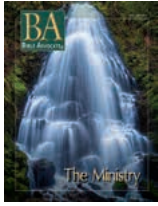


May - June 2020

**BA**  
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**The Ministry**



# 2020: The Ministry of Reconciliation



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## A New Normal

This isn't the editorial I had planned. (You can find that one, written in late February, on BA Online.) The First and Last Word for this issue were replaced last minute. Who knows if life is back to normal as you read this in late April. As I write, mid-March, COVID-19 has shut down not only our churches but also national borders and economies around the globe. Like me, you're probably among the millions who are self-quarantining to protect the weakest and to help our health workers keep pace with treatment.

When our normal is so thoroughly and abruptly halted, we have a rare opportunity to reflect in the stillness, the isolation, of the moment. My thoughts have turned toward our shared humanity, vulnerability, and accountability to our Creator and Redeemer. We're all in this together, but will we turn to Him? This was Paul's message about "the Unknown God" in Athens: "He has made from one blood every nation . . . so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might . . . find Him, though He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:26, 27).

Paul then urges "all men everywhere to repent." God "will judge the world" by Jesus, whom He raised from the dead (vv. 30, 31). It's not normal, but it is transformational in a world where God has become irrelevant, if not unknown. Paul ministers with such clarity because Jesus already interrupted his "normal" and made him a disruptor of the normal with the life and death message of Jesus Christ. The ministry is powerful when it addresses life and death together. Paul taught *both* new creation *and* "the whole creation groans . . . we ourselves groan" (Romans 8:22, 23).

Recent events confront us with a reality that our comforts and conveniences often obscure. While coronavirus brewed in China, fires engulfed Australia, and locusts devoured East Africa. *Creation groans*. Ministers of reconciliation groan with it. If you haven't, now is the time. This is our ministry to and in a broken world, and we share it. We minister new creation by authentically facing death ourselves, knowing it is swallowed up in Christ's life. So, minister hope in these unsettling times: "The creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption . . ." (v. 21). This should be our normal.

The Lord bless you and give you victory!

— Jason Overman





# Bestowing Blessings

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Thriving homes and churches need fathers.

by Laurie R. Crowson

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As a Sabbath school teacher who prays regularly about instilling confidence in my students, I recently had a “God moment.” He revealed people in my life who have true, meaningful confidence. In prayerfully meditating on these lives, I realized that one thing was *always* present: a committed earthly father figure who invested time working with his children, teaching them how to love the Lord and serve others.

Unfortunately, positive male role models are in short supply in American society. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 25 percent of children in the US

live in mother-only households. That is over 18 million children who do not live with a father figure, much less a godly one. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, less than 20 percent of all elementary and middle school teachers are men. Additionally, when we look at popular culture, men and masculinity are increasingly ridiculed or viewed as toxic.

The truth is, male influence is not a detriment to society. It’s just the opposite: Godly father figures bestow blessings.

## Precept of promise

Deuteronomy 6 says this:

“This is the command — the statutes and ordinances — the LORD your God has instructed me to teach you so that you may follow them in the land you are about to enter and possess. Do this

so that you may fear the LORD your God all the days of your life by keeping all His statutes and commands I am giving you, your son, and your grandson, and so that you may have long life” (vv. 1, 2).

God still blesses when fathers obey Him by teaching their children His commands. The New Testament agrees. In Ephesians 6, Paul talks to both fathers and children: “Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise, so that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life in the land” (6:2, 3; Exodus 20:12). He continues to the dads, “Fathers, don’t stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (v. 4).

I don’t know what circumstances led to Paul’s admonishment, but I do know that he was addressing *all* fathers in this

verse. While many recognize the truth of Paul's words, this could also imply that if fathers *don't* instruct their children in the ways of the Lord, they will stir up anger in their children.

These verses tell us that for families, churches, and society to reap the promised blessings, godly fathers must step up to their responsibilities and must be honored.

### Personal experiences

When our boys were younger, my husband, Jody, worked long hours as a truck driver. He would often get up around five each morning, and sometimes wouldn't come home until between ten and midnight. For days, and even weeks, the boys saw him only on weekends. After going to church on Saturdays, my beloved would often spend Sundays working on the trucks he co-owned with his parents. Every time he was gone for any length of time, I noticed a building resentment and anger in the boys, but it seemed to relax anytime Jody spent time doing things with them. His presence restored blessing.

This principle doesn't apply to just boys. As a teen, a sweet friend of mine drastically changed one summer after her parents divorced and her dad left to live with his new girlfriend. While her dad tried to include her in his new life, her mom told my friend stories about all the bad things her father was doing. As a result, my friend started seeking out new father figures in her life.

I invited her to my church youth group in hopes that she would find the ultimate Father

figure. Though she came a few times, it wasn't until several years later that she came to know the Lord. In the interim, though, my friend battled depression, anger, and resentment, and she made some poor choices along the way.

This is the story of so many in our society. The promise of blessing is lost when dads leave, and children reap the consequences.

### Price of fatherlessness

When we look at society today, we see some good, but we also see bitterness, envy, anger, strife, and covetousness. Where does the good come from? In a

sheds light on what happens when strong, God-fearing father figures are absent from children's lives. The study says that "85% of youths sitting in jail grew up in a home without a father." That's staggering. It makes me wonder how many of the other 15 percent had a God-fearing father figure in their lives.

The same study also states that "63% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes. . . . 75% of young patients seeking substance abuse treatment are from fatherless homes. . . . Children who grow up without a father are twice as likely to drop out of high school."

“Male influence is not a detriment to society. It's just the opposite.”

large part, from Christians who are secure knowing that God *loves* them and is not going anywhere! We as a church are called to love our neighbors as ourselves and often minister to the sick, widowed, and needy in our communities. But what about the fatherless? Are we providing father figures for those who have lost the blessing and may not know the joy of running to a dad when they need help answering tough questions?

A legal guide written by attorney Jeff Adrian Biddle (July 2012)

While society teaches that we don't need men in our lives, the Bible clearly states otherwise. And statistics *clearly* show otherwise. Instead of bestowing blessings, absent fathers leave a curse. But it doesn't have to be that way. The church is full of godly men, and they are called to stand up to meet the fatherless and neglected souls where they are.

### A church of fathers

Are we inviting father figures to actively participate in Vacation Bible School, teach children's

classes, or hold question-and-answer sessions, or even Bible studies, with our youth? When my boys were younger, my brother led a Scout troop that went hiking, fishing, hunting, and on many other outings throughout the years. While I encouraged and tried to help our boys earn their merit badges along the way, it was my husband who made a real difference in their motivation to earn the next badge.

Time and again, I would get involved and help our boys

according to data he collected from Promise Keepers and Baptist Press, if the father in the family doesn't attend church — even if his wife does — only 2 percent of the kids will become regular worshippers. Cady continues, "If a father attends church irregularly, between half and two-thirds of their kids will attend church with some regularity as adults." If Mom does not go to church, but Dad does, at least two-thirds of their children will end up attending church.

“Godly men are called to stand up to meet the fatherless and neglected souls where they are.”

with fundraisers, testing for their badges and such. But it wasn't until their dad got involved that they worked that much harder to achieve their goals. As a society, even for fathers, we often forget how important it is for dads to celebrate the successes of their kids and for children to know the exuberance of hearing them say, "Well done!" Rather than provoking anger, an attentive father bestows the blessing of joy.

Godly fathers can impact the church directly. In his article appearing in *The Longmont Pastor* (June 2016), Nick Cady cites statistics on young adult church attendance and the impact of the father's church attendance. Ac-

While mothers are not excluded from teaching in the way a child should go, it is vitally important that father figures come alongside. They should reinforce the precepts that godly women bring to the table and give children a sense of peace about obeying our heavenly Father.

### A great need

I think the Scouts had the right idea at one point in their early history: Father figures spending quality time with children sets the tone for the rest of their lives, either pointing them toward or away from God. I simply pray that we're raising our children to

look toward a Father who loves us so much that He desires an intimate relationship with us. Obedience to the Holy One opens up the floodgates for God to release His blessings. Are we opening our hearts to receive His blessings, or are we turning away His gift?

Clearly, statistics show just the opposite of what society proclaims today about father figures. I know that not all of us have a father present in our lives. My own dad passed away many years ago, but godly men in my life have lovingly come alongside me to guide me when I ask those tough questions.

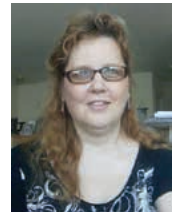
Is there someone — a father, grandfather, uncle, or other church member — who might be willing to spend a little time with you or your kids on a regular basis? If you're not sure, please reach out to your local pastor for ideas. You never know when a retired elder might be searching for a mentoring relationship with someone.

Please join me on a prayer journey that God would raise up the father figures *He* wants to be present in our lives to carry out His blessing. And for all the fathers who bless our lives every day, we say, thank you! **BA**

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### Laurie R. Crowson

writes from Meridian, ID, where she ministers with her husband, Pastor Jody Crowson. Scripture quotations are from the *Holman Christian Standard Bible*.



# The Music of Ministry



by Christopher L. Scott

Waving her arms around isn't enough. The movement must be clear, timed, and the same as in practice sessions. This is the role of my cousin, Rachel, a classical music conductor at a local church. With a small baton in her hand, she methodically guides her musicians to play a distinct way and brings everyone into harmony.

After practice, she brings her musicians in front of an audience and directs them through the music. Do the musicians need the conductor to play the music? Not really. They have the musical score in front of them. But the conductor keeps the musicians playing together in harmony and helps them correctly interpret their musical score.

In the same way, Christ is our music conductor, and He requires our work: "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18). The conjunction *and* tells us what we should do based on what He has done. The ministry Paul talks about in this passage is a service, or task, done for other people. It is a translation of the Greek word *diakonia*. The *New Living Translation* and *Good News Bible* translate it "task." Paul uses the same Greek word to describe how God was "putting me [Paul] into the *ministry*" (1 Timothy 1:12). And in his first letter to the Corinthians: "There are differences of *ministries*, but the same Lord" (1 Corinthians 12:5). Lastly, when talking to pastors, Paul says their responsibility is "equipping of the saints for the work of *ministry* . . ." (Ephesians 4:12).

God gives us the task of reconciling people back to God because people are separated from

God (Colossians 1:21, 22). All people are distant from God until they meet Him and follow Him.

One of my young son's favorite things to do is play at the park. Sometimes while there, he walks away from the playground to an open field. Once he gets about a hundred feet away, I say, "Luke, come back, please." That's my plea to him. But I don't need to plead for him to come back unless he is far away. Likewise, everyone is far away from God until they adopt a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

What is the ministry for all Christians that Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 5:18? Jesus expresses it: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). *How* do we preach the gospel? By using what Paul calls the "word of reconciliation." This is the good news — the message we preach — to everyone: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Christ died and took the punishment people deserved because of their sins. Now people have eternal life by believing in Him.

God is the musical conductor; we are the musicians. In a symphony piece, the conductor selects the music and interprets it for the musicians. But the musicians produce the music. What the audience hears is from the instruments, not the conductor. God has selected the music for us, so let's play it. **BA**

**Christopher L. Scott** writes from Exeter, CA.



# Ministries of Glory

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Becoming sufficient  
ministers of the new  
covenant.

by Jason Overman

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In the last “Spotlight” we examined Revelation 21 and the *new creation* that began in Christ and the ministry of reconciliation. This time we focus on the *new covenant*. Just before Paul communicates that reconciliation is a God-given ministry and that we are ministers of God (2 Corinthians 5:18; 6:4), he writes that God has “also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant . . .” (3:6). These two ministries go hand in hand. In fact, they are one and the same.

Paul’s second epistle to the Corinthians has more to say about “the ministry” than all his other letters combined, and chapter 3 is his most concentrated expression on the subject.

It’s also one of the most complex and profound statements the apostle (already well-known for deep and challenging teaching) ever wrote. With rich insight and imagery drawn from Scripture, Paul tells how we are both competent ministers of the new and readers of the old, by the Spirit.

## Living letter

The chapter opens with Paul defending *his ministry*. Some are questioning it. Does he have the proper credentials? Where are his letters of recommendation (v. 1)? His response addresses this situation, but has far-reaching consequences for the nature of all Christian ministry: “Clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart” (v. 3).

What better commendation could Paul offer than the community of faith in Corinth itself? They are a living letter, minis-

tered by Paul. Paper and ink is little, compared to flesh and blood. Obviously, an incarnated message is far superior to an inscribed one. And here is a teachable moment that Paul takes advantage of to instruct on the ministry of the new covenant in which he and Corinth participate.

The careful reader will recognize the allusions to Scripture compressed in verse 3:

Exodus 31:18: And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.

Jeremiah 31:33: “But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

Ezekiel 36:26: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will



# 2 CORINTHIANS 3

take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”

From the Law and the Prophets, Paul identifies and contrasts old and new covenants. The old communicated God’s message but failed because “the letter” is insufficient to conform hard hearts to His will. The new overcomes this. It makes us sufficient through the Spirit, transforming hearts (2 Corinthians 3:5). What was inscribed without could not bring obedience, but what is inscribed within will be embodied.

## Letter vs. Spirit

From Exodus, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, Paul can conclude “The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (v. 6). The contrast could not be sharper. The old is glorious; it is God’s revelation. But it was a ministry of condemnation and death because by it, sin was exposed — and the wages of sin is death. But how much more glorious is the new that is the ministry of the Spirit and righteousness unto eternal life (vv. 7-11)?

The condemnation and death of the old covenant is evident from the story itself. In only one verse we move from the extraordinary act of God writing the Ten Commandments on two tablets of stone with His own finger, to the erection of the golden

calf (Exodus 31:18; 32:1). Three thousand died that day (a curious counterpoint to the three thousand saved when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost) for Israel’s great sin, and the tablets with the covenant were broken (32:1-35).

This was just the first of many, many covenant-breaking moments. No wonder the prophets, situated in exile for Israel’s relentless rebellion, foresaw a new covenant, different from what had come before — a covenant ministry not just *written down* but *written in*, where stony tablets and hearts were exchanged for new hearts of Spirit enfleshed with God’s nature in Christ. The witness of the prophets is the experience of the church in Corinth. That’s Paul’s point. They have become the people of God by the ministry of the Spirit through Paul.

It is important to note that *letter (gramma)* doesn’t refer to Scripture (*graphie*), of which Paul speaks only positively as God’s authoritative revelation to the church (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). The content of the covenant is not in question; the law is written in both. It’s the covenant form that makes all the difference for covenant ministry: dead script or living Spirit? As an advocate of Scripture and writer of epistles, Paul is no enemy of words —

God’s least of all. But only the Spirit can make letters live.

And Paul is just getting started.

## Behind the veil

Paul continues reflecting on the events at Sinai. His imagination is captured by the story of Moses and the veil that covered his face. It follows in Exodus 34, after the golden calf catastrophe. Moses went back up the mountain to intercede for Israel. In God’s mercy, wrath is turned away and the covenant is renewed. But in the presence of God’s glory, Moses is transfigured. Unaware that his face is shining, reflecting God’s glory, he goes down the mountain with another set of tablets. The people fear and recoil from him, so he veils himself.

In the final third of 2 Corinthians 3, the story of Moses and his veil becomes a multi-layered metaphor that symbolically reinforces not only the superiority of the new covenant over the old, but also how Moses prefigures the new covenant community. Paul isn’t doing history here, but theology. The original story is a given, but like any good preacher, Paul teases out meaning for his congregation’s edification.

At the first level of meaning, in light of the prophets and experience in Christ, Paul sees the

radiance of Moses' face as the "fading" (*katargoumenen*, transitory) glory of the old covenant. Like Moses' glow, it was temporary, while the exceeding glory of the new "remains" (*to menon*, permanent; vv. 11, 13). The veil signifies Israel's inability to tolerate the glory of the old, as well as her ongoing inability to see its "end" (*telos*, goal) in Christ. "Unlike Moses," who hid his face from the children of Israel, the children of the new covenant shine and speak with "great boldness" (vv. 12, 13). The transience of the old is transcended by the transformation of the new.

But in verse 14, Paul suddenly shifts. Now Moses the man is Moses the Torah, old covenant text veiled to the blind Jewish reader. Paul comments, "For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ" (v. 14). But the good news is, "when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away" (v. 16), revealing the *telos* to which its glory pointed: *Christ*. The unveiled reader is the competent reader who reads Scripture in the light of Christ, the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets (John 5:39; Matthew 5:17).

That turning signals the last level of metaphor meaning. Verse 16 echoes Exodus 34:34: "But whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he would take the veil off until he came out." Moses prefigures the transforming ministry of the Spirit unto righteousness. It was the Lord whom Moses turned to in unveiled face and was transfigured. Paul identifies Him with the

Spirit in whom is Christian liberty and by whom we are all being transformed: "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 3:17, 18).

Here at the end, Paul reaches his metaphoric crescendo, and new covenant ministry is revealed in all its transfiguring glory. Moses prefigures Christian transfiguration even as the contrast with old covenant continues. Only Moses, of Israel's children, experienced this partial, intermittent glorification. "But we all," Paul says of the new covenant community — all believers fully, continuously — are being transformed into the very image of the Lord's glory, from glory to exceeding glory: "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (4:6).

This is *the ministry*. Our ministry. This is where reconciliation and righteousness are taking us in Christ and by the Spirit. New covenant! New creation! "Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart" (v. 1). Let's not settle for a lesser glory when God is calling us all the way to His likeness. We are not sufficient of ourselves, but He has made us so in His Son and Spirit.

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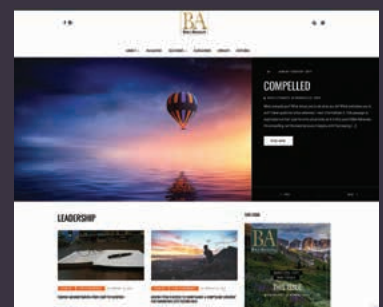
*For a more in-depth account of this reading of 2 Corinthians 3, Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul, by Richard B. Hays, is highly recommended and influential to this article.*



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## Questions & Answers



**I**s the Sabbath a “shadow”? A recent BA article said it was.

**A** shadow is a shaded image cast by light rays striking a body or object. In biblical study, the words *type* and *shadow* can refer to a person, event, or item that serves as a pattern, preview, or lesser image of a later, greater person, event, or item in Scripture. Isaac, Joseph, and Moses were types of Christ. Israel’s exodus from Egypt foreshadowed our Christian freedom from sin-slavery through Jesus’ death and resurrection. And Israel’s tabernacle in the wilderness was a copy of heavenly things, according to Hebrews 9:24. The word *shadow* in this sense occurs three times in the King James Version.

In the “Day of Grace” article (May-June 2018 BA), the word *shadow* was used to describe the seventh-day Sabbath’s relation to the eternal kingdom of God, to be realized when Christ comes again and defeats all His enemies. That the Bible’s weekly Sabbath is a true prefigure, an accurate shadow, of God’s kingdom to come is seen in these comparisons of the two: **1)** Both are times of rest and peace, when the labors, cares, and conflicts of this life are laid aside (Genesis 2:2, 3; Hebrews 4:1-11; Revelation 21, 22). **2)** Both are God’s good gifts received and celebrated by faith, not by the works of those who receive them (Exodus 20:9, 10; Mark 2:27; Romans 6:23). **3)** Instead of legalistic limitations on humans, both are times of unbounded pleasure and delight as we focus on God in Christ and on His people joined by the Spirit’s love, joy, and peace (Isaiah 35:10; 58:13, 14). And **4)** Both the Sabbath and God’s kingdom are holy items of high value. Our desire to keep Sabbath *holy* (i.e.,

separate from other days), according to God’s command, points to ultimate *wholeness* in body, mind, and spirit of all God’s saints in His eternal kingdom to come (Exodus 20:8; Revelation 21:4, 27).

In the Bible’s pattern and in God’s economy, the lesser is blest of the greater and is the shadow of the greater, not vice versa. As wonderful and blest as the seventh day is for those who receive it by faith, this progression from lesser to greater in biblical typology is also true of the weekly rest day. Sabbath is, in many ways, only a preview — a foretaste — of the best in human experience yet to come in God’s kingdom.

Similarly, consider the *typical* relationship of human marriage, with its heavenly reality to which the shadow points: the marriage of Jesus Christ with His bride, the church (Ephesians 5:22-33, esp. v. 32; Revelation 19:7-9). The exceeding, eternal greatness of the latter marriage does not abolish or diminish the reality and value of today’s temporal marriage, still rightly practiced by God’s people and blest this side of Christ’s return for His bride.

This shared symbolism of two God-given human institutions dating from creation week — Sabbath and marriage — reminds us how those marvelous beginnings (Genesis 1, 2) anticipate an even more marvelous end with its marriage supper of the Lamb and its eternal Sabbath rest in God’s kingdom (Revelation 19-22). It is no insult but high honor indeed to speak of the former institutions as copies, shadows, and types of the latter. We value and delight in the weekly Sabbath indeed. And we pray even more earnestly, “Come, Lord Jesus. Rule and reign forever with our Father in that eternal Sabbath of righteousness and peace!”

— Elder Calvin Burrell



# The Priesthood

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## Reconciliation in the Old and New Testaments.

by Ramon Ruiz

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**T**he theme of reconciliation is as old as humanity itself. Because of sin, humans damaged their relationship not only with God but also with their neighbor. Because of the Fall, communion between Adam and Eve was lost, giving rise to individualism. Both covered themselves with fig leaves, which they had not needed before: “I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself” (Genesis 3:8-10). Their relationship with creation was broken too.

Sin makes us fugitives because we know we have intentionally failed. Filled with fear and guilt, humans distance themselves from their Creator. The prophet

Isaiah states this sad fact: “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God” (Isaiah 59:1, 2a).

Sin produces estrangement and paralysis in humanity. Therefore, reconciliation is undoubtedly God’s initiative. It is an act of love that comes from the heart of our Creator toward anyone who has offended Him. It is pure grace, mercy, and forgiveness available to all.

### Old covenant reconciliation

God established atonement, prefiguring the ministry of reconciliation, as a priority of Israel’s ancient priesthood: “And Moses said to Aaron, ‘Go to the altar, offer your sin offering and your burnt offering, and make atonement for yourself and for the people. Offer the offering of the

people, and make atonement for them, as the LORD commanded” (Leviticus 9:7; cf. 16:6).

Leviticus 16 describes the Day of Atonement. The passage includes the story of Azazel, the male goat (scapegoat) that was expelled into the desert and took with him the sins of the people. The text literally reads:

[Aaron] is to cast sacred lots to determine which goat will be reserved as an offering to the LORD and which will carry the sins of the people to the wilderness of Azazel. The other goat, the scapegoat chosen by lot to be sent away, will be kept alive, standing before the LORD. When it is sent away to Azazel in the wilderness, the people will be purified and made right with the LORD” (vv. 8-10, NLT).

This text is difficult to interpret, as the etymological origin of the

name Azazel is uncertain. We understand that it means “go to a desert.” What is clear is that this male goat represents an act of purification, because he takes the sins of everyone with him into the desert to make reconciliation between God and His people. Some believe the scapegoat was a type of Christ, who went out to the mount of the skull bearing the sins of the people. John the Baptist suggests this: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29; cf. Isaiah 53:6, 12).

Because Israel was forgiven on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), the Feast of Tabernacles, the last of Israel’s seven festivals that followed right after in the fall, was a celebration of joy and love. Everyone shared the abundant fruit of creation, rejoicing together in God’s reconciliation (Leviticus 23).

### New covenant priesthood

In the New Testament, as fulfillment of the old covenant, the ministry of reconciliation is an essential part of the priesthood of all believers. Sin moves like a raging sea that covers all of humanity, without any distinction of race, language, or social class; every person is sinful. This does not apply just to Israel but to the whole world.

The apostle Paul quotes the condition of the human being from Psalm 14, writing a succinct, devastating statement: “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). By opting to sin, every individual has broken their relationship with God, imitating Satan, the master and lord of enmity, violence, division, resentment, and death.

In the face of universal evil, God surprised us by bringing to light something unthinkable for us: the new creation, in which reconciliation is fundamental. Paul writes:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17, 18).

promises to unite us to Himself forever in Christ: “Then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28b). This is total and ultimate reconciliation.

If I had to define with just one word the most important task of Christians, without a doubt I would say *reconciliation*. This is what we do by evangelizing, sharing the Word of God. As a priesthood of believers, we reconcile men and women with each other, with creation, but

“The ministry of reconciliation is an essential part of the priesthood of all believers.”

In the famous parable about the love of God, the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), God the Father waits for us to accept reconciliation. But the older son is also there, unwilling to reconcile himself with his brother. In him is a piercing hurt of bitterness and resentment. This is the other side of the coin — the other reality of many men and women who prefer the path opposite of God. In other words, instead of a priesthood of reconciliation, there is separation.

### Reconciliation defines us

In the future, the ravages of separation caused by sin will be completely overcome, for God

above all, with their Creator.

While we wait for the final reconciliation, God invites us to be priests in His marvelous work as active reconcilers. In the end, everything will be as it was intended in the beginning, before sin. So let’s embrace the privilege of participating in reconciliation, the incomparable plan of God. **BA**

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Following the lineage of  
sacrifice from Adam to  
Christ.

by Dorothy Nimchuk

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**F**aced with eviction from the only home they had ever known, Adam and Eve were escorted out of their garden paradise. Adam remembered the warning words of God: “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:16, 17).

Adam and Eve would miss their evening walks with their Creator. Why couldn't they have been satisfied with the fruits of the many other trees God had provided? Hereafter, Adam was destined to till the ground, work-

ing with his hands by the sweat of his brow. Possibly repentant and consequently forgiven, the couple had to suffer consequences for this act of disobedience.

Fig leaves had provided scant cover as Adam and his wife realized their nakedness, so God slew an animal to make tunics of skin for them. Though not specifically spelled out prior to the giving of the Mosaic law on Mount Sinai, blood offerings for sin may have been implied herein. The red line of Christ, the sacrificed Lamb, begins.

Out of the ashes of their punishment, Eve remembered and held dear the promise. Yes, there would be enmity between Satan's seed and her Seed. However, her body would nurture the Seed for a carefully documented Messianic lineage recorded by Moses, Matthew, and Luke, and the resultant reconciliation with God.

### **Patriarchs of promise**

Eve's sons, Cain and Abel, grew to manhood. Cain, the elder, brought a sacrifice to the Lord of his home-raised produce. Abel, designated progenitor of the Messiah, chose rather to offer a flawless firstborn lamb of his flock. Abel's offering was accepted but Cain's refused. Satan, determined to thwart God's plans at any cost, entered into the heart of Cain who, out of envy, killed his brother and was banished by God as a result.

When Adam was one hundred thirty years old, Eve gave birth to yet another special son she named Seth, meaning “appointed”: “For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed” (4:25). Satan's efforts to destroy the royal Seed had not succeeded. During the time of Seth's son Enosh, “men began to call on the name of the LORD” (v. 26). Some

scholars understand this to mean public, communal worship of God.

Noah, one link in this lineage, sacrificed clean animals in praise to the Lord following the Flood. By faith, Abraham prepared to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, for he concluded that “God was able to raise [Isaac] up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense” (Hebrews 11:19). The Angel of the Lord stayed his hand, providing a substitutionary ram. Isaac, son of promise, was another special link to the Messiah. His near-death experience is thought to have prefigured Christ’s own death and resurrection.

Other notable links in Christ’s lineage were Jacob (aka Israel), who wrestled with an angel and prevailed (Genesis 32:22-31); Judah (fourth in line of Jacob’s twelve sons), of whom it was prophesied “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes” (49:10); and David, “a man after [God’s] own heart . . .” (Acts 13:22).

### Sufficient sacrifice

While God gave Moses the law (including those in regard to atoning sacrifices) on Mount Sinai, the people waiting below became restless. After four hundred years of slavery, and being familiar with Egypt’s pagan gods, they coerced Aaron into creating a god they could worship, not knowing if Moses would ever return (Exodus 32:1-14).

Under the Mosaic law, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies once each year with a blood offering for his sins and the sins of the people. The offer-

ing was symbolic, for “without shedding of blood there is no remission” (Hebrews 9:22), but “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins” (10:4). These sacrifices were but a shadow, a reminder of better things to come.

Therefore, Christ shed His own blood as the perfectly prescribed sacrifice — the climax of the red line. His was not a yearly sacrifice, as under the old covenant; Christ died once. And that was sufficient. As our High Priest, He entered “into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; not that He should offer Himself often . . . but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (9:24-26).

### Covenant consummation

From before the world was, eternity was gift wrapped and sealed symbolically with the blood of God’s covenant. Created in perfection, Adam and Eve had perfect fellowship with God. However, this Edenic pair had tested God’s word, and sin reigned as a result.

Jesus’ last recorded words, “It is finished!” (John 19:30), declared an end to the old sacrificial system. Jesus had performed the task His Father had sent Him to do. When He breathed His last, there was a great earthquake, and the curtain between the Holy and Most Holy partitions of the temple ripped in two from top to bottom, signifying direct access to God in the name of Jesus. Thus, Christ’s spilled blood congealed, sealing the covenant between Him and all who accept this gift to humanity.

The red line continues in all who, through faith, accept Christ and walk the red line in spirit and truth. If you feel you’ve been handed an eviction notice in forsaking your faith, as Adam and Eve were, the way of reconciliation is still open. Christ’s death in the first century AD in essence requited sins confessed and forsaken under the old covenant and beyond. And that is cause for praise! **BA**

**Dorothy Nimchuk**  
writes from Medicine Hat, Alberta.





"Dad, if we are under God's grace, do we need to keep His commandments?"

Dad looked up from his paper and invited his son to sit next to him. "Let me tell you James Baldwin's story called 'The King and the Page.' It will help answer your question."

Many years ago there was a king of Prussia, whose name was Frederick. . . . Like other kings, he lived in a beautiful palace and had many officers and servants to wait upon him. Among the servants there was a little page whose name was Carl. It was Carl's duty to sit outside of the king's bedroom and be ready to serve him at any time.

One night the king sat up very late; and the little page was kept busy running errands on until past midnight. The next morning the king wished to send him on another errand. He rang the little bell which was used to call the page, but no page answered. . . .

He opened the door and looked out. There, sitting in his chair, was Carl, fast asleep. The poor child was so tired after his night's work that he could not keep awake.

The king was about to waken him roughly, when he saw a piece of paper on the floor beside him. He picked it up and read it. It was a letter from the page's mother: — *Dearest Carl: You are a good boy to send me all your wages, for now I can pay the rent and buy some warm clothing for your little sister. I thank you for it, and pray that God will bless you. Be faithful to the king and do your duty.*

The king went back to the room on tiptoe.

He took ten gold pieces from his table and

wrapped them in the little letter. Then he went out again, very quietly, and slipped them all into the boy's pocket.

After a while he rang the bell again, very loudly. Carl awoke with a start, and came quickly to answer the call. "I think you have been asleep," said the king. The boy stammered and did not know what to say. . . .

He put his hand in his pocket, and was surprised to find the gold pieces wrapped in his mother's letter. Then his eyes overflowed with tears, and he fell on his knees before the king. . . .

"Oh, your Majesty!" cried Carl. "Have mercy on me. It is true that I have been asleep, but I know nothing about this money. Someone is trying to ruin me."

"Have courage, my boy," said the king. "I know how you must have been overwearied with long hours of watching. And people say that fortune comes to us in our sleep. You may send the gold pieces to your mother with my compliments; and tell her that the king will take care of both her and you."

"Since the king showed such kindness to Carl and promised to care for him and his mother, do you think that Carl started getting lazy?" asked Dad.

"Of course not," answered his son. "I'll bet Carl always did his best because he was so grateful to the king."

"And that's why we obey all God's commandments," answered Dad. "We know that God's grace is what saves us, and we are so grateful that we want to serve and obey Him always."



**Code Chart Puzzle:** Use the code chart below to match the number codes with letters. The solution to this puzzle tells what God's new covenant does for us. The numbers in the top and left rows of the chart represent the double-digit numbers in the codes. Write the letters that appear in the intersecting squares of those numbers in the corresponding blanks below. For example, the letter "F" is in the square for code 61.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
2	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
3	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U
4	V	W	X	Y	Z		

61 13 43 63 12 22 53 22 53 62 44 31 13 14 51 72 11 72 63

24 22 63 12 63 12 51 62 24 12 51 72 22 63 11 42 51

11 24 11 44 63 12 51 22 43 53 22 72

The solution to this puzzle may be found in Romans 11:27.



John Smithson, 2007. Public domain.

### A Challenge: What Do You Remember?

Stare at the picture for one minute. Have an adult time you. Once the minute is over, have the adult take the picture from you and read to you the questions, listed on page 26, about the picture. See if you can answer them based on what you remember.

Kids Time activities are abridged from the BAP children's curriculum. Order at [cog7.org/online-store](http://cog7.org/online-store).





# A God-

by Amber Mann Riggs

At twenty-five years old, Phil Vischer had a simple goal. He wanted to blend the love of his faith with his love of filmmaking. Each profitable *VeggieTales* video meant he could afford to delight children with a new Bible-inspired story.

Then his goal got bigger. Captivated by the concept of adopting a goal so big, he wouldn't be able to accomplish it apart from God's help, Vischer set his sights on building his company into a top-four family media brand in twenty years. Wanting to pour his life into something that would outlive him, he dreamed of developing a Christian version of Disney.

As *VeggieTales* continued to grow in popularity, God's hand of blessing seemed evident.

However, in his autobiography, *Me, Myself, and Bob*, Vischer describes how the venture spun out of control and how overwork landed him in the hospital. Just ten years after the first *VeggieTales* video arrived in homes, Vischer's company declared bankruptcy.

Vischer discovered firsthand that a God-sized goal and a goal

shaped by God are two different things.

## God has a goal

To grasp God's overarching goal, we have to recognize that the Bible is, first, one big seamless story in which God is the main character. Everything we read in its pages is contextually rooted in that story and in specific chapters of that story.

The chapters can be demarcated into covenants: the Adamic/Edenic, the Noahic, the Abrahamic, the Mosaic, the Davidic, and the *new*. What's fascinating about these covenants is that they each reach an important milestone on the way to arriving at the end goal. Even more astonishing, we see time and again how God invites humans to partner with Him toward this goal and live in His care.

## Partnering with God

All partnerships revolve around a shared goal and terms of how they will realize it. A *covenant* partnership, however, revolves around a goal and terms that the partners are willing to stake their lives on.

In the first two chapters of Genesis, we find God entering into a covenant partnership with

humanity (Hebrew: *adam*). Of course, we won't discover until later that it was indeed a life-or-death partnership for both parties. God spelled it out for us through the prophet Hosea, just so we could be certain: "But like Adam, you broke my covenant and betrayed my trust" (Hosea 6:7, NLT).

What was the goal of this covenant partnership? Starting with a small, elevated patch of earth called Eden (the original kingdom of God on earth), God and humanity would work together to extend the manifest rule of God and bless the entirety of earth with the flourishing nature of Eden. This goal was so large that it inevitably would have taken billions of humans thousands of years to carry out our side of the partnership.

And what were its terms? Because God created humanity as image-bearers capable of reflecting His character and ways, we could complete this goal only by receiving and reflecting His *loving* wisdom, while God served as king and sustainer. As His representatives, we were to "fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28).

Of course, humanity staged a power-grab and ingested a meal of "wisdom fruit." Thus,

# Shaped Goal

our bodies both received sustenance from and became carriers of the knowledge of good and evil. In doing so, we exchanged God's *loving* wisdom for a *selfish* wisdom.

However, remember this was a covenant partnership. God was so committed to His goal, He was willing to die for it.

## Renewed covenant

God then initiated a series of covenant partnerships that prepared humanity, in stages, for the time when He would renew this original covenant through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

By the time Jesus made His appearance, humanity was no stranger to the rule of human sin. However, one pocket of humanity — the children of Israel — had been taught to hope. They were deeply rooted in a story in which forgiveness meant reentrance into the kingdom of God, the realm where God ruled. They understood their land to be a new Garden. They understood themselves to be waiting on God to send them a King who would live forever and usher in God's presence.

What the children of Israel didn't understand was how they

could carry out all of the laws of the land, yet not reflect God's character and ways.

It was Jesus who invited humanity into a new covenant with a new meal. It was Jesus who showed us what God wanted in a partnership with humanity: Love God and love people — and love as *He* loved. It was Jesus who busted the boundaries of the Garden by telling His disciples to go and fill the earth with His flourishing, loving ways. And it was Jesus who sent His Spirit to dwell inside us so we could learn to image His ways from the inside out.

One day, Jesus will return and complete the work He started in and through us. The result? A renewed creation. The manifest rule of God will bless the entirety of earth with the flourishing nature of heaven.

## Living out the story

Over fifteen years later, Vischer is still merging his faith and filmmaking. But it now has a different taste to it. He knows what's going to outlive him: the story of God. New creation. His new stories aim to help viewers understand how we fit as partners within God's big story. Partners who rest in God's love and

then live out our Spirit-imbued love for Him day by day as God slowly speaks new creation into existence.

Like Vischer, we all need to examine our goals. God has already established a goal bigger than any of us. To partner with Him is to agree that we want what He wants and then follow His lead instead of our own. **BA**

### Amber Mann Riggs

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**For resources on leading your congregation to work together in ministry, visit Artios Christian College's Lead Up section in [baonline.org](http://baonline.org).**



# A Letter to the Church

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What the ministry of reconciliation tells us about ourselves.

**by Paulo Renato Garrochinho and Paulo Jorge Coelho**

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Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself . . . (2 Corinthians 5:18, 19).

**P**aul's second epistle to the Corinthians surprises us each time we read it. One reason is that, despite the apostle's scholarship, seen in his use of literary resources and his way of

expressing himself so passionately, he is lucid and rational. But the main reason we're surprised is that Paul achieves a tremendously difficult feat: putting everything of his soul in his writing, in the deepest and most intimate way. Only a few writers can manage to reach this level of intimacy and truth.

For example, Paul presents the human being, human nature, and the nature of the church as they really are. Though the church has a divine component — Christ, her founder, essence, and head — she is deeply human and prone to sin. Paul presents the church without masks or cosmetics — just the bare reality. She has defeats and victories, lights and shadows, falls and recoveries, fears and courage. It is always good that we have the correct notion of what we see and believe.

Second Corinthians could

have been written today. It is extremely current, considering the state of our world. It teaches that humanity is weak and sinful, but that we are called to get up (resurrect) and start again. We are called to holiness, to a life with deep and defined meaning and purpose through the ministry of reconciliation.

## Core concepts

The heart of this letter is chapter 5, verses 17-21, which speak about this ministry. Several words and concepts are worth highlighting.

First, God calls us to a ministry. In verse 18, the Greek word translated "ministry" is *diakonia*, which, in its etymological richness, means service, attention, assistance, relief, help. So in using this word, Paul emphasizes that the church — all her members — is called to serve. To serve means to relieve and assist all

people in need, without exception.

Second, the place of this service is the *kosmos*, as Paul puts it. It is the world and its inhabitants, all living beings. Paul identifies this *diakonia* (service) in the world as reconciliation (*katalagés*), our third concept. This Greek word is a little complex. Among its various meanings is the idea of restoration and repair.

Putting these three concepts together, we see that God has given us the service of restoration and repair everywhere in the world – all people and all living beings, including nature.

### Caring community

We must keep these three concepts in mind within the church community to live out our purpose. The church is not the place for people who consider themselves morally good and holy. The church is a community of people who struggle to believe, to stay above the challenges of life with all their lights and shadows. The community of believers exists only because of the love of God in Christ. We all lived without hope and meaning in life, but in a strange and indefinable moment of our existence, we were touched by the deep love of God in Christ. We owe everything to God – our whole being, the whole meaning of being.

The church in Corinth struggled to be this kind of community. The believers were fraught with problems – the same problems of our human nature that have been with us over time – perhaps because the people in that church thought only of themselves. They were simply

centered on *self*, on their little world, and did not think of fellow believers.

This is the serious situation in churches today: the separation from reality. Many people live in their ivory towers and believe in a reality of their goodness that does not exist, except perhaps in their minds. The constant demonization of culture and contempt for those who have broken lives, who think and act differently, is one of the great signs of decay and failure of many churches and religious associations in contemporary society.

“Believers are the only representatives of God’s love and mercy in a sick world.”

### Kingdom ambassadors

Just as Christ is the only door to salvation, believers are the only representatives of God’s love and mercy in a sick world. Only the church with her ministry of reconciliation, in the power of the Holy Spirit, can raise the sinner’s conscience above the mortal reality of sin. In this way, the apostle Paul calls the believer Christ’s ambassador (v. 20). The word *ambassador* is translated from the Greek *presbeuo*, which means to be more mature and to act as a representative.

The Christian is a citizen of the kingdom of God. We no longer belong to the kingdom of sin but are ambassadors of the

kingdom of heaven in the midst of a world where sin dominates. This is the exclusive function of reconcilers of the world with God, through Jesus Christ. Learning how to fight against sin and, at the same time, love sinners in the real world, with all its miseries, is what the church must do in order to fulfill our ministry of reconciliation. Then, the justice of God is accomplished in the converted sinner’s victory over sin at the feet of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Second Corinthians 5 continues to surprise us. But more of a

surprise is that God would use us frail, flawed humans for this reconciling ministry. Thanks to His grace in Christ, we are made His ministers of grace to all. **BA**

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# A Picture's Worth

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The witness of living the  
ministry of reconciliation.

by Israel Steinmetz

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“A picture is worth a thousand words.” We know this from experience. In fact, just reading this saying brings images to mind. For some it is a newborn baby, for others the Twin Towers on 9/11. For me, a picture comes to mind from a courtroom.

In 1995 former professional football player O. J. Simpson was tried and acquitted for the murder of his ex-wife and her friend. The trial gained international attention, and particularly in the

United States, where people were mesmerized by and divided over its salacious details and social implications.

Yet of all the memories from that trial, one stands out. At one point the prosecution asked Simpson to put on a pair of gloves that the murderer had allegedly worn. But when Simpson tried to put them on, they didn't fit, and the world was watching on TV. Johnnie Cochran, one of Simpson's defense attorneys, took advantage of the eye-catching scene and quipped, “If it doesn't fit, you must acquit.” He repeated the phrase in his closing arguments, and millions of Americans went on to repeat it, calling to mind the picture of Simpson struggling to put on the gloves.

Twenty-five years later, I still

see the scene in my mind. That picture was worth a thousand words. Whatever other arguments, evidence, or testimony were shared during the seven months of trial, that one image remains burned in my memory.

## Cosmic courtroom

The worth of a picture comes to mind as we continue our journey through 2 Corinthians 5:14-21. In our last article we looked at this passage through the lens of a cosmic courtroom in which all of humanity stands condemned before God. We have the motive of rebellion, the testimony of our own rejection of God, and the evidence of a life that falls short of God's perfection. We are guilty, but God has found a way to make us inno-

cent. His motive is love, His testimony is the faithfulness of Christ, and His evidence is Christ's sacrifice on our behalf. Those who accept this pardon are commissioned to be advocates on behalf of others still facing condemnation. Compelled by the love of Christ, with the testimony of God's grace through Christ and the evidence of our reconciliation to God and one another in Christ, we enter a plea of "Guilty, but forgiven" on the part of the world, and beg them to take the plea.

In the last article we touched briefly on the evidence we have. Through reconciliation with God and each other, we become part of the new creation in Christ. God is on a mission to redeem and restore all that was lost to sin and death. His mission will culminate in the creation of a new heaven and earth in which all will be made right for eternity. But God invites us into the realities of this new creation at the moment we are reconciled to Him. In Christ we become part of a new creation project already underway! Abundant and eternal life begins the day we are reconciled to God and enter His spiritual kingdom of grace in anticipation of and participation in spreading and actualizing that kingdom throughout all creation.

### Testimony and evidence

According to 2 Corinthians 5:18, 19, God has given us both the *ministry* and *message* of reconciliation. When we think about sharing our faith, evangelizing, or doing outreach in the world, we often think strictly of the message of reconciliation. While the message is vital, it is incomplete

without the ministry. That is, our testimony is incomplete without evidence.

So it is that we must not only talk about reconciliation but live it as well. Living out our reconciliation with God and one another proves the truth of our testimony. *Why should anyone believe they can be reconciled to God and one another if we are not demonstrating the reality of that reconciliation in our daily lives?* This is one of the key – and often overlooked – purposes of pursuing godliness as followers of Christ. Too often we have valued righteousness as a means of at-

pursuits of sanctification and righteousness. Rather, it is a love that gives, that serves, that sacrifices for others. This is the nature of God's special kind of love: *agape*. Our practice of godly living, particularly with one another in community, is not chiefly for us but for others. Our obedience honors and glorifies God, and it invites others to glorify Him (Matthew 5:13-16). Paul highlights this reality in his letter to Titus when he gives specific instructions in righteous living to older men and women, younger women and men, bondservants and masters. The stated purpose

“ In Christ we become part of a new creation project already underway! ”

taining or maintaining salvation. When we recognize the folly of this false gospel, we face the question "If obedience does not earn or maintain our salvation, why should we obey?" There are many important answers to this question, all of which come back to our created purpose of loving God and loving one another.

### Something beautiful

But the love we are called to is not a love we practice for ourselves, even for the noble

for this righteous conduct in view of a watching world is to

adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect. For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for

us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds (2:10b-14).

To “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior” is to make it appealing, to put it on full display, to draw attention to its wonder and beauty and grace. This is the role of our good works, for which we were re-created in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:8-10). *Our practice of holiness is for the sake of the world, so they can see evidence to support our testimony that we*

“Christians are called not simply to say, ‘God loves you . . .’ but to add, ‘and I can prove it.’”

*are indeed reconciled to God and to one another and that they too can be reconciled in Jesus Christ. As Jesus said, the world will know we are His disciples by our love and unity (John 13:35; 17:23). The compelling proof does not come in the complex and abstract arguments of philosophers but in the simple and concrete habits of demonstrating God’s love together in community. Christians are called not simply to say, “God loves you . . .” but to add, “and I can prove it.”*

### Explaining by embodying

Upon returning to his home country of England after a long career as a missionary in India, Lesslie Newbigin found himself in a post-Christendom culture. The words of Christians and churches were no longer implicitly trusted as true or authoritative. He found a new “mission field” right in his backyard where words alone no longer carried much weight. In fact, Newbigin discovered a world in which the actions of the church had not matched her lofty language, and instead had

created a crisis of credibility for the church in the surrounding culture. In response, he coined one of the most quoted phrases in the missional movement in *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*: “. . . the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.”

*Hermeneutic* comes from a Greek word meaning to reveal, describe, or explain. *Hermeneutics* refers to the work of studying Scripture to understand, interpret, and apply its meaning. It is a word used in John’s

Gospel when he writes, “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him” (1:18). The meaning of the word translated “explained” is summed up well in the *Amplified Bible*: “He has revealed Him and brought Him out where He can be seen; He has interpreted Him and He has made Him known.”

The incarnation of the Word who was God (John 1:1, 14) has revealed the unseen God to us in flesh and blood. God spoke in various times and ways through prophets, angels, and even theophanies, but His greatest revelation came in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4). As Howard Hendricks wrote in *Teaching to Change Lives: Seven Proven Ways to Make Your Teaching Come Alive*, “God’s method is always incarnational. He loves to take his truth and wrap it in a person.”

As followers of Christ, we are compelled by love not only to preach the *message* of reconciliation, but also to live the *ministry* of reconciliation to God and one another in our daily lives. In this way, we partner with God in His mission to redeem His creation.

BA

**Israel Steinmetz** is dean of Academic Affairs for Artios Christian College and pastors New Hope United. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.





# A Christian's Legacy

If I teach you the love of nature —  
to respect all living things  
by being kind to animals  
strangers, and friends —

Yet . . . don't teach you about God,  
I've taught you simply compassion  
not hope.

If I show you the beauty of the ocean —  
to notice its vastness  
by exploring its majesty  
and mystery —

Yet . . . not introduce you to its Creator,  
I've shown you only today  
not eternity.

If I give you ample space —  
to make your own way  
by allowing you to be  
who you are —

Yet . . . not explain the path before you,  
I've given you merely life  
not destiny.

Marcia K. Leaser





## Readers Write



### Celebrating feasts

In the Jan-Feb 2020 edition of the BA Jason Overman wrote on p. 11, 2nd paragraph, of the Q&A that “the feast days belong to the old covenant ceremonial statutes” and that (4th paragraph) “the minutiae of the temple calendar are no longer required of the new covenant believer.”

So, to understand, he is saying the annual festivals were required under the old covenant but are not now required in the new covenant. Does not Zech 14:16 indicate, very strongly, that the Feast of Tabernacles/Booths WILL be required in the future?

This “required/not required now/will be required” scenario makes no sense. The [feast of tabernacles] looks forward to and envisions what life will be like in the world tomorrow. The 7 annual holy days picture God’s plan of salvation. Observance of the [feast of tabernacles] is an integral part of worshiping God.

Jason Overman is wrong.

D. F.  
Email

*Editor’s note: We agree that Israel’s “holy days picture God’s plan of salvation.” Picture, I think, is the key word here, as the Passover lamb pictured Christ crucified. But when the real comes, a picture is no longer needed. Note that Zechariah’s prophecy comes in the language of the old covenant “picture”: pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem, with sacrifices made. No feast-keeper today does this, nor could, though the law required it. We must interpret the picture Zechariah gave in light of the revelation of Christ. The feast did “look forward,” but worship is no longer centered on the temple in Jerusalem or on the rituals done there, but in Christ, the true tabernacle of God (John 1:14; 4:21; Revelation 21:3, 22). Praise God that the Feast of Tabernacles does picture the kingdom and new Jerusalem, where God tabernacles with His people forever. If you want to celebrate the feast in its week in your way, in light of Christ and this hope, the Church of God (Seventh Day) sees no harm in it. Nor do we require it.*

### Modern prophets

Just opened my copy of the BA [Mar-Apr] from the mailbox and managed to squeeze in a reading of your Q&A on the existence of modern day prophets before getting pulled into other duties. Excellently handled! Thanks for this positive and careful treatment of a challenging question.

I. S.  
San Antonio, TX

### Prison ministry

Greetings! I am an inmate in Washington State. I have been receiving the BA magazine and a

few other literature items for over 10 years now, and I am always pleased and impressed with the knowledgeable, God-led information. Thank you. Also, I enjoyed the book, *This We Believe*. I have been trying to teach the very same correct concept of the “Trinity” for years. The way you broke it down and explained it has been extremely helpful in my personal mission to spread the true gospel here in prison.

M. F. M.  
Aberdeen, WA

### Questions for Challenge (p. 17)



How many faces did you see in the picture? Which direction were they looking? Did you miss the faces completely? Sometimes we have the wrong focus. If we focus on obeying the law so that we can be saved, we’ll fail. But if we focus on just the gift of eternal life and figure we can do whatever we want, disregarding God’s law because we are saved by grace, we’ll miss out on what eternal life is all about: knowing God. Our focus needs to be on Jesus — who He is and what He’s done for us. Then His gift of grace will save us and transform us so we know Him and become more like Him.



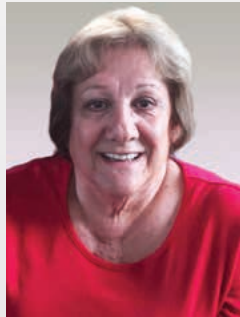
## 2020 IMC Conference in Nigeria

Every four years delegates from around the world in the International Ministerial Congress gather to effect the business of the Church, commission new service roles, acknowledge zone area reports, accept new members, and seek to advance the work of Jesus Christ throughout our church family. The meeting takes place November 16-21 in Nigeria. Find more information at [imc.cog7.org](http://imc.cog7.org).

## Thank You, Sylvia!

Recently, Sylvia Corral retired from her vital role as translator for the General Conference – what she calls “a precious and unbelievable chapter of my life.” Sylvia is precious to us too! For over 32 years she served in various capacities: at conventions, translating services and business sessions, and especially in Publications, translating the *Bible Advocate* and quarterlies into Spanish. Her great attention to accuracy and heart for ministry blessed readers and co-workers alike.

We will miss you, sister! Our prayers go with you in this new chapter of your life.

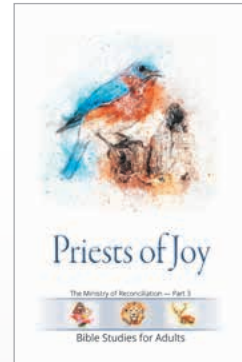


## Third Quarter Studies

This year's quarterlies are dedicated to what the apostle Paul called “the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:17-21). What is reconciliation and this essential ministry? In the first and second quarters we studied the fundamental roles of our loving Father and His Son, the Prince of Peace, as the source and means of reconciliation. In the third quarter, we study the role of the church as priests of joy!

Remarkably, we are the *ministers* of reconciliation. In this quarterly we survey our role “in Christ.” No longer living for ourselves, we are compelled by love to be ambassadors for Christ, bringing the message of reconciliation to the world on His behalf. We learn how the church is to be a joyous family, modeling reconciled relationships.

Order Quarter 3 through the online store at [cog7.org](http://cog7.org).



**Editor at Spring Vale.** BA editor Jason Overman visited Spring Vale Christian School in Owosso, MI, January 31 - February 2 for its Winter Revival. Shortly after arriving on Friday afternoon, Jason addressed the student assembly on the LeRoy Dais Young Writers Contest.



# On Mission ... In Myanmar

*Left to right: GC Missions Director Bryan Cleeton, Thian Bawm Thang, Thuan Nei, and Tluang Kung*

by Tluang Kung

Myanmar is a member of the International Ministerial Congress of the Church of God (Seventh Day). It is a Buddhist country in Southeast Asia, sharing its border with India, China, Bangladesh, Laos, and Thailand. In this environment Jesus Christ is moving in the lives of more people.

## Challenges

But there are challenges. Christianity experiences significant

discrimination and persecution in Myanmar. The government seeks to limit the growth of Christian churches, and, as a result, ministry here is difficult. For example, if you live in Yangon and are worshipping on the Sabbath, it is not good to sing loudly. People may object and report you to the government in order to stop the ministry. If you do not stop, they will put you in jail. Therefore, we have to make a strong effort to be in good relationship with our surrounding neighbors. Ninety percent of the country's population is Buddhist, and 4 percent is Christian. Roman Catholics are about 50 percent of the Christian

population. Baptist and Seventh-day Adventist churches are the largest Protestant denominations.

After Myanmar declared independence from Great Britain in 1948, the military leadership took power and maintained strong control of it until 2010. Government and military corruption over the years have ruined the country and the mentality of the people. Currently Myanmar is experiencing reform as the people now have a stronger voice in the government. However, the military still maintains political control because the current constitution allows military leadership to have more power

than the elected president and parliament.

Myanmar has a small gross domestic product, and many are jobless. As a result, crime (including theft and murder) is common. Daily wages are only \$3. In a family, only one person might have a temporary job. Most of the people are uneducated.

Our neighboring countries are suffering from coronavirus. Myanmar shares 1,700 miles of border with China. Recently the health department announced that the virus can be found abundantly and immediately within our city. Prices of food and basic needs like rice, oil, masks, etc. are getting higher every day because people are beginning to store these things. We don't know when the government will announce a state of emergency or if our city of Yangon will be quarantined. The government will never tell the truth, and we do not know how many people are affected. The government says to stay away from areas where there are many people. However, we must buy from the markets where there are big crowds. Members are collecting food as much as they can.

It is difficult to evangelize unbelievers. The first well-known missionary to Myanmar, Adoniram Judson, said it is easier to pluck the tooth from a living lion than to convert a Buddhist. Most people here believe that if someone converts to Christianity, that person cannot be loyal to their country or tribe. To be a citizen of Myanmar means that you are a Buddhist. That is the thinking. They see Christianity as the religion of the British, who colonized our country, and therefore is not good. To grow as a church,

people must see a strong, dependable organization. In order to share effectively, the people must see that we are strong and effective in our ministry. Otherwise, they won't listen. They take note of a church when they see her buildings, the lifestyle of the people, and the quality of her organization. As a result, the Baptists can do much more than a smaller organization like ours, whose reputation is not strong. These qualities are important to the Buddhists and to other Sunday churches.

## Ministry

Some of our churches are mission congregations where half of the members are former Buddhists and Animists. Typically, we ask the pastor to arrange for a crusade or Bible camp to gather the people. In a recent crusade we had four to five new converts from Animism and Buddhism, in addition to others within the Church who were also baptized. Our plan in the near future is for each ministry (youth, women, men, etc.) to organize a crusade one or more times a year. Also, the vision of our ministry to

orphans is to recruit and equip them with the Word of God so that they may serve as ministers, workers, and missionaries when they are done with school. They will know the doctrine and will be well trained. We have eleven orphans now, and when the construction of our new building is finished, we hope to have up to forty.

The new building we are constructing will have three purposes. It will serve as a headquarters office. It will also serve as a dormitory for the orphans, who come from various parts of the country and go to school. And some space will be available for Bible training for youth and full-time Bible students. Staff members who will help us carry out the work more effectively will also stay there. The work of the Church is great, and more workers are needed to move her ministry forward.

The Church also has land for investments that will support the Church. We want to invest in fencing and a small house for a caretaker in each location. Bananas, lemons, pomegranates, dragon fruit, fish, and chickens are some ideas we are consider-



*A CoG7 vision is to prepare orphans like these for future ministry.*

## Myanmar

Population: 54,589,000  
Capital: Nay Pyi Taw  
Land area: 676,533 sq km /  
261,219 sq mi  
Official CoG7 congregations: 10  
CoG7 membership: 250  
(approximate)



ing. With these investments, as well as the tithes and offerings of the members, we can run and sustain the church. All the churches are contributing their tithes and offerings faithfully, and we are forming an investment department. To move the work of the church forward, financial stability is important, and we are actively putting this into place.

### Testimony

The following is the story of one sister's journey to life in Christ and in our church.

Thuan Nei has lived most of her life in Mainuai Village, Chin State, and is a faithful member of our church there. She was born into a Christian family and belonged to the Baptist church until her husband died nineteen years ago. When he died, he left her with three children. Two of her children are living in another village; one has passed away. Her children do not support her

because she is a member of the Church of God (Seventh Day) and keeps the Sabbath.

Thuan came to the Church of God (Seventh Day) because she found our teachings to be based on the Bible. This is what attracted her to become a member.

Thuan Nei works hard maintaining the large Church compound in Manuai Village and cleans houses for other people to make her living. She sometimes goes to the hills to gather firewood to sell to support herself. The Church is very grateful to her. She is 68 years old, and is no longer able to work as she did before she aged. Moreover, Thuan broke her wrist in a motorbike accident, making it more difficult for her to find a new livelihood.

A few months ago when the monsoon began earlier this year, the wind blew the roof off of Thuan's bamboo-and-thatch hut, and she had no place to live. The Church allowed her to stay

in the compound and serve as a groundskeeper. The Church also constructed a small hut for Thuan to live within the compound, assisting her with food and medication. In the future, Thuan hopes to raise chickens for her livelihood, and get electricity so that she may have light to see in the night. Our church in Myanmar is active in engaging members like Thuan Nei in the ministry and, in so doing, is bringing good testimony to the Church and the Lord Jesus Christ.

### Working in the Spirit

All of these factors are important to our ministry in Myanmar. However, most important, we must have the Spirit of God. We are to act and obey. We have to practice this in our life and not wait in the upper room. We have to allow that power into our lives and make it practical. If we do this, then with the manpower and finances God may give to us, we can do the work God has called us to do.

If you and/or your congregation would like to support the ministry of the Church in Myanmar, or another country where the Church of God (Seventh Day) exists, contact GC Missions at [gcmisions@cog7.org](mailto:gcmisions@cog7.org). Write a check with "GC Missions" on the memo line, or donate online at [cog7.org/giving](http://cog7.org/giving).

#### Tluang Kung

serves as general secretary of the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Myanmar. He and his wife, Mapuii, have four children and live in Yangon.





## Fear Not

As we face the challenge of COVID-19, I find guidance from statements by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the apostle Paul.

The evening before Jesus was crucified, He announced a new covenant and gave His followers a new commandment: “love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34, 35, ESV throughout). The great commandment of the new covenant is to love as Jesus loved.

To the Philippians, Paul wrote, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:3-5). Christlike love as described and modeled by Jesus and Paul is humble, selfless, sacrificial, and giving. It places the needs of others before the desires of oneself.

Finally, to Timothy, Paul wrote, “For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (2 Timothy 1:7). As the once popular chorus asks, “If God be for us, who can be against us?”

With regard to decision-making, Pastor Andy Stanley has suggested this memorable phrase: “When unsure of what to say or do, ask what love requires of you.” What does Christlike love require of us in relation to the dangers of the coronavirus currently sweeping our world? I suggest the following.

**Love your neighbor.** People all around us are experiencing the same needs that we have. Without Christ, many may be suffering anxieties and fears to a far greater extent. Crisis situations

provide opportunities to share our faith in God and our love for others as we share whatever resources we may have. The gift of a can of food or other necessities may mean more than we might imagine.

**Love one another.** Our decisions should be based, not on personal desires but on what is best for others. If this means missing a Bible study, Sabbath services, work, or any other gathering because you are ill and/or may infect others with any disease, the loving thing is to stay home. If we must cancel meetings until danger has passed, that’s what we should do.

**Trust God and reject fear.** Medical experts and common sense tell us that we can do concrete things to protect ourselves and others from diseases such as COVID-19. You’ve read the lists: Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly; avoid touching your face; disinfect surfaces and devices you may touch; cover your mouth if you sneeze or cough; bump elbows instead of shaking hands; avoid crowds; stay home if you’re sick, etc. If we can slow the spread of COVID-19 and other diseases, we can avoid serious consequences for ourselves and others later. But let’s do these things because they are the smart and loving things to do, not because we have embraced a spirit of fear.

No matter who we are or where we are, God and the statistical probabilities are on our side. We who are in Christ enjoy God’s promise that He will never leave us nor forsake us. In Christ, we may face any challenge with confidence.

— Loren Stacy





# Going Digital!

It has been 47 years since the BAP entered the offset printing era. Now it's time to enter the next generation: the digital press. We will soon have the capability to publish our older study books in quantities as few as one and as many as 10+. Now as a print-on-demand Publications department, we're excited about the possibilities going forward.

Watch future issues of the BA for new capabilities and what we can do for you!