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Soli Deo Gloria
Glory of God Alone



2017: Reforming-Transforming



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Lord of Glory

It's hard to believe 2017 is already winding down to a close! It seems as though we just began our yearlong Reforming-Transforming journey together. Of course, the now five hundred-year-old Protestant Reformation goes on, as will our efforts to transform vision into reality. But the final *sola* in this series does provide an appropriate end. *Soli Deo Gloria* is the *telos* (end) to which our year together has been pointing. The goal of all is *the glory of God alone!*

This is no simple matter. Humans fail to recognize God's glory because we are fixated on our own. Notably, the psalmist achieves clarity only after a double negation of self-occupation: "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your mercy, because of Your truth" (115:1). To discern God's glory, we have to get us out of the way: "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Corinthians. 1:29-31; Jeremiah 9:23, 24).

"Who is this King of glory?" David asks in Psalm 24. He is the one we began with, the subject of the first *sola*: *Christ alone*. So this last *sola* brings us full circle. The Word made flesh in Jesus (John 1:14) is the fullness of God's grace, truth, and glory that the psalmist encountered. Jesus is "the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:7, 8; James 2:1). This locates God's majesty and power, not in all-determining control or force, as some think, but in the loving, sacrificial cross of Christ.

Perhaps most exciting of all, God desires not only to *show* us His glory but also to *share* it with us. Fulfilling the Old Testament stories where the glory of the Lord filled the temple (Exodus 40:34; 1 Kings 8:11; Ezekiel 44:4), the "hope of glory" promised by the prophets and proclaimed by Paul is that the glory revealed in the resurrected Lord will be revealed in us too (Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 1:27; Revelation 21:11; Isaiah 60:1, 2).

Are we to be that vibrant 21st century church? I can think of no other way to that end than by seeking the radiant glory of God in the face of Jesus. In the pages that follow, paths toward this glory are paved — all to the praise of His glorious grace. See you next year!

— Jason Overman



To God be the Glory

The grand finale of the *solas*.
by John Lemley

Last in the BA's 2017 *sola* series commemorating the five-hundredth year of the Reformation is the *sola* to which all the other *solas* point. The Reformers were convinced that Christ and Scripture alone, and faith and grace alone, are only valid when understood and lived for *solī Deo gloria* – for the glory of God alone. We confirm this conviction. God's glory is paramount, and we stress the necessity of keeping our focus on Him in the here and now.

Jesus Christ is, of course, central – the unique Savior of the world (1 John 4:14). Jesus is the

subject of Scripture (John 5:39), the object of our faith (Galatians 3:26), and the One to whom God's grace invites this fallen world (Titus 2:11). He is the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23). Christ's preeminence is grandly expressed in "That's My King," a sermon by Pastor S. M. Lockridge. As he says, Christ truly is "the greatest phenomenon that has ever crossed the horizon of this world." But Christ's centrality, to God's glory, is meaningful only if *He is the greatest phenomenon to ever cross the horizon of your life*. Has He?

Gospel glory

The early chapters of Luke narrate how Jesus Christ represented a life lived to the glory of God. That glory began at His birth, when the angels sang, "Glory to

God in the highest . . ." (2:14). At the age of twelve, He was already about His Father's business, bringing Him glory (v. 49).

At Jesus' baptism, God was "well pleased" with His Son's obedience (3:21, 22). Chapter 4 begins with Jesus in the wilderness, where He was tempted of the Devil. Notice His resolve in living for the glory of God alone. He refused to make bread of stones, because glorifying God did not give place to satisfying physical cravings. Earthly power and glory were as rubbish; God's glory was all He sought.

During His temptation, Jesus was not tricked by a quote from Scripture (4:10, 11). He knew Psalm 91, describing the blessedness of the one dwelling in the secret place of the Most High. He recognized the important

words “in all your ways” (v. 11) that Satan left out. Our Lord remained steadfast, determined for all His ways to be in God’s secret place — the place of God’s glory.

Finally, Luke 4:17, 18 tells about Jesus giving a sermon at the synagogue in Nazareth, stating His reason for glorifying God. His message was based on Isaiah 61:

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God . . . to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified” (vv. 1-3).

Notice that the purpose of Jesus’ calling, the reason for His ministry and its effect upon those who became His followers, is that God might be glorified. Think of it like this:

Jesus was anointed, that God be glorified.

Jesus preached, that God be glorified.

Jesus healed, that God be glorified.

Jesus proclaimed liberty, that God be glorified.

Jesus opened prisons, that God be glorified.

Jesus proclaimed the acceptable year of the Lord, that God be glorified.

Jesus proclaimed the day of

vengeance, that God be glorified.

Jesus gave beauty for ashes, that God be glorified.

Jesus gave oil of joy for mourning, that God be glorified.

Jesus gave the garment of praise for heaviness, that God be glorified.

Why all this? That we “may be called trees of righteousness” — to God’s glory (v. 3).

God’s glory remained the emphasis throughout Jesus’ ministry. When He was told that His friend Lazarus was sick, Jesus said, “This sickness is . . . for the glory of God . . .” (John 11:4). When Jesus was asked why a man was born blind, He said, “that the works of God should

God alone.” Salvation through Jesus Christ is solely God’s plan (1 Peter 1:18-21). All the glory, honor, and credit go to Him! Glorifying our God is our highest purpose.

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! . . . For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen (Romans 11:33, 36).

The obstacle is that we’ve all sinned (Romans 3:23). Sin prevents us from glorifying God, in word and in deed, as we ought to.

“Glorifying worship is where our response to the eternal glory of God begins.”

be revealed in Him” (9:3). He concluded His model prayer with “For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen” (Matthew 6:13). In the garden, Jesus rightly summarized His life as having glorified His Father on earth (John 17:4).

Sin and God’s glorious plan

The Reformers proclaimed, “Christ alone for the glory of

Jesus understands what we’re going through and helps us overcome. He was tempted as we are, yet didn’t sin (Hebrews 4:15). He chose the glory of God when tempted with “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16). He chose the glory of God when tempted with “carousing, drunkenness, and the cares of this life” (Luke 21:34). Christ chose God’s glory, and He “received

us, to the glory of God" (Romans 15:7).

Jesus is the only answer to our sin. Through Him and the gift of His Spirit, we glorify God and become the trees of righteousness that Isaiah foretold. Therefore, "whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31) — just as Jesus did.

Our glorifying response

God is supremely glorious! By His very nature, He manifests its most exalted definition. His glory



is eminent to the highest degree. Paramount! He didn't receive such glory; He didn't learn to be glorious. God is, by nature, *glorious* and always will be. Jesus shared this glory with the Father before the world was. He shares it now and gives it to us (John 17:5, 22). Glorifying worship is where our response to the eternal glory of God begins:

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name

of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the whole earth is full of His glory (Psalm 19:1; Isaiah 6:3). The heavens and the earth have no choice. His glory exists whether or not anyone acknowledges it. But God has given us a choice. He is glorified when the lost is found. He is glo-

riated when those who have been casual or careless about Him repent and earnestly rededicate themselves. He's glorified when His Son is granted center place in our lives and when we use His Word as our rule for life. He's glorified when our lives show evidence of our faith in Christ and His grace at work deep within us. He's glorified when His church reflects His glory through Christ and when we actively participate in its life.

There is no better representa-

tive of, and conclusion to, the theme of *soli Deo gloria* than Fanny Crosby's beloved hymn "To God Be the Glory." Sing it as you read it:

To God be the glory, great things He hath done,
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son,
Who yielded His life our redemption to win,
And opened the life-gate that all may go in.

Oh, perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
To every believer the promise of God;
The vilest offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

Great things He hath taught us, great things He hath done,
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;
But purer, and higher, and greater will be
Our wonder, our transport when Jesus we see.

Praise the Lord,
praise the Lord,
Let the earth hear His voice;
Praise the Lord,
praise the Lord,
Let the people rejoice;
Oh, come to the Father,
through Jesus the Son,
And give Him the glory; great things He hath done. **BA**

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Piles of Leaves

by **Jaye Brown**

Outside my window, a lawn service is cleaning up the autumn leaves — for the fifth time. The total number of leaves is enormous, and the faces on the lawn crew show their astonishment. Though they’ve come five times, they found us inundated every visit.

This situation has made me ponder some things about sin. For example, growing up in a Christian setting is advantageous in many ways. There are life-damaging sins that need not be committed, the consequences of which need not be incurred. The pliable nature of a saved child can be formed into Christlike preferences and habits. What a precious testimony is made possible by a lifelong relationship with the Lord.

However, every convert, young or old, must recognize and remember this truth: Each of us has many sins. Using figurative language, the Bible says they are countless (Psalm 40:12) — somewhat like the autumn leaves.

When I came to Christ as a child, my sins were many. Some wrongs I hadn’t committed yet and some I’d never commit. But a canopy of sinful desires and behaviors had already begun to fall upon me, leaving me buried enough to need a Savior. Whether my pile of sins was measured at age fifty, twenty, or ten, it would have been an astounding total — more than anyone could withstand (Psalm 130:3).

Compounding our “pile” considerably, James argues that breaking just one command of God’s law is the equivalent of breaking them all (2:10). This is because what matters most isn’t *what* we violate but *whom* we violate: God (v. 11). We do this by committing just one sin, because, by its very nature, sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2), the only

source of life (Nehemiah 9:6). Even a “lightweight sinner” is dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1).

How many ways did Jesus say it? He’s the water of life (John 4:14) and the bread of life (6:35). He is life (11:25; 14:6) and was sent that we might have life (3:16; 10:10) — what every sinner needs.

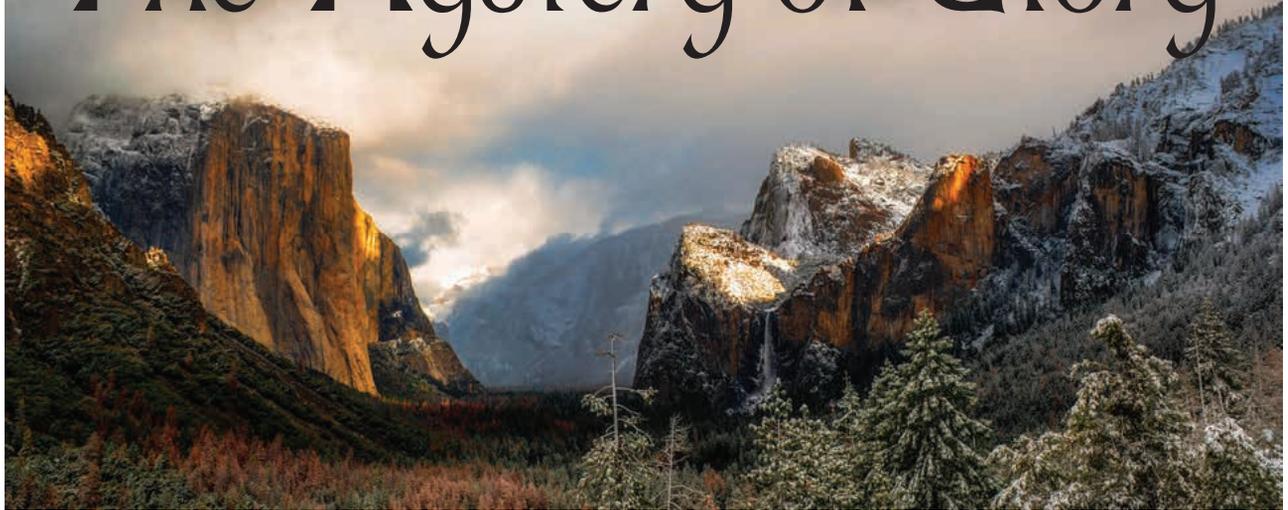
Because conversion drastically decreases the incidence of sin in people’s lives, we Christians can easily join the Pharisees and the disciples in viewing ourselves as less in need of a Savior than others (Luke 5:30; 15:1, 2; 9:51-55). How wrong we are, though, to think we stop sinning. The Bible is clear that this isn’t the case (Proverbs 20:9; 1 John 1:8).

Praise God that my salvation stops me from engaging in so many different sins, but I have still been forgiven much and will continue to be forgiven much. My pile of sin — past, present, future — would be enough to doom me to an eternity without God. To be forgiven this amount is much indeed! I don’t want to lose sight of this, ever, because Jesus said, “Whoever has been forgiven little loves little” (Luke 7:47). None of us has been or will be forgiven little. God forbid that we think it.

Every spring when seemingly countless leaves begin to bloom, that’s exactly how many will drop to the ground in the fall. What a reminder of how much Jesus accomplishes the moment He saves us. The Old Testament praises God who forgives all our sins (Psalm 103:3), and the New proclaims the same (Colossians 2:13). How thankful I am that my pile isn’t too big — that no pile is too big. **BA**

Jaye Brown writes from West Michigan. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.

The Mystery of Glory



Beyond knowing and into
the marvels of God.

by **John Klassek**

The wonder and mystery of the central gospel message – salvation in Christ – is conveyed throughout the pages of the Bible using six *p*'s: poetry, prophecy, prose, preaching, praise, and parable.

While perusing Scripture, we may find ourselves wondering about that heavenly realm or dimension in which Jesus has, for the time being, returned. How do we grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ while He is in heaven? How are we to comprehend all that He asks us to believe? Why are there only a few glimpses into the heavenly dimension by so few prophets? As when we read a well-written story, we hunger for more details about this promised “glory.”

Embracing mystery

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 29:29).

Unlike those in ages past who mostly accepted the unknowable mysteries of life, our era of scientific rationalism wants to dissect everything into manageable bytes. However, the lesson we must learn is to find joy in the mystery itself – being content that ultimately, in due course, we will understand and experience our awaited “hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). We cannot begin to comprehend the details of what exists beyond time, space, and matter! We learn from the prophet’s parable: “O Lord, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand” (Isaiah 64:8).

Thus, as hard as we try, we fail to comprehend the full mystery of the glory of God to

be revealed. But God says that by faith in Christ, we “may be able to comprehend with all the saints . . . the width and length and depth and height” of the mystery of glory that is the “unsearchable riches” and “love of Christ which passes knowledge” (Ephesians 3:8-19).

The mysterious glory revealed in Christ is ours to search out. Heavenly glimpses of His ultimate eternal glory are generously made available as well. A good example is found in Matthew’s Gospel.

Glimpsing glory

Of the Twelve, Jesus took just three of His closest disciples – Peter, John, and James – into the wilderness and atop a remote mountain. And there, in the isolation of that pristine environment, Jesus allowed them, suddenly in vision, to gain a glimpse of a heavenly dimension. In what is known as the Transfiguration, these disciples momentarily saw Jesus glorified, shining brighter than the sun. With Him in con-

versation were two others they immediately recognized as Moses and Elijah — great prophets from Israel’s antiquity who were deceased long ago (Matthew 17:1-13).

Yes, these were two of the greatest men in Hebrew history, symbolizing the law and the prophets who pointed to Christ: Moses, instrumental in the giving of the law, and Elijah, the quintessential prophet. So, what was this vision all about? Just as the disciples were grappling with and trying to comprehend what they were experiencing, a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” (v. 5).

How would you have responded to such a heavenly, other-dimensional experience? Would you have fared any better than Peter, who, as the most outspoken of Christ’s disciples, quickly suggested they build three shelters to accommodate Jesus, Moses, and Elijah (v. 4, NIV)? Of course, this wasn’t what the vision required. We immediately sense the folly of trying to create tabernacles to “accommodate” the heavenly. Peter profoundly misread this situation and profoundly misspoke.

What about John and James? We don’t know much about their reaction from this account, except that they either fell down or fainted in great fear. Many years later, however, in the Revelation vision Jesus gave to John, he became so overwhelmed by what he saw that he fell down in worship before the angelic messenger — an idolatrous error for which he was promptly rebuked (22:8, 9). Prophets like Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel all trembled and often fainted when con-

fronted with a glimpse into the heavenly realm of glory (Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1; Daniel 8).

Thankfully, we are largely shielded from such other-dimensional experiences, partly because we cannot cope with them or believe them. As Jesus taught, even if someone were to miraculously rise from the dead, it still would be insufficient to convince an unbelieving heart (Luke 16:31).

tures, telling of this glory through poetry, using rhythm and rhyme; prophecy, foretelling and forthtelling; prose, given letter by letter, word by word; preaching, sermons long and short; praise, like the Psalms that glimpse angelic worship; and as only Jesus could, parables, those metaphors of the greater glorious reality to come.

Somehow, being engrossed in awe and wonder, we too must rejoice and be content in the mystery that words in this life

“ The lesson we must learn is to find joy in the mystery itself. ”

Hearing Jesus

God wants us to remember, however, that like an unborn baby, we’re still not yet equipped to embrace the resurrected, fully glorified rebirth splendor promised to us when we see our heavenly Father face to face (1 John 3:2). But for now, we know Jesus, God’s beloved Son, and we know Him better when we “hear Him.”

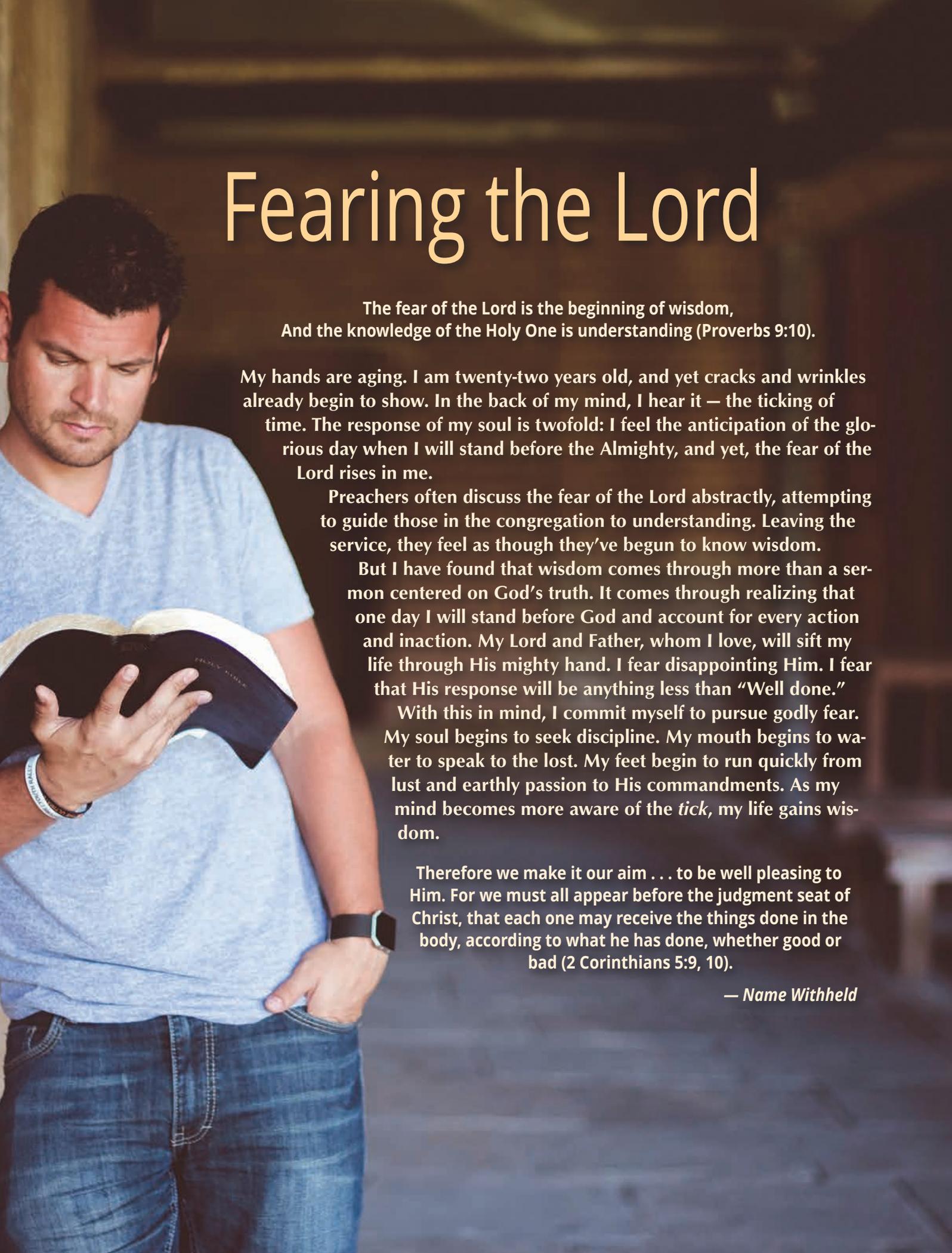
This is why Jesus mostly taught using basic, easy-to-understand parables rooted in first century fishing, domestic livelihood, and agriculture that local villagers could understand. Today, God continues to convey His will and purpose throughout the Scrip-

simply cannot accommodate. As Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, all creation yearns for the glory to be revealed of the sons of God. The Spirit affirms this with groans that words cannot express (8:18-26).

Cherish the mystery, be content with wonder, and trust in Jesus: Hear Him. **BA**

John Klassek serves as secretary of the International Ministerial Congress and lives in Northam, Western Australia.



A man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a light blue t-shirt and blue jeans, is looking down at an open Bible he is holding in his hands. He is standing in what appears to be a church or a similar setting with a blurred background. The lighting is soft and focused on him.

Fearing the Lord

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

My hands are aging. I am twenty-two years old, and yet cracks and wrinkles already begin to show. In the back of my mind, I hear it — the ticking of time. The response of my soul is twofold: I feel the anticipation of the glorious day when I will stand before the Almighty, and yet, the fear of the Lord rises in me.

Preachers often discuss the fear of the Lord abstractly, attempting to guide those in the congregation to understanding. Leaving the service, they feel as though they've begun to know wisdom.

But I have found that wisdom comes through more than a sermon centered on God's truth. It comes through realizing that one day I will stand before God and account for every action and inaction. My Lord and Father, whom I love, will sift my life through His mighty hand. I fear disappointing Him. I fear that His response will be anything less than "Well done."

With this in mind, I commit myself to pursue godly fear. My soul begins to seek discipline. My mouth begins to waver to speak to the lost. My feet begin to run quickly from lust and earthly passion to His commandments. As my mind becomes more aware of the *tick*, my life gains wisdom.

Therefore we make it our aim . . . to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:9, 10).

— *Name Withheld*

Questions & Answers



Our statements of faith say that Jesus always existed with God the Father. Can you share scriptures for this belief?

Eternality is an attribute of Deity. It says that God has neither beginning nor end. As the great I AM, Yahweh always *is*. The biblical evidence points to the conclusion that Jesus Christ the Son, in His divine nature, is eternal just like His Father. Follow the Bible's chain of evidence here.

The first link is a Hebrew prophecy of the coming Messiah-King, Jesus. In Micah 5:2, we read, "But you, Bethlehem . . . out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from old, from everlasting." The marginal reading for *everlasting* here is "from the days of eternity."

The next link is John 1:1-3. Here we learn that the One who became flesh and lived among us (v. 14) was the Word, with the Father in the beginning and with Him created all things. This pre-existent Christ enjoyed heaven's full glory — with God and as God — before time and creation began (1:1; 17:5). Elsewhere in John, Jesus explodes all time limits by linking the Father innately with Himself: "Before Abraham was, I AM" (8:58).

The third link is in the Epistles. Philippians 2:5-11 says that Christ Jesus became a human-form servant by laying aside His original, before-the-world glory in God form. This emptying, seen earlier in John 1:14; 17:5, is echoed in Philippians 2 and confirmed by glory-before-creation language in another passage: Hebrews 1:1-3.

The final link in this chain is in the Bible's final book, the "Revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:1). In red letters, the Son of God takes for Himself a series

of time-and-life descriptions reserved only for Almighty God: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last, the Lord who is and who was and who is to come, He who lives and was dead and is alive forevermore" (1:8, 11, 17, 18; 2:8; 22:13; Isaiah 41:4; 44:6). Each of these carries an implication of bigger than time, of existence beyond time, of sharing the eternal attribute of I AM.

We should speak of the Son, then, as begotten by the Father before time, rather than created by Him in time, as Colossians 1:15b and Revelation 3:14b might suggest at first glance. Jesus is Himself the Creator, and without Him was nothing made that was made (John 1:3). And when did the Father beget the Son? As far back as we can count or think, Jesus was there. In human terms, fathers are always older than sons. The reality with our heavenly Father and His Son, however, need not conform to every reality of human fathers and sons (i.e., method of conception, relative age).

Was not the Son begotten on a certain day, as Psalm 2:7 says: "You are My Son, today I have begotten You"? Rather than limit the Son's begetting to a point in time like His baptism (Matthew 3:17) or resurrection (Acts 13:33), it is fully plausible to see this "today" as a non-literal day when the Father recognized and honored His Son around the throne in heaven. This is analogous to the timeless, everyday "today" when the Holy Spirit calls persons back to faith in God (Psalm 95:7ff; Hebrews 3:7-15).

Other texts that support Christ's eternal Sonship with the Father: John 17:24; Colossians 1:17; and Hebrews 7:3.

— Elder Calvin Burrell

Does Israel still command prophetic attention seventy years after her birth?

by Robert Coulter

From the 1920s through the 1980s, many students of prophecy in the Church of God taught that the second coming of Jesus Christ and the battle of Armageddon were inseparable. Further, they taught that when the state of Israel declared independence in 1948, it was a sign that His coming was near, surrounded by prophetic events yet to be fulfilled.

Gathering nations

One of those events that will take place leading to Jesus' return is described in Revelation 16:12-14, 16:

Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates . . . And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs . . . which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. . . . And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.

Zechariah appears to address Armageddon and the gathering of the nations against Israel. He indicates this is not just another attack on Israel's sovereignty, like those attacks following its independence in 1948 or the current terrorist attacks. The enemies of Israel are gathered there to destroy her, but God uses the occasion to judge and destroy the armies of the nations gathered



there by intervening in this fierce battle: "Behold, the day of the Lord is coming . . . For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem . . . Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle" (14:1-3).

Mount of Olives

Church of God (Seventh Day) apologists taught that the second coming of Jesus, our Lord and Savior, will occur in the midst of Armageddon. The vision of Revelation 16:12-21 is interrupted by the declaration "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches . . ." (v. 15a). Zechariah declares that Jesus will appear east of Jerusalem in the midst of the war: "And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives . . ." (14:4a).

Just as Jesus ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives, He will return to the earth on that

same mount. Remember, when the Lord ascended to heaven, His disciples were promised, "This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven. . . . Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet . . ." (Acts 1:11, 12).

Who's Gog?

Further, the Church's interpreters of prophecy taught that Ezekiel 38 identifies the major participants in Armageddon:

"Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and say, 'Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and lead you out, with all your army . . . Persia,



Look

Ethiopia, and Libya are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; Gomer and all its troops . . .” (vv. 2-6).

“On that day it shall come to pass that thoughts will arise in your mind, and you will make an evil plan: You will say, ‘I will go up against a land of unwalled villages . . . to take plunder and to take booty, to stretch out your hand against the waste places that are again inhabited, and against a people gathered from the nations . . . Sheba, Dedan, the merchants of Tarshish, and all their young lions will say to you, ‘Have you come to take plunder? Have you gathered your army to take booty . . .?’” (vv. 10-13).

Traditionally, Gog has been identified as Russia. She will lead her army, along with the armies of her allies, against Jerusalem to wipe Israel off the face of the earth. Tarshish has been identified as England, and the United

States as one of the merchants of Tarshish. They, and their NATO allies, will confront Russia’s armies in defense of Israel. The glorious event of the Lord Jesus’ appearance in the clouds of heaven will occur in the midst of this bloody and destructive war.

Stalled prediction

In 1991 the Church’s teachers of prophecy were dismayed when the Supreme Soviet granted full sovereignty to its former satellite republics, and Mikhail Gorbachev declared the Soviet Union was extinct on December 26, 1991. Many believed that the dissolution of the Soviet Union rendered Russia incapable of leading her satellite states in a war against Israel.

The subject of the Battle of Armageddon and Jesus’ return in its midst to establish His kingdom has virtually ceased to be taught

in Church of God circles. Not that the Church has abandoned her hope of Jesus’ second coming. But the Church’s only active discussion of these events may be in our Sabbath school lessons or the Bible Advocate Press’s tract entitled *The Battle of Armageddon*.

Keep watching

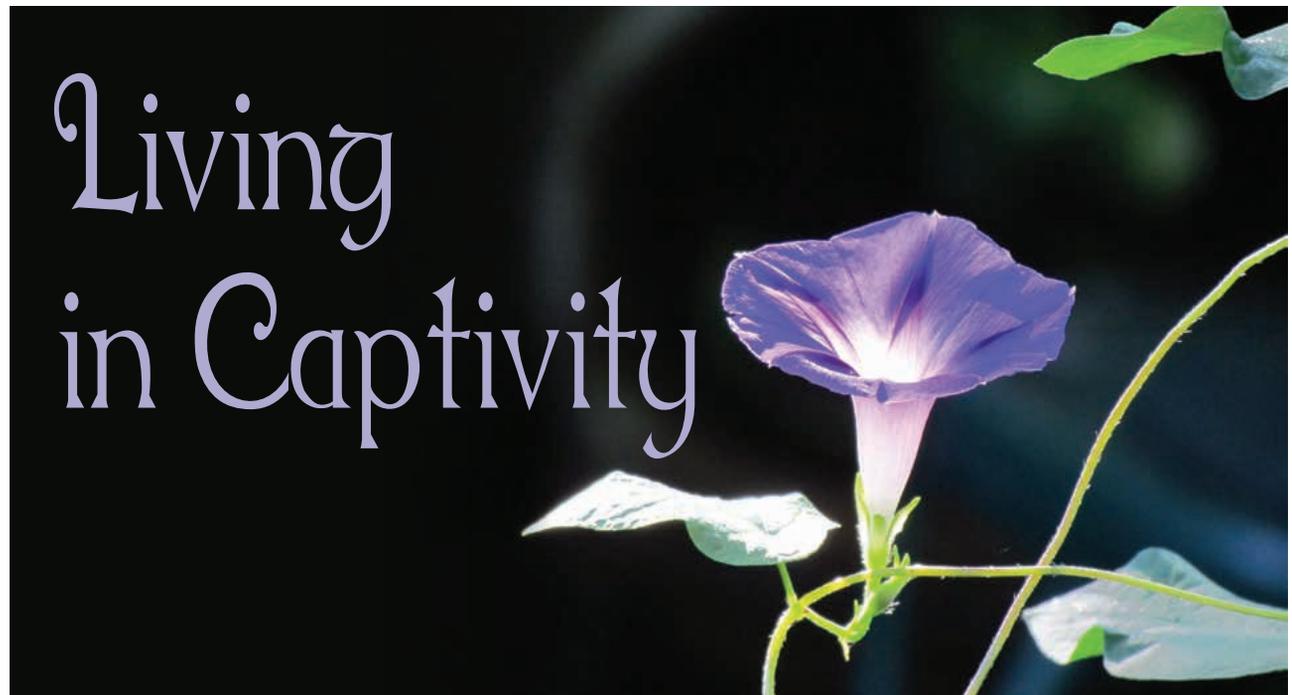
Current events in the Middle East have greatly changed since 1991. Russia has taken possession of the Crimea from Ukraine, giving it a warm water seaport. Russia has established military bases in Syria and has allied herself with Iran, Israel’s archenemy.

These developments give Russia a permanent military presence in the Middle East much closer to Israel than at any time in history. Israel is in easy range of an attack led by Russia, who supports Iran’s ambition to develop nuclear warheads capable of completely destroying Israel.

Under these circumstances, the Church needs to look at these prophecies anew to clarify our understanding of them in view of current events. The Church of God (Seventh Day) should not be caught off guard when it comes to recognizing the signs leading up to Jesus’ return. The second coming of Jesus is something the Church has looked forward to for the past 159 years of its existence! **BA**

Robert Coulter and his wife, Ida, reside in Northglenn, CO, and attend the Denver church.





Living in Captivity

A practical guide for
Christians not of this world.
by **Cathy Mogus**

As a believer, do you ever feel displaced? I do. I grew up in a small American town where God was honored. Most people went to church. The media disallowed profanity and immorality. We respected the President whether we liked him or not.

Sad to say, the world I once knew has drastically changed. Although I now live in Canada, I am still an American citizen. To my dismay, I have watched the political, spiritual, and moral decline of both countries. I often feel helpless in view of all the negative media. I'd love to escape the atrocities that are overtaking our world.

If you feel as I do, you probably have a few questions. Why is

God allowing all this? What will happen to you — and to those you love? What is God's purpose for your life? Is there anything you can do to make a difference?

Prophetic model

The answer may be found in Jeremiah 29.

The divided nation of Israel was in political and spiritual decay when God called Jeremiah to become her prophet. This priest wasn't happy with his new role. Apparently, writing letters — not so nice letters — to the captives in Babylon was part of his job description.

But there was an upside. Jeremiah informed his displaced countrymen, especially their spiritual leaders, that God had a plan. It boiled down to something like this: "Listen, like it or not, you're not leaving Babylon for seventy years. So quit dreaming of going home, and get on with your lives." He then outlined God's five-step program for their sur-

vival in captivity. You might want to take notes.

Accept where you are as God's plan.

Although the Israelites created most of their own misery, God still referred to them as people "whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon" (Jeremiah 29:4, KJV). In other words, God *allowed* His people to be displaced for good reason.

The Judeo-Christian worldview in our Western civilization is being challenged as never before. As Christians, we feel more and more like foreigners in our own countries. Who are these people who demand we think and act and talk to please them? Where have our freedoms gone? And where is God in all of this?

Daniel probably entertained similar questions. When the Israelites were exiled to Babylon, he was selected with three other Jewish boys from noble families to become scribes for King Ne-

buchadnezzar's court. But in spite of his unfamiliar surroundings, Daniel stayed true to his cultural roots of faith.

This young man's faithfulness and obedience to God caused Babylon's amazed king to declare, "Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings . . ." (Daniel 2:47). Daniel became chief to the monarch's wise men and governor of the province of Babylon. He was certainly not liked by everyone and was persecuted for his faith. But through him, the Israelites received great comfort in knowing that God was still in control.

God wants to bless you where you are. He selected you to be born in this exciting time in history, and to be a part of what He is doing in our world. You may never be in the limelight like Daniel, but you count. Our Lord Jesus "is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us" (Ephesians 3:20).

Make plans to settle.

Jeremiah told the people to "Build houses and dwell in them" (29:5a). That's not what they wanted to hear! But God knew it would be in their best interest to unpack their bags and stay awhile (like seventy years!). They might as well live comfortably.

I can understand the Israelites' adverse reaction. When I married, I had no idea what a diverse neighborhood we would live in. I would love to have been surrounded by Christians, but that was not God's plan. Within a two-block radius of our home are Sikhs, Muslims, Protestants and Roman Catholics, Hindus, and the non-religious.

My husband and I believe God wants us to be His light to our neighbors. We invite them into our home. We walk with some around a nearby park, converse in our yards. We feel honored when we're invited to their weddings, funerals, and birthday parties. These connections have opened doors for us to counsel and pray with some of them.

Don't be afraid to put down roots where you are — and be witnesses to others!

“As Christians,
we feel more
and more like
foreigners in our
own countries.”

Nourish yourself and others.

Jeremiah's next instructions to those in captivity were "Plant gardens and eat their fruit" (29:5b). In other words, now that you're settled, think about ways to survive and thrive together.

Think community gardens. I love driving by those plots of ground in the middle of a busy city that are reserved for vegetation. It warms my heart to think that people from all walks of life are working together and sharing the fruit of their labor with those less fortunate.

A number of years ago my husband and I became involved in an evangelical outreach program in our city — the most rewarding thing we have ever done. Those of us on the interdenominational leadership team disagree on certain Christian doctrines, but we set aside our differences in order to harvest souls for Jesus Christ. One can't read John 17 and not feel God's heartbeat. He *yearns* for His children to "be one" in order to carry out His mission to all the nations.

Keep your eyes open for Christian events where Jesus Christ and His Word are front and center. Ask God for love and discernment, and be prepared to leave the comfort zone of your own backyard. God may have a "community garden" in mind for you! When you nourish others, you nourish yourself.

Reach out to others.

Next, Jeremiah told Israel, "Take ye wives and beget sons and daughters . . . that you may be increased there, and not diminished" (29:6, KJV). By that he meant, don't live just for yourself. Pray for spiritual children so that your life will make ripples throughout eternity.

I learned this truth several years ago while attending a women's retreat on personal evangelism. We were challenged to think of ten women in our neighborhood we could influence for Christ. I thought the number was rather high, but I obediently jotted down every woman I knew — or sort of knew — on our block and nearby streets. I couldn't believe my eyes. I wrote down exactly ten!

continued on page 27



Beyond the Reformation

■ [History]

by Whaid Rose

Not everyone is celebrating Reformation 500. In Sweden last year at an ecumenical service for Catholics and Lutherans, Pope Francis spoke of undertaking “a common journey of reconciliation . . . an opportunity to mend a critical moment of our history by moving beyond the controversies and disagreements that have often prevented us from understanding one another.”

John Welby, archbishop of Canterbury, issued a similar statement lamenting the damage done to the unity of the church five centuries ago. And according to Gerard O’Connell, Vatican correspondent, “It just seems more reasonable for most people today to say, both sides misspoke. Mistakes made, let’s all move on, shall we?”

To be clear, the Reformers weren’t perfect, and neither were their reforms. The era of the Reformation includes dark moments and regrettable unintended consequences. But to view that critical moment as something to be repented of reflects a misguided evaluation of such a momentous event.

The Reformers were driven, not by theological peccadilloes, but by deeply held biblical convictions. Luther’s 95 Theses, for instance, was a list of scriptural objections to indulgences that set off an inevitable showdown with Catholic authorities.

At the heart of the separation were non-negotiables, such as the authority of Scripture, the nature of faith and regeneration, and Christ’s lordship over His church. The Reformation was therefore not so much about Luther, Calvin, and others as it was about the scriptural truths to which these men unwaveringly submitted themselves, consumed by a passion for the glory of God in all things.

Retracing our steps these five hundred years later, we’re reminded that the reformed church always needs reforming. That’s the meaning of the Latin saying *ecclesia reformanda, semper reformanda*, introduced in a 1674 devotional book by Jodocus van Lodenstein, a key figure in the Dutch Reformed movement. The saying isn’t advocating adjustments and improvements to the great *solas*, for these truths are settled; the non-negotiables remain. Rather, it’s a call to continual submission to Scripture and to the lordship of Christ. It’s about avoiding ecclesiastical pitfalls like formalism and liberalism. Formalism is being cold, static, and stuck in past traditions. Liberalism is being tethered to the spirit of the age, a progressivism driven by popular culture. This accounts for the spiritual paralysis that marks much of modern Protestantism.

The antidote to both extremes is *heart*. God’s greatest angst with His people has always been lifeless worship: “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me” (Matthew 15:8).

So having appropriately celebrated Reformation 500, we move deeper into it — beyond its sentiments to its heart and soul, not away from it. There, we’re reminded that sin’s darkness cannot overcome the light of the gospel (John 1:5); that this light shines from the face of Jesus, revealing the knowledge of God’s glory (2 Corinthians 4:6) — *soli Deo gloria!*; and that moving toward the climax of all things, *post tenebras lux* (“after darkness, light”), indeed, ultimate light is near!

Creation Waiting

It is a serene October midnight,
a full moon rides the ragged clouds,
ducking behind them, almost brushing
the swaying tips of trees now.
The night is cold with a biting
breeze, but still I linger, snug in my
toque and woolen coat,
my eyes trained on that perfect,
shiny coin in the sky,
how it can beautify
the mystery of the dark
and the darkened woods,
the higher branches dancing
with the moon.
Sycamore, elm, willow,
white birch . . .
their arms reach up,
limbs stretching as if to embrace
the stars with praise,
stretching toward Jesus
with relentless anticipation,
all that He fashioned awaiting
the liberation He has prepared —
robes washed white in the Lamb's blood
as incorruptible consumes corruptible
as Christians rise up in the air.

Francis Freed
Inspired by Romans 8:21



Living With

■ [Leadership]

by Amber Mann Riggs

A never-ending angelic choir concert: This was the scene that played in my little brother's mind when he heard the words "eternity with Christ." Far from being an enticing prospect, this was actually closer to his greatest nightmare. In his short life, he had become an obedient yet reluctant regular at choral events, and he knew from personal experience that they were a recipe for long-suffering restlessness. Just as my brother submitted to choir concerts out of love for his mezzo-soprano-singing only sister, he would endure that angelic choir out of love for Jesus. But it understandably put a damper on his anticipation of Christ's return.

Fortunately for him, my brother's pop-culture vision of eternity was not a biblically accurate one.

While we can be tempted to write eschatology off as irrelevant, what we believe about our future with Christ matters — not just because it shapes our anticipation (or dread) of His coming, but because an accurate understanding of His kingdom has an underlying power to shape how we approach each element of our lives in the here and now. A biblical vision of the eternal

kingdom of God has the inherent potential to unify the church, transform our homes, give meaning to our vocations, and drive our community interactions.

"Kingdom come" is about the manifestation of the ultimate glorification of God in Christ. To live our lives *solī Deo gloria* — to the glory of God alone — in the present is to remember how He has been glorified in the past, and act out our anticipation of how He will be glorified in the eternal future.

Beginning with the end

When we consider the picture that the Old Testament prophets paint of what is often referred to as the millennial kingdom of God, we characterize it by the manifest presence of God, work, and the absence of all curses. According to J. Dwight Pentecost in *Thy Kingdom Come*, it will be a physical place marked by joy, peace, glory, holiness, comfort, no sorrow, justice, knowledge, instruction, abundance, no sickness, and freedom from oppression. In its entirety, this new creation will be a physical place, where heaven intersects with earth.

This vision of a new earth did not originate as a result of God's desire to save humanity from the curse of sin. Rather, it is a redeemed and glorified vision of

the End in Mind

the original intent of creation.

When God planted the Garden of Eden, He never designed it to function as merely a home for humanity. As long as human beings imaged God in how they ruled Eden, this garden was a physical intersection of heaven and earth — a place where God felt at home to take walks with them in the cool of the day. As we read Genesis 1-2, we catch a glimpse of God's eternal vision: generations of men and women working alongside one another to fill and rule over the entire earth in a way that reflects and glorifies our Creator. In this way, Eden, the paradisiacal intersection of heaven and earth, would eventually expand to cover earth in its entirety.

The same partnership that God established with humanity in the beginning is what He envisioned for the end. However, this isn't just a partnership reserved for the bookends of time. In *The Day the Revolution Began*, theologian N. T. Wright refers to this ongoing partnership between God and humanity as a covenant of vocation, explaining,

The main task of this vocation is "image-bearing," reflecting the Creator's wise stewardship into the world and reflecting the praises of all creation back to its maker. Those who do so are the "royal priesthood," the "king-

dom of priests," the people who are called to stand at the dangerous but exhilarating point where heaven and earth meet.

Leading in the present

All things in heaven and earth are unified in the body of Christ. Just as He is the firstborn of this new creation, we are new creations in Him. The old has gone, the new has come, and, in Christ, He invites us to partner with Him as He renews all of creation (Ephesians 1:10; Colossians 1:15; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

When we turn the rule of our lives back over to God through Christ, we become reconciled to the *imago dei* — the image of God — and are re-created as leaders after the pattern of the first man and woman. Together, we are to care for and lead the rest of creation as appointed representatives of the Creator until the consummation of the end and the fullness of creation is ultimately reconciled to Him.

As a church, we embody in global, regional, and local communities what it looks like to live and interact in the freedom of Christ's victory over sin. When we lead with the end in mind, we increasingly reflect the glory of the future into the present reality of each sphere of life.

Thus, our homes become holy workshops of reconciliation where we continually practice making peace with one another, comfort sorrow, and instruct one another in the ways of Christ. Our work becomes the means of embedding Christ's ways into the fabric of our culture. Our interactions within civic communities model our stewardship of Christ's resources. And our places of worship resonate with the sounds of cursed shackles falling to the ground as Christ is affirmed as King.

Yet, this is only a fragment of the light that Christ allows us to reflect into His world. In standing at "the dangerous but exhilarating point where heaven and earth meet," it is our privilege and pleasure to serve as witnesses of what is to come, imaging God into the world around us and partnering with Him in cultivating the new creation that He began in Christ. Thus we discover more as each day passes that to live *solī Deo gloria* is to live with the end in mind. **BA**

Amber Mann Riggs is dean of administration for Artios Christian College. She lives near Eugene, OR, with her husband, Bryan, and their four daughters.





The prophet Isaiah proclaims the message of God's glory.
by Dr. David Downey

The apostle Paul spoke to the Romans of the “goodness and severity of God” (Romans 11:22). These are in response to spiritual choices. He said that those who stayed faithful and built their lives on God himself could expect blessings, but those who “fell” and rejected Him would see God’s judgment. This is much like Isaiah’s message years before. His prophecies to the people of Judah began at King Uzziah’s death in 739 BC and lasted for some sixty years through the reigns of Jothan,

Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Isaiah constantly thundered how the people should choose God and His ways and not follow man or nations – to give glory to God. But they often ignored him.

It should not surprise us that Isaiah and Paul give essentially the same message, as it follows the message God has given to us all since He created the world. In Genesis 1:1 the significant words are “God created the heavens and the earth,” but for what purpose? To give glory to God! Humans, once created and free to choose, were commissioned to “have dominion” and “be fruitful and multiply” (1:28). Why? To inhabit the earth and *spread* the word about God’s glory.

On man’s end, these plans went awry in Eden and have been slipping ever since. Humans chose self, *and severity*, but God’s original plan is still

in place: Have dominion, focus attention on the goodness and mercy of God, and spread the word about His glory.

God *has* all glory; He needs nothing from us. So what is He asking for when He asks for glory? When we freely acknowledge His eternal glory (His perfections in love, righteousness, power, goodness, wisdom), we are getting others and ourselves on the right track. We are essentially lining up with reality. Contrary to what we may see in society today, it is good to be real!

However, messages about God’s glory come with warnings, and Isaiah was one of His heralds.

Warnings

Isaiah spoke with authority. His name is literally Yeshu Yahu, a different form of *Joshua*, which

means “the Lord is salvation” and is the Hebrew form of the name *Jesus*. Isaiah, well named, wanted the people of Judah to know God is salvation and that salvation can be found nowhere else. The penalty for missteps would be severe, just as Paul told the Romans.

In his prophecy, Isaiah often used the terminology “the day of the Lord,” referring to several local judgments on his contemporaries, but also to the great day at the end of time when all nations and people would be judged. In 2:19 Isaiah prophesied that people will be hiding in caves while the earth trembles. In 51:6 he showed that everything is impermanent — earth, sky, and inhabitants; only God’s salvation is everlasting. And he warned against confusing dark with light or evil with good (5:20) or scoffing at judgment as bondage would increase (28:22).

Isaiah 13:9-13 announces terrifying judgment during this day of the Lord. It will be cruel. The sun and moon will be darkened, humanity will answer for their wickedness, and even the earth will be moved out of place in response to God’s “fierce anger.” This prophecy, first directed against Babylon, was used by Jesus in His end-time remarks (Mark 13:24-37; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10).

Proper perspective

How are we to bring such earth-shattering images to bear on our modern behavior? How can we exist faithfully while walking with so many who scoff at anything except their personal stories, stealing the glory from God?

We get our answer from those committed to the Reformation. Central to it was the desire not to see anything more important than God himself and His purposes — to glorify God alone. Churches, church leaders, governments, statesmen, *worlds* — all are insignificant when compared to Yahweh, the everlasting “I AM.” When God gave this redemptive name to Moses on Mount Horeb (Sinai), He was saying, “All the things you have heard — what great nations have done, the powerful men who lead them — are insignificant.

authority for faith and practice), but do we also remember *solī Deo gloria* — “All glory to God alone”? Isaiah made it clear: We seek to rely on God alone not only because of His worthiness but also because the alternative is untenable.

Promises

With all the fury of Isaiah’s prophecies, we might miss the main message. God *is* merciful and His goodness is great, and He waits for the opportunity to show His lovingkindness (30:18; 63:7).

“When we freely acknowledge God’s glory, we are essentially lining up with reality.”

I exist. That is all you need to know.”

When we consider this, each Christian has something to point to in God’s glory. Some will ignore us, scoff, or even attack as they did in Isaiah’s day, but we should continue to point. If our eyes are fixed on the Lord (Hebrews 12:1, 2), then we are prepared to share His message.

From the Reformation we often mention the cry *sola Scriptura* (“Scripture alone” — our

One of the famous passages in this book is 11:6-9: “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb . . . And a little child shall lead them . . . For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD. . . .” This is likely an image of the millennium but is also a clear picture of what will be true one day: All enmity will be contained. Nothing will be left but harmony, peace, and the working out of God’s glory and love throughout eternity.

As we see the world increasingly rejecting the Lord, what should our attitude be? For sure, not like a dog I once heard about. He thought he was a hero, but he actually was misguided. His master lived close enough to an airport that when a plane took off, the dog would run to the fence, barking furiously. He would follow the path of the airplane across the yard to the opposite fence, barking out warnings until the plane began disappearing into the distance. Then he would trot back to the back porch, tail wagging, smug in knowing that he had protected

the dog, our “barking” may not be doing any good.

Isaiah told us that “In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength” (30:15, NIV). He said to be reasonable and realize that though our “sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” and that when we obey, we will “eat of the good of the land” (1:18, 19).

As Christians, when we hear promises like these, we immediately think of the Messiah. Isaiah did too, as several of his “servant songs” reveal a suffering servant who will come to our aid. The

“Our commission is to continue to bring His promises to the world.”

his master and averted another catastrophe.

We shouldn’t be this barking dog. Although our concern for the world is well placed, our attitudes should be shaped, not by a fixation on end-time severity but by mercy, to be as sorrowful as Jesus was when the world rejected Him (Matthew 23:37-39). We should realize that God is responsible for handling catastrophes and judgment; we aren’t. Our worry about the godlessness of society may be inhibiting our message. God wants us to be faithful while we are *in* faith. Like

clearest is in Isaiah 52:13–53:12. This remarkably exact promise of Jesus’ coming tells us the details of His suffering over seven hundred years before He walked the earth. However, with suffering comes victory, as the prophecy says: “He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted . . . surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried . . . He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors” (52:13; 53:4, 12, NASB).

Purposes

God purposed His creation to give Him glory from the beginning, but it has been wayward. Because of humankind, it has fallen. But God also provided a solution in His Son. It really is finished (John 19:30)! Our commission is to continue to bring His promises to the world, to have faith when everything else shakes, and to realize that the message He offers transcends any human messenger. He will break through to those hearts He has prepared.

We cannot leave Isaiah without remembering God’s invitation to a banquet, mentioned in 55:1-3: “Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters . . . Come, buy and eat . . . without money and without price. . . . Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you” (see also Revelation 22:12-21).

We must take Isaiah seriously when he speaks of God’s judgment and severity, but should we also be receptive when he relays God’s goodness and His promises? With these words before us, we return to Paul and the end of Romans 11, rejoicing in the God who offers goodness and mercy to all who will: “For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen” (v. 36).

We choose goodness! **BA**

Dr. David Downey writes from Fort Worth, TX.



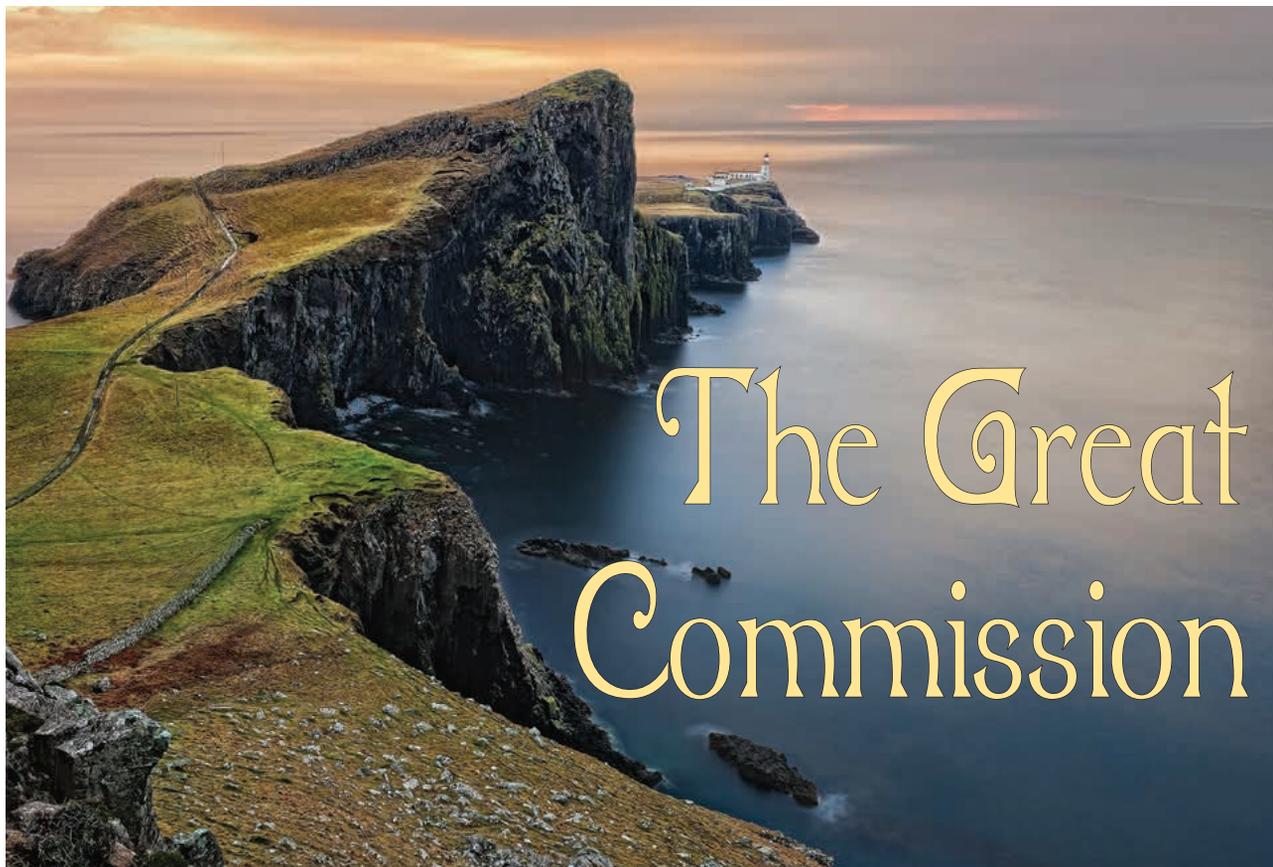


Did You Know?

- October 31, 2017, marks the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther nailing his 95 Theses to the Wittenberg castle church door. What does his unintended Protestant movement look like today? It has proliferated at an astonishing rate and, in most every direction, is growing numerically and geographically, but fragmenting denominationally and theologically. For better or worse, the Reformation has proven to be remarkably dynamic and adaptable.
- The 2010 edition of the Atlas of Global Christianity reported that there are now over four million Protestant congregations spread across the world, representing 38,000 denominations. In 2017, the Center for the Study of Global Christianity reported that there are 560 million Protestants, accounting for over one third of all Christians.
- Global Protestant population centers have shifted to the southern hemisphere, as Gordon-Conwell's survey of Protestant populations (by continent) reports: 228 million for Africa, 99 million for Asia, 91 million for Europe, 67 million for Latin America, 61 million for North America, and 13 million for Oceania. In 1910, eight of the top ten countries with the most Protestants were European. In 2015, the top ten included Nigeria, Brazil, China, India, Kenya, Indonesia, and Ethiopia.
- According to a recent study by Pew Research Center, Protestant commitment to Luther's theological legacy is waning. Just three in ten American Protestants believe in both salvation by faith alone (*sola fide*) and the complete sufficiency of Scripture (*sola scriptura*). It's the same for Western Europe, where a minority of Protestants in almost every nation holds to *sola fide*, including its birthplace. Only one in five German Protestants adhere to the doctrine.
- The theological slippage reported by Pew led Christianity Today to editorialize: "500 Years After Reformation, Many Protestants Closer to Catholics than Martin Luther." Indeed, majorities of Protestants in both America and Europe believe that Catholicism is more like Protestantism than the two are different.
- The only subgroup of American Protestants analyzed that resists this trend is white evangelicals who have a college education and attend church weekly. Most believe in *sola fide* (81 percent), *sola scriptura* (72 percent), or both (65 percent). This group is also the least likely to identify with Catholic teachings, such as purgatory.
- A new effort among hundreds of key Protestant leaders seeks to articulate a "mere Protestant Christianity" consensus on the shared fundamentals of faith (<http://reformingcatholicconfession.com/>). C. S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity* that "the church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs." Let the Reformation and every other Christian movement be measured by this standard. *Soli Deo gloria.*

"Transforming Vision into Reality" — Christ Centered • Spirit Formed • Bible Based

• Sabbath Celebrating • Distinct Yet Inclusive • Passionate in Worship • Compassionate in Service • Engaging in Witness • United in Fellowship • Committed to Discipleship



The Great Commission

Crossing the distance
from respect to caring,
with C. S. Lewis.

by **Jody McCoy**

The three stages of Transforming Vision into Reality (TVR) are Jesus as our Savior (justification), Jesus as our Lord (sanctification), and the Great Commission (loving obedience). The Holy Spirit transforms our vision into reality as we focus on Jesus (Stages 1 and 2) and follow His plan (Stage 3). We've discussed the first two stages at length. We'll close this series with the final stage, the Great Commission.

First, let's understand more about the risks involved with car-

ing for others and what it means to love them.

Risking to care

Respect is important. We're taught to respect each other's lives, possessions, and integrity: Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness. We're taught to respect God by not taking His name in vain, not worshipping other gods, and remembering our Creator on the day He sanctified and blessed.

Respect isn't just good manners. It is a need that sits at the core of our nature because we're created in God's image. When we're treated with disrespect, it damages our sense of self-worth, and we have to get that respect back. Justice is a way to restore it. That's why it's so important to

families who've lost loved ones in horrific crimes to find closure, even decades later. Sometimes it isn't about vengeance. It's about restoring respect for the one they love.

Because of our core need, the Ten Commandments require us to respect all individuals regardless of how they treat us. But the commandments represent something far greater: love, because they're based on God's eternal law of love.

So what's the difference between respect and love? Respect concerns behavior. We can be respectful of a stranger passing by. We see him and a moment later, we've forgotten him. Love, however, requires an emotional investment. Love makes us vulnerable. It brings us deep joy, but it also exposes us to the possibility of searing pain and loss.

We're even warned about love: "Don't get attached to that kitten, Jenny. We have to take her back." Love hurts. The common response of a child who's been hurt emotionally is "I don't care anymore." Even at a young age, children know they can protect themselves from pain by divorcing themselves from caring. One of the meanings of the word *care* is "grief." So the easy solution to end the pain is to stop caring, which means to stop loving. We're careful when we're full of care, and we're careless when we care less.

The world can be a scary place for those of us who have been hurt before. To avoid the pain, we learn to face life by putting on emotional hazmat suits. Safe inside our protective gear, we insulate ourselves from the emotional carnage that surrounds us. However, what we encounter through our suits is a sterile world. It's a world where we see the strawberries, but they have no taste; we see the flowers, but they have no smell; we see the fire, but it has no heat; and we see the screams, but they make no sound. Why can't I feel anything? Why doesn't a terror bombing that blasts three hundred people seem to bother me anymore? Shouldn't I care?

This lack of care has dire consequences to fulfilling the Great Commission and reaching out to others. Perhaps we can grasp this point even more by seeing how the pain of caring and love affected one great Christian.

Shadowlands

After fifty-eight years of being single and living the quiet, orderly, and solitary life of an Oxford

English literature professor, C. S. Lewis fell in love and married Joy Gresham. Joy had bone cancer, which she would die from only four years later. Joy brought life to Lewis; she brought love to him and opened his guarded heart.

When Lewis would retreat from fear of the pain of losing his wife, Joy would expose his actions with words like, "You've arranged a life for yourself where no one can touch you." Joy reminded Lewis of the need to engage his world, to be a part of it. Her words: "See yourself in the mirror, you're separate from yourself. See the world in the

ing to lose Joy. So he distances himself from that future and, unknowingly, from her.

"I don't want to be somewhere else anymore," Lewis admits. "Not looking around the corner anymore. Not over the next hill anymore. Just here now, that's enough."

Joy responds, "That's your kind of happy isn't it?" Lewis says it is.

"It's not going to last, Jack." (Jack was her name for him.)

"You shouldn't think about that now," Lewis says. "You shouldn't spoil this moment."

"It doesn't spoil it; it makes it

“Love requires an emotional investment. Love makes us vulnerable.”

mirror, you're separate from the world. I don't want that separation anymore." Joy knew she was dying, and she wanted to savor life. She didn't want to merely exist in a hazmat suit anymore. She wanted to love and be loved.

In the movie *Shadowlands*, Joy and Lewis go on a picnic together. While they relax on a blanket, it begins to rain and they have to run for cover. Safe under a shelter while the rain is drizzling down, Lewis expresses his feelings, but he's hiding from the pain of knowing that he's go-

real," Joy says. "Let me just say it — I am going to die. And I want to be with you then too. But the only way I can be with you then is if I am with you now."

"Don't worry about me, I'll manage somehow," Lewis responds.

Joy makes the point that the issue isn't just managing but embracing the pain: "The pain then is part of the happiness now," she says. "That's the deal. Love me *now*."

Ambassadors of love

Yes, love hurts, but love is *real*. There is no greater gift, no greater glory, no greater experience, no greater power, and no deeper reality than love, because love connects us with God. God is love (1 John 4:8). Love will not always mean suffering as it did for C. S. Lewis, but God suffers now because He cares about fallen, willful human beings who have been hurt and are bent on justice. They want others to feel the pain they feel.

One day all suffering will end, and paradise will begin. If we are



to allow Jesus to rescue others through us and fulfill His Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20), that opportunity is today.

Jesus has given us a purpose of eternal consequence. He wants to include us in His work, to share His love through us to a lost and dying world. That's what the Great Commission is — taking the risk of being ambassadors of love (2 Corinthians 5:12-21).

As Christians, this should

come naturally to us. We have access to God's unconditional love. The power of that love moves people's hearts; it transforms lives; it conquers evil. God has placed that power in our hands if we have the courage to transcend justice and join Christ in surrender and sacrifice, allowing His will to be done through us. Perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). That choice is ours.

When *Shadowlands* concludes, Joy has died. Lewis reflects with the words "Why love if losing hurts so much? I have no

answers any more. Only the life I have lived. Twice in that life I've been given the choice: as a boy and as a man. The boy chose safety, the man chooses suffering. The pain now is part of the happiness then. That's the deal."

For the Christian, the suffering is now, but the joy lasts forever.

Commissioned to care

None of us should take God's grace for granted. We receive

blessings from God every day. And we shouldn't believe that we deserve His grace. We didn't deserve Christianity; it was given to us. Billions are born into other religions or no religion at all. Millions are indoctrinated into hate from the time they are young. Millions more are starving, and countless more suffer under corrupt and oppressive godless governments.

Who would I be now if I'd been born into a den of evil, abused, neglected, or addicted to crack from birth? Would I surrender to the pain and lose myself in alcohol and drugs? Or would I perpetuate evil by inflicting my pain onto the next generation? Who would I be now if I'd been indoctrinated in hate from the time I was a toddler? Who would I be now if I'd been born into a world of suffering and starvation and disease?

If we are to be a people who participate in God's mission to seek and to save a hurting, dying world, we can't just love those who love us back. We have to show more than just respect. We must cross the distance to real caring. We must love the unlovable as Christ did. We can't do that in ourselves, but Jesus can. He wants to give us His Spirit and the power of His unconditional love. He wants to rescue a lost world through us. That's what the Great Commission is all about. **BA**

Jody McCoy is executive director of the CoG7 and lives in Austin, TX.



Living in Captivity

continued from page 15

I quickly realized I needed to pray more, be more visible, more hospitable, and more available.

Look around you. Are you willing and available for God to help others through you? Perhaps He can use you best right where you are at this moment.

Pray for your nation.

Jeremiah also told the captive Israelites that God wanted them to “seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it” (29:7). These are not easy orders if you don’t like the leadership or policies.

Abraham Lincoln is alleged to have said, “I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for that day.”

God has placed you in your neighborhood — and in your nation. Pray for your president or prime minister. Pray for your local politicians and people. Pray for policies to pass that will reflect the wisdom and will of God.

Can you make a difference in this world gone awry? Yes. It is quite possible that, like Esther, the Jewish queen of Persia’s King Ahasuerus, you may have “come to the kingdom for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14). **BA**

Cathy Mogus writes from Richmond, British Columbia.



Reflected Glory

by Isaac Overman

Christians today should use every opportunity to be an exhibition of God’s glory. Unfortunately, sometimes we act badly when we should portray the love of Christ.

A wonderful example of someone reflecting God’s glory is in Exodus 33-34. Here Moses inquired to see God’s glory, and God showed it to him! Later, when he walked down the mountain, “all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him” (34:30). He was forced to wear a veil because the people weren’t ready to reflect the glory of God; they were afraid of it (v. 33).

God intends something better for us: to be a light that cannot be hid (Matthew 5:14). Isaiah prophesied, “Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you” (60:1). Before, Moses reflected God’s glory; Israel didn’t. But Isaiah foresees that, in Jesus, all God’s people will reflect His glory.

Isaiah also wrote, “For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth . . . But the Lord will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you” (v. 2). This darkness sounds familiar; it describes our generation perfectly. This is why Christians need to be lights in the world, a reflective surface projecting God’s glory for all to see (Philippians 2:15). And we do this when we spend time with Jesus, just as Moses spent time with God:

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Isaac Overman is 15 and writes from Jasper, AR.



Hurricane News and Disaster Relief

by Bryan Cleeton

High winds and record-setting rain from two hurricanes (Harvey and Irma) August 25 - September 15 damaged and flooded tens of thousands of homes in Texas, Louisiana, Florida, and the Caribbean. In response, CoG7 Disaster Relief teams were formed locally to help members recover and to distribute more than \$60,000 of Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) aid. The following are the most recent news and testimonies from the affected areas at the time of this writing.

Texas. We have well over 30 congregations within the greater Houston area, and the damage there was from both wind and flood. Many of our members were forced to evacuate before rising floodwaters. Some lost their homes, and other members' homes were damaged. A number of our congregations' church buildings suffered flood damage. Southwest District Disaster Area Response Teams (DARTs) have established five distribution centers and are using Disaster Relief funds to secure materials needed to address the terrible aftermath of Hurricane Harvey. — Loren Stacy, GC President





St. Martin (Caribbean). Thank God, our family was spared by the storm (Irma). But three of our members lost their homes. The home of the gentleman who gave us land to build the church is partly destroyed, but tomorrow (Sunday) Pastor Saban will be taking some of his co-workers to reconstruct the gentleman's house. Others and I are helping the other brethren. The government is helping with food and water, so we are giving glory and praise to God. - *Josephine Saban*

Florida. Hurricane Irma brought high winds and storm surges, and flooding was reported. Many of our members left for safety, only to return to power, water, and gasoline outages and closed stores. In spite of these and other difficulties, our members were extremely blessed and fortunate. Most church leaders reported minor flood damage, along with downed trees. A few of our members experienced roof problems, but in all cases the members of their church came to the rescue by installing tarps until a permanent fix could be arranged. Because of our

blessings, we are now focused on how to aid local communities and beyond our own membership. - *Steve Krome, Southeast District Superintendent*



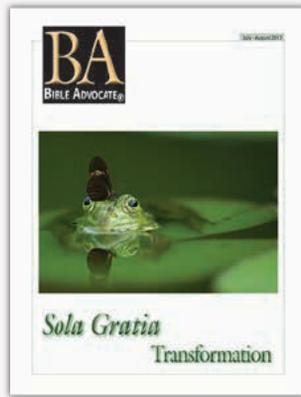
Superintendents, local churches, and members wish to extend their gratitude to the Conference members who donated funds, supplies, and offerings at this critical time. Let us continue to pray for those affected by Harvey and Irma and other storms. In the words of Steve Krome, "We can't thank you enough for your support during this most trying time."

How can you help? By contributing to our Disaster Relief Fund. Earmark your check "DRF" and mail it directly to our Denver offices (P. O. Box 33677 Denver, CO 80233). Or make a donation by credit card via our website: cog7.org (click Donate on the Contact dropdown menu.)





Mail Bag



Applause for July-August

Just received your great magazine all the way across the pond — so thank you — it looks fabulous. . . .

J. S.
England



Wonderful website

I'm the director of communications of our church ministry and the operation manager of orphans and a vulnerable school established in Kenya. I'm married with six. We thank God for leading us to such a wonderful website. We're much delighted to find out that you're committed to reach out and help people along the journey.

Certainly we've come to the right place we've been longing to be for a long time.

Praises and glory be to our Father. As we were keenly reading the articles on your website, our heart was throbbing with joy, praising God to have led us to the right place for worship and teaching we've been longing to hear. We

came to understand and realize that your church is a true end-time congregation of God that very few people knew about in our region and hope that is [the] same to many nations. . . .

Having studied the life-giving messages on your website, reading about your statement of beliefs, which goes with your call in this great work of God, what you believe in, how you're organized, our fellowship board asked me to write and invite you to come over to Africa. In this regard I want to cordially extend my humble plea and invite you to come and minister unto the spiritually thirsty souls here in East Africa.

I believe and trust that our loving Father, who led us to you, has a purpose.

R. O.
Kenya

BAP literature

It's pretty obvious that the Lord doesn't want us to participate in warfare. However, in the US, young adults, especially those graduating high school, are looking for ways to pay for college, and decide to join the armed forces with intentions of not bearing arms. Does our conference support this, and how should we teach this to young adults?

M. R.
BA Online

Editor's note — Here is Calvin Burrell's reply in the response section at baonline.org/military-service/:

I'm confident that neither the General Conference nor the CoG7 Ministerial Council has ever discussed the ethical propriety of a Christian's choosing to perform non-combatant military service with the primary motive of obtaining a free college education.



Non-combatant military service, in and of itself, has occasionally been chosen by CoG7 members in lieu of bearing arms. Pages 152 and 153 of This We Believe: Teachings of the Church of God (Seventh Day) refer to it in approving tones, and say that the Church has never discriminated against those who choose this option.

Choosing the option of non-combatancy with the express motive of receiving "free" education, however, puts a different twist on the topic. If the member's truest conviction is to oppose military service in any form, the choice of non-combatancy places them in the position of selling their soul for the right price.

If, however, non-combatant military service is in full harmony with the member's understanding of God's Word and will in the matter, they might proceed to take their "free" education without the impingements of guilt or remorse.

Much thanks for the Bible study [Sabbath school] books. Deeply enlightening, and may the Lord richly bless all of you and hope you continue sending them to us.

S. B.
Ghana

STATEMENT

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Soli Deo Gloria

As a music student in university, I was particularly gratified to learn that Johann Sebastian Bach and George Frideric Handel often wrote *Soli Deo Gloria* (“Glory to God Alone”), or simply *SDG*, at the end of their finished compositions. I find it encouraging that some people of great talent, creativity, and accomplishment give credit to God rather than claim it all themselves.

You or I probably will not attain the level of achievement reached by Bach or Handel, but each follower of Christ is given the responsibility to bring glory to God by their behavior. Jesus instructed, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16, NASB throughout). Titus 2 tells us to behave in such a way that we “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect” (v. 10). The foundation of such behavior is love – wholehearted love for God (Matthew 22:37, 38), selfless love for our neighbor (v. 39), and sacrificial love for fellow believers (John 13:34, 35).

We live in a time when genuine and godly love stands in stark contrast to the behaviors that surround it. Have you noticed the growing lack of civility permeating our cultures? Politics has become a blood sport. Those involved no longer just disagree with their opponents; they seek to demonize and destroy them. In recent years, I have been concerned that this shift in secular political thought and interaction may be creeping into the body of Christ. I’ve recently learned that others share my concern.

In his presentation that opened the 2017 Global Leadership Summit, Pastor Bill Hybels addressed the topic of “Leading in an Era of Division and Disrespect” and suggested for all organizations Ten Rules of Respect. I didn’t get them word for word, but here they are according to my quickly scribbled notes: 1) Differ without demonizing. 2) Have spirited conversations without drawing blood. 3) Listen. 4) Keep your volume down and no belittling, incendiary words. 5) Be courteous. 6) Never stereotype. 7) Apologize when you have done wrong. 8) Form opinions carefully. 9) Keep your word. 10) Enforce rules of respect (insist upon such basic behaviors).

As Christ-followers, we are called to be in the world, but not of the world. We are called to influence the world while avoiding the great danger of its influence on us. Jesus addressed our calling and this danger in Matthew 5:13-15:

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.”

We live in a world marked by an increasing lack of civility and respect. Let’s be careful to avoid that trend. Let’s live lives that deserve the end mark: *soli Deo gloria*.

— Loren Stacy



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The Whole Word for the Whole World

Annual World
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Offerings support leadership training, developing evangelism and discipleship materials for diverse cultures, and church planting in new regions of the world.

Note: If unable to participate on November 4, we invite you to participate in December or soon after.

