the prophet Nahum’s take on them: “The LORD has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet” (1:3). But there is another meaning to clouds in the Bible. Hebrews 12 says we’re surrounded by “so great a cloud of witnesses” and encourages us to “run with endurance the race that is set before us” (v. 1).

This truth takes us beyond mere observation of nature. It urges us that now is the time to seek and find the love, forgiveness, grace, and mercy Christ offers. Now is the time to commit to following in His footsteps. As we look deeper into the Book, we see Matthew 24 and Luke 21 recount Jesus’ words regarding many things that will occur on this earth prior to His return.

Heed the warnings. Jesus is coming! And we “will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud

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While We Wait

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Our destiny in
Christ begins today.
by **Kathleen Barrett**

God's children are given precious promises about the future. We're promised an eternal place (John 14:2-4), pearly gates and streets of gold (Revelation 21:21), a crystal-clear river coming from the throne of God (22:1), fruit-bearing trees with leaves of healing (v. 2), family reunions (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), and, most anticipated, dwelling with God Almighty in a new heaven and new earth forever (1 Kings 8:30; Revelation 21:3, 22).

This eternal home is the destiny that confessing believers long for. Christ beckons us to come

and see our glorious future with Him. However, until His glorious kingdom is established on earth, how do we live in the meantime? The entirety of 1 Thessalonians 4 tells us how: We live to please God.

But, oh, how we fall short, with life's woes, temptations, and blatantly increasing disdain for authority and virtue in our culture. Nonetheless, take heart, dear Christian. Come and see your future in Christ as you follow His instructions. Paul's eloquent address in 1 Thessalonians 4 urges believers to elevate their living even "more and more" to the glory of God:

Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please

God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus (vv. 1, 2).

Love and sex

Paul continues by naming two specific areas of living for Christ that may need "sandpaper" as correction: sexual conduct and brotherly love. Although sex is a highly personal matter, Paul observes behaviors in the Thessalonian church that were not honoring God. Sexual immorality is not much different today than in ancient times, and that is why Paul speaks so firmly about practicing self-control: "For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit" (vv. 7, 8).

Similarly, the Holy Spirit shows

us that loving others more than ourselves produces holy, fruitful, righteous living, which pleases God immensely. Paul is delighted to commend his audience for their brotherly love throughout Macedonia, and therefore reiterates the request he made earlier: “But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more” (v. 10).

His plea echoes to believers down through the centuries. How will you exhibit brotherly love in your community, hometown, neighborhood, or village? By knocking on doors? Surprisingly, no. Paul says believers show love by leading a quiet life, minding their own business, and working with their hands.

Paul’s passion declares that we must practice righteous, peaceful, and holy living because the coming of the Lord is nearer today than it has ever been. How can we read 1 Thessalonians 4 without being encouraged to be our best for God’s glory, for our promised future, and for the future of others who may come to Christ because of our godly influence?

Power for life

Influenced by the power of Jesus’ resurrection, Paul assures committed believers that they will have eternal life — a life that is more than we could ever hope for or imagine. Come and see! “For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him” (Romans 6:5, 6). Our sins were

buried with Jesus when we first believed. Therefore, in His likeness, we can look forward to resurrection life with Him, now and forever. We are no longer enslaved to sin but are alive in Christ Jesus through His resurrection life.

In the Lord’s Prayer, we ask, “Your kingdom come” (Matthew 6:10). Did you know God’s kingdom is within you if you have made Jesus your Lord? Yes, the domain is represented by the Holy Spirit. He guides, comforts, and reminds us of what Jesus taught (John 14:26). This also gives us power to live every day for Him.

Life to come

John the Revelator tells us that all our right living on earth will pay off one day. There will be a new heaven and earth (21:1) with stunning beauty and joy as in a wedding celebration (v. 2).

Then John heard a loud voice saying, “God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will

be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God” (v. 3, NIV). Adding to our joy, John writes, “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (v. 4, NIV). Although our world is spinning out of control with ungodliness, we can sigh with grateful relief at John’s revelation of restoration in the coming kingdom.

Rights and rewards

Though rewards are great in the coming kingdom, it is a wonder why the Lord would find any one of His children worthy of them. Yet Revelation 22:11, 12 illuminates why rewards are reserved for you and me. When we continue to live to please God, Jesus says, “Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done” (NIV).

Our rewards, therefore, are based on what we have done on

Crowns

Besides the imperishable crown Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 9:25, four other crowns are mentioned in the New Testament:

- of rejoicing (1 Thessalonians 2:19);
- of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8);
- of life (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10);
- of glory (1 Peter 5:4).

These are crowning achievements believers will gladly lay down at the feet of Jesus when they meet Him face to face.

— Kathleen Barrett

earth while waiting for Christ's coming. By first receiving the gift of salvation through faith in Jesus, the gift of sanctification follows. Your spiritual and emotional growth results from living to please God. Fruitful works are produced by emulating Christ's life. Heavenly rewards are therefore granted because we continue to do right in God's eyes.

One such reward is described in 1 Corinthians 9, where Paul compares his personal race with the intense training of an athlete competing for a crown that does not last: "I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (vv. 26, 27).

Paul ran the race of endurance

and integrity as a public practitioner of Christ's principles, passionately preaching the gospel. He ran the race to win an "imperishable crown" (v. 25).

"Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown" (Revelation 3:11).

We, too, will receive an imperishable crown one day. In the meantime, we can live as Christ would have us live, according to His Word. We can rise above the world's woes until we are forever with Christ. **BA**

Kathleen Barrett
writes from Port
Saint Lucie, FL.



Eternal Assurance

The eternal value of a life spent pleasing God for His glory and cultivating respect for others made in His image are priceless. A believer's future is assured (John 3:16).

But sometimes believers question their salvation because they don't take in the whole counsel of God, the Bible. They tremble at the thought of death, unsure of their final destination.

If that is your struggle, let's put it to rest. Your future in Christ Jesus is secure. God loves you and has a glorious plan for your life. Sin has separated you from God. Jesus Christ is your provision and the only justification for sin. If you have repented, believed in your heart that Jesus poured out His blood for your sin, and received in your heart that He rose from the dead, you are saved and declared righteous in Christ Jesus. The kingdom of Christ is within you, and the coming eternal kingdom awaits you (Psalm 37:37).

God's children, come and see your future in Christ — now and for eternity!

— Kathleen Barrett

A Book and a Blanket

continued from page 7

with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near" (Luke 21:27, 28).

I still love to sit on our deck with my Bible in hand, blanketed in Christ's righteousness, reading God's Word and/or watching the clouds and dreaming of the day when He *will* return. What a day *that* will be!

With skies rolled back as parchment scrolls, amid a host of angels and trumpet sound, Jesus will descend, and we shall rise to meet Him as He circles the earth to gather His own. Zechariah writes, "And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives" (14:4), fulfilling the angels' promise at the time of His ascension: "This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

May we be ever watchful. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20). **BA**

Dorothy Nimchuk
writes from Medi-
cine Hat, Alberta,
where she lives
with her husband
Nick.



Questions & Answers



Does the New Testament equate Jesus with the Lord (Yahweh) of the Old Testament? If so, where?

Yes to the first question, but let's see why this is so before we give examples. This question is addressed in our Statement of Faith:

The unique nature and identity of Jesus Christ is further seen in Scripture by the fact that several divine names are used in reference both to the Father and the Son" (*This We Believe*, p. 18).

The "unique nature" of Jesus is outlined in Statement #2 - The Deity:

The sovereign deity of the universe is God Almighty, who is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth. He is eternal, infinite, holy, self-existent Spirit who created, sustains, rules, redeems, and judges His creation. He is one in nature, essence and being. God is revealed in Scripture as Father and Son (TWB, p. 11).

Jesus Christ is God's one and only begotten Son. As begotten, not created, He shares the nature, names, and attributes of God with the Father. As Son, not Father, Jesus is subordinate to His Father in rank. From eternity, the Son was with the Father, shared the Father's glory as the pre-incarnate Word, and with Him created and sustains all things" (TWB, p. 17).

As the Shema confesses, "The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" (Deuteronomy 6:4; 1 Corinthians 8:4). The divine unity (oneness) of the Father and Son is true because they share one "nature, essence and being." Of Jesus it is said, "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily"; He is "the brightness of [God's] glory and the express

image of His person" (Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:3). It follows that the Only Begotten "shares the . . . names . . . of God with the Father." Here are a few examples.

In quoting Isaiah 40:3, three Gospels (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:2, 3; Luke 3:4-6) equate the Old Testament name of God, *Yahweh* (Lord), with Jesus: "Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

Paul does the same in Romans 10:8-14, equating the Lord Jesus with the name of the Lord from Joel 2:32 (cf. Acts 21:6-16; 1 Corinthians 1:2). Likewise, Philippians 2:11, attributes to the Lord Jesus the worship that Isaiah 45:22, 23 reserves for God alone: "For I am God, and there is no other. . . . to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath." Remarkably, 1 Corinthians 8:6 identifies the Lord God of Creation and the *Shema* with God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

With respect to titles, Jesus in Revelation is referred to as the First and the Last (1:11, 17; 2:8; 22:13), but this title is reserved for Yahweh alone (Isaiah 44:6; 48:12). Other divine titles are true of both Father and Son: Creator (Genesis 1:1; 2:4; John 1:1; Colossians 1:16); Savior (Isaiah 43:3, 11; 45:17, 21; Matthew 1:21; Acts 4:12; Titus 1:4); Judge (Psalm 50:6; 75:7; 2 Timothy 4:1, 8); Lord of lords (Deuteronomy 10:17; Psalm 136:3; Revelation 17:14; 19:16) — to list just a few.

Other examples include Hebrews 1:6 (Deuteronomy 32:43); Hebrews 1:8, 9 (Psalm 45:6, 7); Hebrews 1:10-12 (Psalm 102:25-27); Matthew 3:3 (Isaiah 40:3).

Finally, Jesus is called God at least twelve times in the Bible (Isaiah 9:6; Matthew 1:23; John 1:1; 5:18; 20:28; Romans 9:5; Colossians 2:2, 9; 1 Timothy 3:16; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; 1 John 5:20).

— Elder Chip Hinds



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Looking forward to the day
when all will be clear.

by Virginia A. Johnson

For now we see in a mirror,
dimly, but then face to face.
Now I know in part, but then
I shall know just as I also am
known (1 Corinthians 13:12,
NKJV).

It was late afternoon, and I sat in front of my computer screen, frustrated. I had spent most of the day in my office trying to put words to paper. What did I have to show for it? Nothing. No ideas flowed from my brain, through my fingers, and onto the screen. Outside it rained in sheets. Yet another dreary, rain-soaked winter's day here in western Oregon.

Disgusted, I snapped up the

window shade to glare at the downpour. That is when I saw it.

One great shaft of sunshine had pierced through the clouds. With the sunburst, a brilliant rainbow spread itself across the lead-gray sky. Below this incredible scene, like a lush green carpet, lay the neighbor's ryegrass field. An unexpected joy surged over me, washing away my grumpy frame of mind.

Then I noticed something unusual about this rainbow. It had no arc, no curve. I had never seen a rainbow like this one. It looked as though a massive invisible hand pressed down on the rainbow's curve, making it flat.

Despite my dirt-covered office window, the rainbow looked magnificent. What a view! With its background of dark, gray clouds and green field, the rainbow provided an incredible photo opportunity. I grabbed my 35mm camera and quickly

snapped photos of its flattened bands of brilliant blue, yellow, indigo, green, violet, and orange.

While my camera clicked away, I realized how clear, how spectacular the developed photos would turn out — with a clean window. As I rejoiced in this rare experience, the Holy Spirit used the rainbow and my grime-smear window to give me much needed spiritual insight.

Lasting love

The window and the rainbow became symbols of those periods in my life when I could not sense my Savior's presence, could not feel His love for me or see the Lord's work in my life. I was on one side of the opaque window. His love, beauty, and divine purpose for me were on the other side. I recalled the apostle Paul's famous words about love in 1 Corinthians 13.

As background, Paul spends

the greater part of chapter 12 reminding the church at Corinth of three truths: Christ-followers need to exercise their Holy Spirit-given gifts, allow for diversity of gifts, and strive to keep unity within the body of Christ. He ends the chapter with “And yet I will show you the most excellent way” (12:31).

That way is love. In chapter 13, Paul emphasizes that no matter what he said, thought, or did, it was worthless unless motivated by Christ’s selfless love for others. He likens these worthless acts to a “resounding gong or a clanging cymbal,” then adds, “I am nothing. . . . I gain nothing” (vv. 1-3). He reminds the Corinthian church that someday prophecies, tongues, and knowledge will cease, but Jesus’ love for His sheep is eternal.

Paul admits that though now a mature man, he could not see, could not comprehend the magnitude, the power, and the purpose of Christ’s love for him — much as I struggle to. He compared it to trying to see one’s face while looking into a heavily tarnished mirror — or as it reads in the King James Version, through a darkened window.

Paul knew one day there would be nothing between him and his risen Lord. He would stand before Christ and finally see Him, face-to-face. Paul knew that then, and only then, would he understand *everything*. He would have perfect knowledge, and he would finally experience the full power and immeasurable grace of his Savior’s redemptive love. Paul assures the Corinthian believers this will be their future too.

Seeing Jesus

I understand Paul’s yearning to be in the presence of our Savior. I desire, more than anything else, to be face-to-face with the One perfect personification of God the Father’s love for His children. This is my hope, my joy, and my future. Glory to God! Someday I *will* be with Christ.

The Bible promises that this future also awaits all who have chosen Jesus Christ as their Savior. When that day comes, there will be no more straining to see our Lord through this world’s dirty window. No more will we have doubt about His love for us. Most important, there will be no more waiting to see Him.

No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads (Revelation 22:3, 4). **BA**

Virginia A. Johnson writes from Sublimity, OR. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise noted.



Be sure to read our Online Extras for November-December.

“Listening for God” by Rose McCormick Bandon

Some people tend to talk too much, which can damage friendships. Quiet is especially needed for us to hear God’s voice. As listeners, we should treasure what He says.

“The Power of Godly Influence” by Marilyn Buehrer

Non-Christians are watching our lives. What are they seeing in us?

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Jiminy Cricket



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by Mike Wallace

One of the great wonders of my childhood was my dad taking me almost everywhere he went. Several times he took me overnight to the fire station for his entire twenty-four-hour shift. Shopping? I went with him. Camping, hiking, swimming, scuba diving, movies, side carpenter jobs — I would go too. Baseball games, to the neighbors, off we would go together.

Back then, it was wonderful to be Dad's tag-along. One day he called me his Jiminy Cricket — his Little J. C. "What do you mean, Dad?"

"Well, son, it is hard to get in trouble with you on my shoulder and with me all the time. You are like little Jiminy Cricket sitting on Pinocchio's shoulder, reminding me of what is right."

That's true for all of us. It is easy to sin and go off the beaten path, but when you have someone with you, sitting on your shoulder like Little Jiminy Cricket, it's a good reminder to do what is right and not what is wrong. In Disney's classic movie *Pinocchio*, Jiminy Cricket served as Pinocchio's conscience.

Have we ever thought of taking Jesus Christ — the Big J. C. — with us all day long? Just as Jiminy would remind Pinocchio of right and wrong, think about having Jesus on our shoulder as we go about our daily lives.

Consider what Isaiah had to say: "Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it'" (30:21). Wow. Having

Jesus constantly on our shoulder, reminding us of the right way to walk in His Word! Have we ever driven down the highway and had someone cut us off? Do we get all riled up and want to show some road rage? With Jesus on our shoulder as our conscience, telling us, "This is the way, drive in it," we might not respond with hostility. On the morning I wrote this, I was cut off in traffic three times on the way to work. I was sure happy to have Jesus on my shoulder to remind me to keep calm and drive on.

"He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). Words to live by with Jesus riding along with us, whispering (and sometimes yelling) in our ear.

Pinocchio needed guidance and a conscience. Are we like him? Looking back, I know my dad loved me so much that he wanted me with him as his Little J. C. As we go through this life, with all the pulls and desires of sin this world offers, put Jesus Christ on your shoulder. Take Him everywhere with you. Remember His ways and walk in them. **BA**

Mike Wallace, an elder in CoG7, is the senior spiritual advisor for the Colorado Springs, CO congregation and coordinator for the CoG7 in Montana. He lives in Florence, MT, with his wife, Bonnie.



David Discovers the Eternity with God



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by **Marcia Sanders**

"Dad, I'm really going to miss visiting Nana Jean and looking through her picture albums with her," David said sadly. "She visited so many interesting places and told such fascinating stories."

"I know, son," Dad replied. "My grandmother certainly made the most of this life, while still looking forward to the next."

"What do you mean?"

"Nana Jean gave her life to Christ many years ago," Dad responded. "Just a little older than you are now, actually. And she spent the rest of her life living to serve Him any way she could. So she will spend eternity with Him."

"But we just buried her," David said. "How is she going to live another life?"

Dad smiled. "I like the way Job explained it when he said, 'As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth' (19:25). This refers to Christ returning to reign on this earth.

"But the next verse answers your question: 'Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes will see . . .' (vv. 26, 27). Nana Jean will live again with God when He brings her back to life in her new body in the eternal kingdom."

David thought about his great-grandmother and how she lived her life. "So, why was Nana Jean so sure she would live again and see Jesus? I know she went to church every week and read her Bible every day. Is that how she gets into the next life?"

"Not exactly," Dad replied. "Let me see how I can explain this. You know how you loved to visit Nana Jean and listen to her stories and eat her amazing cookies?"

David nodded. "Yeah, I'm going to miss those stories *and* those cookies."

"Well, are the stories and cookies why you loved her?" Dad asked.

"Of course not! I loved Nana Jean because she loved me and made me feel so special. The cookies and stories were extra."

"So Nana Jean will be in the kingdom because she loved God and His Son Jesus and made Jesus Lord of her life. Then, because she loved Him so much, she *wanted* to spend time reading His Word, praying, going to church to be with others who loved Him, and serving Him in any way she could. Those things didn't get her into His kingdom. There's only one way in, and that is to accept His sacrifice for your sins. But once you've done that, you'll want to get to know Him through His Word and prayer. Just like you wanted to spend time with Nana Jean because you loved her so much, not because she made cookies and shared her adventures with you."

"Dad, I want to ask Jesus to forgive my sins and be Lord of my life. Will you pray with me?" **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 American Standard Bible*.





Great Prayers

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▀ Hezekiah (*2 Kings 19:16, 19*)

“Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. . . . Now therefore, O LORD our God, I pray, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the LORD God, You alone.”

▀ A Psalmist (*Psalms 130:1-5*)

Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD; LORD, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O LORD, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in His word I do hope.

▀ Hannah (*1 Samuel 2:1, 2, 6-9*)

“My heart rejoices in the LORD; my horn is exalted in the LORD. I smile at my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation. No one is holy like the LORD, for there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God. . . . The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up. The LORD makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD’s, and He has set the world upon them. He will guard the feet of His saints, but the wicked shall be silent in darkness.”

▀ Daniel (*Daniel 9:18, 19*)

“O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act!”

▀ David (*1 Chronicles 29:10-13*)

“Blessed are You, LORD God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and You are exalted as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; in Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. Now therefore, our God, we thank You and praise Your glorious name.”

▀ Jonah (*Jonah 2:2-4, 9*)

“I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction, and He answered me. Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and You heard my voice. For You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the floods surrounded me; all Your billows and Your waves passed over me. Then I said, ‘I have been cast out of Your sight; yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.’ . . . Salvation is of the LORD.”

of Hope in Scripture

▼ Asa (*2 Chronicles 14:11*)

“LORD, it is nothing for You to help, whether with many or with those who have no power; help us, O LORD our God, for we rest on You, and in Your name we go against this multitude. O LORD, You are our God; do not let man prevail against You!”

▼ Habakkuk (*Habakkuk 3:2*)

O LORD, I have heard Your speech and was afraid; O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy.

▼ Nehemiah (*Nehemiah 1:5, 6*)

“I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments, please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father’s house and I have sinned.”

▼ Jeremiah (*Jeremiah 14:7-9*)

“O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, do it for Your name’s sake; for our backslidings are many, we have sinned against You. O the Hope of Israel, his Savior in time of trouble,

why should You be like a stranger in the land, and like a traveler who turns aside to tarry for a night? Why should You be like a man astonished, like a mighty one who cannot save? Yet You, O LORD, are in our midst, and we are called by Your name; do not leave us!”

▼ Mary (*Luke 1:49-55*)

“He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.”

▼ Jesus (*Matthew 6:9-13*)

“Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power
and the glory forever. Amen.”

■ [Leadership]



The

by Brian Franks

Have you ever played on a teeter-totter? It was something many playgrounds had when I was a kid. With one person on each end of the long board that was balanced in the middle, the teeter-totter went up and down. Just maybe with equal weight on each end, you could balance in the middle.

To be a Christian is to live in the same way as being on a teeter-totter — in tension between two realities, with the present and future at both ends. Unlike worldviews that don't believe another life will come after this one, Christianity is a faith practiced earnestly for the here and now *and* for the life to come. We live on that teeter-totter.

Our Statement of Faith breaks down this idea in a three-part kingdom of God: present, millennial, and eternal. However, for this article, I'll simplify the millennial and eternal into simply the future kingdom.

Balancing present and future

Given this tension, what are our responsibilities to these two realities? What do we do with each one?

In the present, we are continually called to be witnesses to God's kingdom. Consider this sampling of passages that refer to believers as witnessing for God: Isaiah 43:10; 44:8; Matthew 10:18; Mark 13:9; Luke 21:13; John 1:7, 34; 15:26, 27; Acts 2:32, 40; 10:39-43; 14:17; 22:15, 21; Romans 8:16; Hebrews 12:1; Revelation 2:13; 11:3.

One of the most relevant scriptures is Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my *witnesses* in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (ESV, emphasis added). As witnesses, we invite others into present and future peace with God. Consider the example of Peter on Pentecost (2:37-41). Additionally, we are to *demonstrate* the reality of the kingdom in our love for each other (John 13:34, 35); in our service to others, inside and outside the family of faith (Matthew

25:31-46; Luke 10:25-37); and in our gentleness to outsiders (Philippians 4:5).

Our responsibility to the future is to put our hope there, rather than in this present life. Jesus reminds us that God will take care of us here (Matthew 6:25-34). He advises us to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and what we need will be provided (v. 33). Jesus also teaches believers to build up treasure in the kingdom of God rather than in material things here and now (v. 19).

Our balance, then, is in keeping the future hope in our hearts and minds while living in the present as faithful witnesses and workers.

Imbalance

One common imbalance between future and present comes when we can't stop talking about our ideas and proposals about what the future kingdom will look like and when it will come. Often this plays out by constantly interpreting signs and every movement on the world stage as the final harbinger of the end.

Teeter-Totter

Put another way, when we are living only for the end instead of living in the present, we are imbalanced on the teeter-totter.

Our hope should be in the future. The most important thing about that hope is simply proclaiming that it will happen and preparing ourselves and others for the coming kingdom. It's more important to be ready at all times for the appearing of our God and Savior than it is to predict the exact moment and manner of its occurrence. If we're always ready and working as faithful witnesses, we will always be ready for the coming King (Matthew 25:1-13). If our predictions are wrong, we might cause doubt in others, bring derision on the name of God, and fail to be prepared when our lives actually do end or the end comes.

Likewise, if we focus too much on the present, putting our hope only in the here and now, we become imbalanced. We live as though we have too much to lose. We fear death and the loss of the things and pleasures of this life. Then we become useless for the kingdom of God in the present and future (John 15:4-6).

The most fruitful workers for the kingdom know that for the present life, we are mere sojourners (Hebrews 11:13). We work faithfully and patiently as living sacrifices to God (Romans 12:1). We know we may be here for eighty years, so we settle in and work earnestly on the tasks at hand. However, like the heroes of the faith, we put our hope only in the future fulfillment of all things: the future kingdom of God (Hebrews 11:13-16).

Challenge

Here's the challenge. On a teeter-totter, rarely does one go from being balanced in the middle to leaping to one end or the other. Rather, we're slowly drawn to one side until it tips totally in the air. Perhaps this happens in our Christian walk because the end times are interesting to us or we start accumulating things that become dear to us in the present.

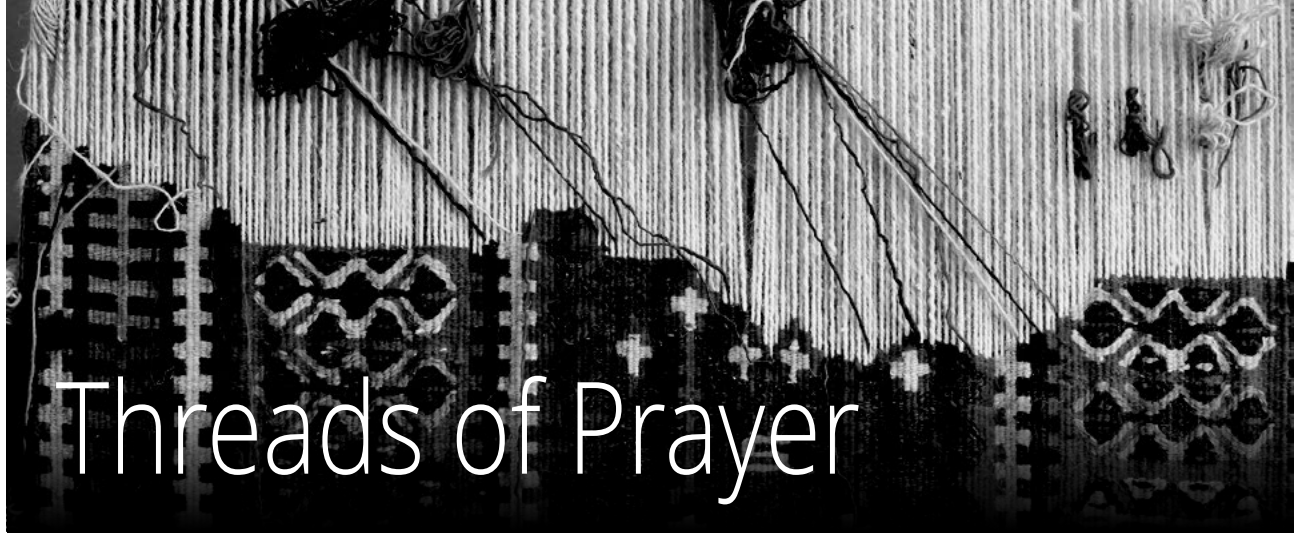
We must beware that we aren't drawn to an extreme. Balance is needed to stand in tension between the "now" and "not yet" kingdoms. We work

in the present for the kingdom while holding our deep and passionate hope in its future coming and glory with God. Everything we do should take into consideration both ends of the teeter-totter. So we orient our lives around the reality that the end will come and that we should proclaim it. But we need to live a long, and certainly fruitful, life before we fall asleep in Jesus or the end comes to all.

May we all labor and persevere faithfully on this journey. May we do so until the last trumpet sounds, and what we have sown with God is raised imperishable in that future glory, where death is swallowed up in victory and God's dwelling is with the faithful forever and ever (1 Corinthians 15:42-58; Revelation 21:3). **BA**

Brian Franks pastors the congregation in Tulsa, OK, where he lives with his wife and four children. He is also the dean of Academic Affairs at Artios Christian College.





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by Lydia E. Harris

I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever; with my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations (Psalm 89:1).

Years before my birth, God began weaving the fabric of my life with vibrant threads of prayer. Without those threads, I would never have been born.

In 1929, Nicolai Siemens, the man who later became my father, was imprisoned in Moscow's dreaded Lubyanka Prison. A pastor, he awaited deportation to Siberia.

Meanwhile, in Chicago, Illinois, his older brother read this headline in the newspaper: "Russia Deports 2,000 Germans to Siberia Camps." Sensing his brother Nicolai was among them, he felt burdened to pray for Nicolai's release.

Sixty Christians gathered for a prayer vigil, praying earnestly into the night. Finally, my uncle announced, "We can stop now. I have the conviction God has answered our prayers." God answered that same hour, and my father was miraculously released and reunited with his wife and newborn son. Within days, they exited Moscow's Red Gate on a train to freedom.

Years later, my family immigrated to Blaine, Washington. By 1944, the family had grown to five daughters and two sons. My forty-four-year-old mother didn't want any surprise additions, but her daughters were praying for a baby sister. Soon they saw used baby clothes hanging on the clothesline, announcing my mother's pregnancy.

As the birth approached, my brothers

predicted, "It's going to be a boy," then added, "We already have too many girls."

"Did you pray about it?" the girls questioned. The boys sheepishly hung their heads.

"We did!" exclaimed my sisters with confidence, "and we prayed for a girl."

I'm thankful God answered their prayers with my birth!

My life was further woven with the fervent prayers of my godly parents, who interceded daily for my siblings and me. As a result, I accepted the Lord as a preschooler and learned the value of prayer through family devotions and my parents' example. Later I married a Christian man, and we raised a son and a daughter who love the Lord.

Then came 1988, a year when big changes impacted my life. Within six months, both my parents died, and our firstborn left for college. I felt the loss of my parents' prayers.

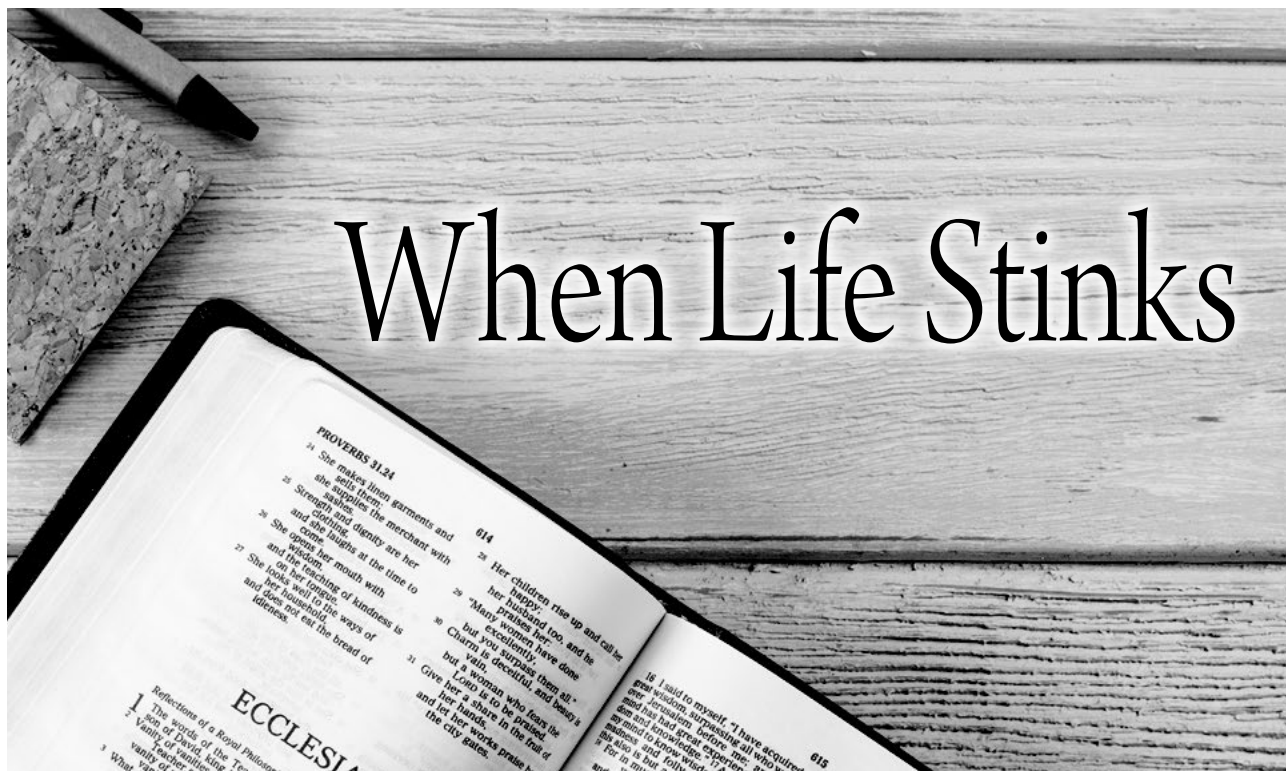
But God is faithful. He provided prayer partners through Moms in Touch (now called Moms in Prayer) to pray with me for my children. I've continued meeting weekly with mothers, now grandmothers, for more than thirty years.

Prayer also helped me during times of illness, such as my cancer diagnosis and our seventeen-month-old grandson's open-heart surgery. Through the prayers of many, God has preserved my life for eighteen more years, and our grandson is now sixteen.

As a grandmother of five precious grandchildren from ages eleven to twenty-two, I thank God for the ripple effect of prayer. Not only did prayer change me, but it changed my entire family.

continued on page 24

When Life Stinks



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What Ecclesiastes teaches us about living well in tough times.

by **Bob Hostetler**

Maybe your life has been just one steady climb, rung by rung, up the ladder of success. Maybe the soundtrack of your life is filled with only happy songs.

But maybe that doesn't adequately describe your journey. Maybe, you've experienced your share of ups and downs. You've been blessed and you're grateful. But, frankly, sometimes life stinks. You feel like you've had more than your share of suffering, and the soundtrack of *your* life could be filled with sad songs.

Either way, it is possible to live well even when life stinks,

to face the worst circumstances without losing hope. Some keys can be found in an ancient book of the Bible. Ecclesiastes is attributed to King Solomon, a man who had tried everything — wine, women, song, money, sex, and power — in an attempt to figure out life. The book never minces words. Some Bible readers find it too blunt, some too cynical. But anyone who values transparency, honesty, and real-life experience will appreciate Ecclesiastes' gritty and straightforward depiction of a world that is not for the faint of heart.

God inspired this book no less than the rest of the Bible and preserved its candor and humor for thousands of years so that people caught in the tornadoic twenty-first century could read and learn from it. Among the things we can learn from its pages is how to react when life stinks.

Cultivate faith

Many people know and love the poem in Ecclesiastes 3, which begins:

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance (vv. 1-4).

Some of those words seem too harsh for our delicate modern ears. A time to die? To kill? To weep? But those verses aren't *telling us what to do* (if so, some of them would contradict clear commands of Scripture). They are simply *telling it like it is*.

Ultimately, we don't decide the time to be born or die, to plant or uproot, and so on. Those

things come to us at times of God's choosing. And while we all want to pray, "God, please let my life be one long string of happy days," we really know better. Or ought to.

Even for the richest, wisest, most educated, and comfortably situated person of his time, life held seasons of good and bad, up and down, blessing and tragedy for Solomon. We should not expect otherwise. "The truth is," said poet and novelist Anatole France, "that life is delicious, horrible, charming, frightful, sweet, bitter, and that it is everything."

Birth, death, weeping, laughing, acquiring, and losing are all part of the normal course of things. We cannot completely

discord and division? Pray for faith to see God's purpose in it all, even as you look for the dawn of a new era of peace in your relationships.

Rather than complaining when the cycles and seasons of life hit us hard, we should cultivate the faith to believe that God knows what He is doing, His intentions are good, and His timing is wise.

Cultivate wisdom

After cataloging the ups and downs of human experience, Ecclesiastes 3 goes on:

What do workers gain from their toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. He has made ev-

it. God does it so that people will fear him (vv. 9-14).

Picture the great King Solomon at the end of his life, looking back on all he's worked for, all he's built. And as he does, he frowns. Shakes his head. Maybe even groans. He thinks, *Only what God does really lasts, and I should have enjoyed life more. I should have found satisfaction in working hard, doing good, being happy, living in the moment instead of always stressing about the future.*

So wise.

If your priorities are fortune or fame, you'll end up like Solomon someday, asking, *What was I thinking?* If you're focused on winning awards or getting a promotion, or absorbed with wild living, you'll end up asking, *What was the use?* Nothing like that will satisfy.

We are wired for so much more than we realize. We are intended for eternal purposes. So we should cultivate the wisdom to accomplish God's priorities. To be happy and do good while we live. To enjoy what we have while we have it. To live our lives and do our work in the light of eternity, because "everything God does will endure forever" (v. 14).

The corollary is that the things we do won't endure. Not my job. Not my home. Definitely not my paycheck. But my wife will. My children and grandchildren will — and friends, neighbors, and co-workers. Eternity knocks on our doors every day in the form of the people God places in our paths. If Scripture teaches us anything, it says that people are important to God. When we make others a priority, we can

“We are wired for so much more than we realize. We are intended for eternal purposes.”

avoid any of them; we shouldn't expect to. But we can cultivate the faith to accept God's timing.

Are you in a season of gathering? Praise God . . . and cultivate the faith to accept this season as well as the next, which may be a time of scattering.

Are you enduring a period of loss? Lean on God . . . and cultivate the faith to accept this season while awaiting the next, which may be a season of joy.

Are you suffering through

everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil — this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from

more heartily enjoy all of God's gifts — eating, drinking, working — because we are pursuing God's priorities.

Cultivate patience

The wisdom keeps coming in Ecclesiastes 3, this time regarding wickedness, judgment, and justice (vv. 16, 17).

There's probably not a man or woman among us who hasn't complained about little injustices. Life stinks when it seems as though wicked people are whizzing by you on the ladder of success, when your lazy neighbor wins the lottery, when your roommate who never studies gets a scholarship. Which is why we need to cultivate the patience to await God's judgment. Don't expect God to sort things out right here, right now. The author of Ecclesiastes promises "There will be a time for every activity, a time to judge every deed" (v. 17).

But that time is not yet. So pray. Wait. And cultivate the patience to await God's judgment.

Cultivate hope

When life stinks, and even when it doesn't, we can cultivate the hope to anticipate God's reward. Ecclesiastes 3:18-22 says:

I also said to myself, "As for humans, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; humans have no advantage over animals. Everything is meaningless. All go to the

same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. Who knows if the human spirit rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?" So I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to enjoy their work, because that is their lot. For who can bring them to see what will happen after them?

Like an old man who senses death approaching, the author waxes philosophical about the immortality of the human soul: "Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath;

but we still "see through a glass, darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12, KJV). The only way to see eternal life is by faith. As the Bible says, "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1).

So when life stinks, it's helpful to cultivate the hope to anticipate God's reward. If this life "under the sun" is all there is, it's all meaningless. But as Thornton Wilder expressed in *Our Town*:

We all know that *something* is eternal. And it ain't houses and it ain't names, and it ain't earth, and it ain't even the

“ Pray. Wait. And cultivate the patience to await God's judgment. ”

man has no advantage over the animal" (v. 19). At the time he wrote Ecclesiastes, belief in life after death was not widespread. But just a few verses earlier he wrote, "God has . . . planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end" (v. 11, NLT).

From an earth-bound perspective, we have no way to conclusively determine that we're any different from the animals. We live on the other side of the Resurrection from King Solomon,

stars . . . everybody knows in their bones that something is eternal, and that something has to do with human beings. All the greatest people ever lived have been telling us that for five thousand years and yet you'd be surprised how people are always losing hold of it. There's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being.

Living in that hope is one of the keys to living well, even when life stinks. It's possible to live day by day, not seeing "the whole scope of God's work from



by **Cindy Arora**

The entire universe is standing on tiptoe, yearning to see the unveiling of God’s glorious sons and daughters! (Romans 8:19, TPT).

I love the imagery in this verse. I imagine demons scurrying in haste because their time is short. Angels lean over the balcony of heaven. I envision trees standing on the “toes” of their roots and the wind whispering to the mountains, “Is it time yet?”

All of creation longs for freedom from its slavery to decay. The universe has endured chaos and groanings, a consequence of the original sin (Genesis 3:17). That is why it is standing on tiptoe. It yearns for freedom.

What is the universe watching and waiting for? The unveiling of God’s glorious sons and daughters!

You and I have a glorious destiny for which the universe anxiously awaits. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we’ve had a small taste of that glory. The presence of the Holy Spirit is so sweet that it creates in us a passionate longing (groaning) just as the universe has. We are all longing for that glorious day when we will finally be fully united (glorified body *and* spirit) with our precious Jesus. This is the hope of our salvation. This is what the universe is standing on tiptoe to see.

When we are fully redeemed from the curse, then the universe will celebrate its freedom too. Come, Lord Jesus. Come! **BA**



Cindy Arora writes from Redmond, WA.

beginning to end” (Ecclesiastes 3:11, NLT) but still resting in the hope that “goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (Psalm 23:6). **BA**

Bob Hostetler writes from Las Vegas, NV. Scripture quotations are taken from the *New International Version* unless otherwise noted.



Threads of Prayer

continued from page 20

My husband and I pray together regularly, and we met with my extended family of siblings and children for many years to pray for family needs. Now we share email requests and pray for each other as needs arise.

We have stayed connected through prayer during the ups of graduations and marriages and the downs of illness and death. God has blessed us, and we continue to reap the fruit of my parents’ faithful prayers. As we follow their example, our prayers become the lasting threads woven into the fabric of future generations.

O You who hear prayer, to You all flesh will come (Psalm 65:2). **BA**



Lydia E. Harris writes from Lake Forest Park, WA.

Eternal Kingdom

I saw her pause, lean on her cane
to listen to another person in pain,
offering the hurt to share.

I glimpsed her bouquet of garden flowers
as she entered a sick room at visiting hours,
bringing needed comfort and care.

Once more, I viewed as she bowed to pray
beside the casket of one gone away,
though she was no blood kin.

And later, when she cradled a sleeping newborn,
she said to his mother, who seemed tired and
worn,

“What a blessing your family has been.”

At her funeral I offered my own silent prayer,
as I heard the praise for this life that shared
our Lord’s view of human worth.

There I asked Him to guide my footsteps each
day

so the actions I take, the words that I say
will remain when I’m gone from this earth.

Chris Ahlemann



Readers Write



Growing up in the
Body of Christ

Bible Studies for Adults

Praise for 2023 Quarterlies

I am writing to express my deepest gratitude for the incredible work you put into creating the Church lessons. Your dedication and commitment to providing meaningful and enlightening content have not gone unnoticed.

The lessons you have crafted have had a profound impact on my spiritual journey. Each time I engage with the materials, I feel a renewed sense of purpose and a deepening of my faith. Your words have a way of touching the depths of my heart and soul, inspiring me to live a more compassionate, loving, and fulfilling life.

The Church members are grateful for the effort you invest in researching and writing these lessons. The knowledge and wisdom you share are invaluable, and they have helped me navigate various challenges in my life. Through your thoughtful words, [the members] have gained a better understanding of God's teachings and how to apply them in their daily life.

Moreover, I would like to extend my appreciation to the

editors who meticulously review and refine the lessons. Your attention to detail and commitment to maintaining the highest standard of quality ensure that the lessons are clear, concise,

and impactful. Your efforts behind the scenes contribute significantly to the overall excellence of the materials.

R. S.
Kenya, Africa

Revelation

Bible Studies for Adults - Quarters 1 and 2 - 2024



In this two-part exploration of the Bible's most exciting and mysterious book, we will encounter terrifying beasts and glorious angels, the Red Dragon and the Scarlet Harlot, the fallen city of Babylon, and the descending City of God.

In his introduction, series author Rick Straub writes, "Our goal in these lessons is to continually be drawn back to the heart of Jesus' message." The Revelation of Jesus Christ is as timely for the twenty-first century church as it was for the first century church. It's a warning and encouragement for Christian overcomers in Babylon: Remember your first love, maintain steadfast faith, have Spirit-led discernment, and possess an urgent hope.



Asleep in Jesus



Noah H. Camero
1936 - 2023

Noah H. Camero was born February 24, 1936, in San Antonio, Texas, to Julian and Felipa Hernandez Camero. He passed away June 30 at age 87.

A graduate of Spring Vale Academy, Noah entered the ministry in 1954 at age 19. He married Belinia Guzman in 1955, and they had eight children. The Cameros pastored churches in Saginaw, Michigan; Alfred, North Dakota; Saint Paul, Minnesota; and Bloomington, California.

While in Saint Paul, Noah formed the Saint Paul Trio, a group of talented musicians that included himself, Gilbert Sanchez, and Daniel Camero. They sang and played at churches and retreats throughout the Midwest. Noah also had a local Spanish radio program in Saint Paul.

From 1967 to 1970 Noah served as editor of the *Bible Advocate* in Stanberry, Missouri. Once the Cameros moved to Bloomington, California, he established a local radio program there.

In his later years, Noah enjoyed writing, and he authored some devotional books and poems. He lived in Visalia, California, with his wife, Antoinette, and attended the Visalia church as his health allowed him to.

Noah was preceded in death by his first wife, Belinia, and son Stephen. He is survived by his wife, Antoinette; his children Nathan, Lidia (Danny), Israel, Phillip (Kristi), Reuben (Laura), Michal (Carl), and Jason (Megan); seven grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.

SHINE is Back!

With great joy we announce that SHINE is back! Not that we ever went away, but COVID 19 proved to make mission work more challenging than anyone expected.

With God's guidance and provision, SHINE missionaries set out for Honduras to conduct the first full mission in the city of La Cali since the start of the pandemic. By the time this article reaches you, the missionary group will have provided thousands of medical, dental, pastoral, and other services to those in need in Honduras.

Though this trip (August 14-18) was the first full mission in recent years, the SHINE team remained at work during the pandemic. For one, the focus was shifted to SHINE team members who attended previous missions. This effort, titled SHINE Helping SHINE, set out to provide care and relief to missionaries affected by the pandemic. Additionally, special cases were worked internationally in partnership with churches and ministries of the Church of God (Seventh Day) throughout Latin America. From helping a young girl from Mexico with an insulin pump to dental work required by a young man in Guatemala, SHINE continued to serve.

Now that we've restarted the international missions work in 2023, we look forward to inviting you and sharing with you in the work of our Lord Jesus Christ in an upcoming mission. What these last years have taught us is that even a pandemic will not hinder the church to be the light of the world.

— Daniel Aleman





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by Michael D. Vlad

In his book *Let the Nations Be Glad!*, John Piper tells the story of Joseph, a Maasai warrior who found Jesus Christ one day on a hot, dusty African road. As Joseph was walking along, someone shared the gospel with him. Then and there, he accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior.

The power of the Holy Spirit began immediately transforming Joseph's life. Filled with excitement and joy, he wanted to share the transforming power of Jesus Christ with the people in his village. Joseph began going door to door, telling everyone the message of salvation and expecting them to receive it with the same excitement he had.

To his shock, the villagers reacted violently to his message.

The men seized Joseph and held him to the ground, while the women beat him mercilessly with strands of barbed wire.

They dragged Joseph out of the village and left him for dead in the bush. After days of passing in and out of consciousness, he found the strength to go back, determined to again share Jesus Christ with his fellow villagers. Once again, they beat Joseph, dragged him unconscious from the village, and left him to die.

Days later, Joseph awoke in the bush, bruised and scarred but still determined to go back. When he returned to the village, they attacked Joseph before he could say anything. As they were beating him for the third time, all he could say was "Jesus Christ is the Lord."

Before he passed out, he saw the women who were beating

him begin to weep. When he awoke in his own bed, the ones who had beaten him were now trying to save his life and nurse him back to health. Because of Joseph's witness and determination, the whole village came to Christ.

Sharing the gospel isn't just for those in foreign countries. For the past two years the Church of God (Seventh Day) has made evangelism one of our top priorities through personal witnessing. Our mission is to help lost people change their destiny from eternal death to eternal life no matter what it takes or no matter what we face.

Jesus' command

In Matthew 28:19, 20, Jesus gives the church His Great Commission, also called the Great Command:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

In this commission, Jesus commands us to do four things: 1) *Go*. As we go through life, we are to 2) *make disciples*. We are to share our faith and help people find Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit working in them and through us. 3) *Baptize them*. Bring them into the body of Christ through baptism, an outward symbol of their inward change. 4) *Teach them to observe Jesus’ commands* — to mentor new Christians. We are to help them grow in their relationship with Christ and help them become self-feeding Christians. We must also teach them how to have a daily walk with God and Christ and how to pray, read, study, and apply the Word of God to everyday life.

Jesus gives us a promise in the Great Commission, that He will be with us always, even to the end of the age as we fulfill this command. He gave it to us because it was His top priority and mission, the reason He came to this earth: “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10, NIV). This is why He came to earth. He came to bring lost people into a saving relationship with Himself and God.

Jesus’ message

When Jesus began to preach, His first message was a command to repent: “Repent, for the

kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matthew 4:17, NIV). Throughout Jesus’ ministry, His message never deviated. Several texts in the Gospels tell us that Jesus went throughout the region teaching and preaching the good news of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:14). His singleness of vision was to reach lost people, and His primary message was about salvation. Jesus never lost sight of His purpose for coming: to seek and save the lost.

Disturbing statistics

Evangelism needs to be a priority to every believer who is a part of the body of Christ. In an online article titled “Understanding Ex-Christian America” (*Public Discourse: The Journal of the Witherspoon Institute*, April 12, 2023), Professor Stephen Bullivant defines nonverts as those Christians who have walked

away from their faith. In addition, Bullivant estimates that there are 59 million “nones” (atheists, agnostics, etc.) in the US, and that number is increasing.

In an Internet article “At What Age Do Americans Become Christian?” Southern Nazarene University quotes a survey by the International Bible Society. It indicates that 83 percent of Christians make first-time commitments to Christ between ages 4 and 14. This implies that sometime after their first commitment, those children stray away. Perhaps part of the problem is little to no discipleship/mentoring taking place in churches to help influence these children to stay committed to Christ.

Southern Nazarene University also quotes a study by the Barna Research Group that discovered a probability rate of accepting Christ. It found that children between ages 5 and 13 have a 32 percent probability of accepting

Four Phases

Effective evangelism is taking the initiative to share Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God. Our responsibility is to share our faith with unbelievers. God’s responsibility is to bring them to Christ through the convicting work of the Holy Spirit.

Effective evangelism has four phases:

1. Cultivating - developing relationships with unbelievers.
2. Sowing - planting seeds of the gospel through our relationship with unbelievers.
3. Harvesting - presenting the gospel message in a clear, concise way; encouraging unbelievers to repent of their sins and ask God for His forgiveness; and inviting them to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.
4. Multiplying - discipling/mentoring new believers to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

— Mike D. Vlad

Christ. As children grow older, that probability rate drops dramatically. Youth or teens between ages 14 and 18 have only a 14 percent probability rate of becoming a Christian. Unbelieving adults 19 years of age and older have just a 6 percent probability of becoming believers.

Church's mission

This helps us see the urgency of presenting the gospel to all ages. But we can't stop there. Once we reach people for Christ, we need to make disciples of them. In other words, we need to have a mentoring process that helps these new converts establish their relationship with Christ and become self-feeding Christians.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17-20, Paul calls Christians "ambassadors for Christ" and says that God has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation, bringing lost people back into a relationship with God. He intended for the church to be the conduit through which the gospel would go to the world. The church is not buildings, hymn books, or doctrinal beliefs. The church is composed of people who are committed to Christ.

For us to be ambassadors for Christ and be involved in the ministry of reconciliation, we must share Jesus whenever we can. Our society's rejection of biblical values, increasing violence, growing despondency, and increase in suicides among young people should make us realize how much people need Jesus. He is coming back, and people without Him are lost for all eternity.

Jesus' emphasis

In Luke 14:15-23, Jesus tells a story of a man who was preparing a great banquet and invited several guests to come. He sent an invitation to those originally invited, but they all had excuses why they could not come. The second invitation went to the disadvantaged, the street and alley people who were poor, crippled, blind, and lame. They came, but there was still room at the banquet for more people.

The third invitation was sent to anyone whom the servants could get to come: "Compel them to come in, so that my house will be full" (v. 23, NIV). The word *compel* indicates Jesus' sense of urgency in wanting to see lost people saved.

Jesus wants us to have that same sense of urgency as Joseph had in his village. It will compel us to go out into our communities, neighborhoods, workplaces, families, and friends and share the message of salvation. If we don't feel an urgency, let's ask God to develop in us a burning desire to see lost people saved and motivate us to action. Let's pray that God will give us divine opportunities and divine appointments to share our faith with anyone who will listen. In these settings, we can share Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leave the results to God. **BA**

Mike D. Vlad writes from southern Missouri where he lives with his wife, Debbie.



Pakistan

You have heard in the news recently that Christian churches and homes in Pakistan have been burned and vandalized. This happened because two men were accused of damaging the Quran, Islam's holy book.

Consequently, Muslims destroyed more than 120 homes in different areas of Pakistan. Approximately 40 of our CoG7 families were affected.

CoG7 Pakistan leader and pastor Shamas Pervais has visited the families and provided some with basic needs. But we need your support to help restore the homes of our brethren through the GC Missions Disaster Relief Fund.

Please donate today at <https://secure.cog7.org/giving/>.

STATEMENT

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Our Future in Christ

Revelation 21 paints a picture of life and glory, a vision of a new heaven and a new earth: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away” (v. 1, NASB throughout). “New” here is a translation of the Greek word *kainos*. This new heaven and earth are not new in the sense of being more recent but in form and quality — new in the sense of being of a different nature from the old.

Then something even more astounding: “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem [*kainos* again], coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband” (v. 2). This is consummation language and may be the moment the apostle Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 15:28: “When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.”

Why might one think that? Revelation 21:3: “And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.’” The bride, the new Jerusalem, has made her entrance. And it is announced that Almighty God will dwell there among those people He, through Christ, has redeemed and made righteous.

In what other ways will the new Jerusalem be *kainos* new, different in form and quality, different in nature from the old? The closing chapters

of Revelation tell us that it will be new because of the materials used to construct it. It will be new because of what will *not* be present there (no temple, no sun or moon) and what *will* be present: the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb (v. 22); the glory of God (v. 23); “a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (22:1); and the “tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (v. 2). The new Jerusalem will also be new because of what we will no longer experience: tears, death, mourning, crying, and pain (21:4).

Can you imagine? You and I have never experienced life without the lurking presence of death, mourning, crying, and pain. In the new Jerusalem, however, these horrible first things will have passed away.

And then in Revelation 21:5-7, a series of wonderful proclamations: 1) “Behold, I am making *all* things new” (emphasis mine); 2) “These words are faithful and true”; 3) “It is done”; and 4) “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.”

That’s our future if we are in Christ. New life! New glory!

— Loren Stacy



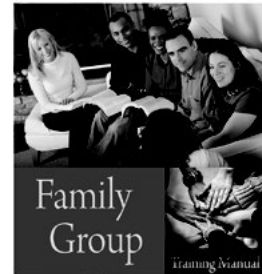
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