



November - December 2020

A scenic landscape photograph of a mountain range. The foreground is filled with trees in vibrant autumn colors, including oranges, yellows, and reds. In the middle ground, there are several tall, dark green evergreen trees. The background features a large, rugged mountain peak partially obscured by thick, white clouds and mist. The sky is a mix of blue and grey, suggesting an overcast day.

Together



# 2020: The Ministry of Reconciliation



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#### Bible Advocate Press

**Jason Overman:** Editor

**Sherri Langton:** Associate Editor

**Keith Michalak:** Director of Publications, graphics

**Martha Muffley:** Translation

**Hope Dais-Clark:** Proofing

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Bible Advocate Press  
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## The Real Revolution

It has been good to see so many stories on reconciliation this year. God is working! Reconciliation has been the consistent message of the *Bible Advocate* in 2020, and for good reason: It's the consistent message of Scripture. As believers of what God has done in Christ for all of creation, it is *our message*, and ours alone. I hope we will recommit ourselves as messengers.

But there are many messengers in this world. As I listen to the cacophony of voices in our media-soaked nation, their constant message couldn't be further from this year's BA theme. Election nears in the US, after an unprecedented year of natural and social upheaval, and tensions couldn't be higher. Many speak openly of revolution.

We have a choice. I do not refer to the ballot box, which I think we now realize can do little to heal our cultural hostilities. No, the overriding choice is whether we will be ministers of reconciliation or not. So cast your vote as your conviction dictates, but let's not reduce the witness of the church to just one more special interest group among many. Let's not deny the gospel of peace by warring in the name of politics.

If we are revolutionaries, let it be for our King and the cause of His kingdom alone. If we must fan the flames, let it not be of anger and outrage, but of our passion for the cross of Christ. And if we must seek power, let it not be to dominate others, but to serve the weakest and worst. We serve our country's best when we, like Abraham, live by faith as foreigners, knowing a better country is coming (Hebrews 11:9, 16). As this world struggles to hold it together, our trust is in the King of Kings, and we are "workers together" with Him (Revelation 19:16; 2 Corinthians 6:1).

If 2020 has taught us anything, it is to know where our true hope resides. The real revolution *is reconciliation* — God's work in Christ. Come what may, let's be faithful ministers of it. On that note, "Faithful" is our BA theme for 2021. As we end an uncertain year, another looms ahead of us. But we can be certain of one thing: God is faithful. May we be found faithful too.

— Jason Overman





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Why Christian witness is so important in a post-Christendom world.

by Israel Steinmetz

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The War of 1812 between Great Britain and the United States ended when the nations made peace in Ghent, Belgium, on December 24, 1814. However, news traveled slowly across oceans in those days, and the bloodiest engagement of the war — the Battle of New Orleans — took place January 8, 1815. Although the war was over, many suffered and died because they had not heard the news.

There is a lesson in this story. This year we've walked through 2 Corinthians 5:14-21, exploring

the ministry and message of reconciliation. As we come to the end of this series of articles, we read one of the most incredible passages of Scripture:

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (vv. 20, 21).

What a thought! God has sent us as ambassadors to beg the world to be reconciled to Him. This reconciliation is made possible because of the greatest exchange in history. Jesus Christ, sinless and perfect, has taken on our sin and given us His righteousness. Jesus becomes a

sin offering; we become God's righteousness.

No one has ever received so much for giving up so little. But how did we come to hear this incredible news?

### God's mission

We are following Christ today because His first followers were faithful to join God in His mission, and each generation since has been faithful to share the good news. It is often said that the church is always one generation from extinction. If we are not faithful to share the gospel, as those first believers were, how will anyone come to faith?

We are called to follow the example of those first Christians as Christ continues to accomplish God's mission through His Holy Spirit at work in the church. In

the interim between Christ's first and second comings, we are on mission with God, co-missioned to share the gospel with everyone and to make disciples of those who believe.

The passage we've looked at this year reveals our role in God's mission. Christ sends us as ambassadors back to the dark kingdom from which we were saved. However, unlike worldly kingdoms that represent their own interests in foreign lands, Christ's ambassadors represent the best interests of our enemies as we advance the kingdom of God. This turns the imperialism of worldly conquest on its head, demonstrating the radical difference between God's kingdom and those of this world. God's kingdom is a benevolent rule, not a human tyranny. God's kingdom is founded on love, humility, and service, overthrowing the kingdoms of this world by waging peace, rather than war.

### After Christendom

As we've seen, love provides the *motivation* and new creation the *evidence*, and the words we speak are the *testimony* of reconciliation. Compelled by love and using our words and actions in concert, we can offer the great exchange to a world literally dying for reconciliation.

But sharing the message of reconciliation requires skill to communicate in our increasingly post-Christendom culture. In it Christianity no longer holds the cultural power and influence it historically exercised in the Western world. While Christianity grows throughout Asia, Africa, and South America, the Christen-

dom cathedral continues to crack and crumble in the West. A lesson those of us in the West could learn from Christians throughout the developing world is this: The gospel is spread through love-motivated and Spirit-empowered word and deed, not through the cultural conditioning and formulaic "evangelistic" programs we developed in a Christendom culture.

In this way, a post-Christendom culture is much closer to the pre-Christendom culture of the New Testament church in which Christians were excluded and ostracized in a world openly hostile toward God. Without cultural influence, how did these

a theater to watch a movie. We do better to meet them where they are and customize evangelism to their unique context. This is a return to biblical methods of evangelism (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

### Telling our stories

In Scripture, the community is not invited to church; the church is sent to the community. May we ever be wary of the *anti*-Great Commission, so often said among us: "We have the truth, and if the world wants it, they can come and get it." This statement is an insult to the grace of God. Jesus has commanded us to go to the world with good

“Jesus Christ, sinless and perfect, has taken on our sin and given us His righteousness.”

first Christians turn the world upside down for Jesus? As we navigate the waters of post-Christendom society, we have much to learn from the New Testament approach to evangelism.

The example set by both Jesus and the early church was a commitment to take the gospel outside the walls of the synagogues and buildings where the church met. Limiting people's encounter with God to an experience in an institutional church setting is as outdated as requiring them to go to a record store to hear music or

news. Our role in God's kingdom is not to sit and wait, but to rise and work!

Becoming witnesses for Christ in a post-Christendom world is not primarily about developing an evangelism program, but cultivating an evangelistic heart. It's been well said that "Crossing the sea will not make you a missionary, but seeing the cross will!" The formulaic approach to evangelism popularized in past generations is far less effective in our context than simple and personal testimonies of God's action in

our lives. This is what testimony is — a witness telling the truth about what they have personally experienced.

Christians have experienced the grace and power of a living God in their lives. Telling our stories will bear more compelling witness to the gospel than memorizing a formula or a handful of Bible verses. And sharing our own stories with those we have already built trust and respect with will be far more effective than outmoded forms

model (Matthew 5:14-16; Romans 12; Colossians 4:5, 6; Titus 2; 1 Peter 2:11, 12). Our context calls us back to loving in word and deed as we reenter a world in which Christianity no longer dictates culture. Only as we learn to speak the language of our context can we effectively communicate the gospel in that language.

God has placed each of us in a unique context in our homes, neighborhoods, communities, schools, and workplaces. Just

sin and death, purchasing freedom for all humanity. He has taken our rebellion and brokenness and replaced them with abundant and eternal life. He has reconciled us to God. We who were enemies are now invited to become His friends. This is the great exchange!

Yet many people live their lives unaware the war has ended. Many suffer and die in battles that never should have been fought. Many have never heard the good news. The story is told that Swiss theologian Karl Barth was asked, “When were you saved?” He replied, “33 AD.” This is the good news the world is dying to hear!

Those who have good news have been sent. The problem lies in the fact that we so seldom go, and when we go, we seldom preach and practice the good news. All the while, the battle against sin and death rages on, causing countless casualties in a war that Christ won at Calvary two thousand years ago.

May we embrace our identity as ambassadors for Christ and take the ministry and message of reconciliation to the world. Our sin has been exchanged for God’s righteousness. Let us share this great exchange with all those around us! **BA**

“Far too often we’ve been guilty of preaching the gospel while not living its reality.”

of confrontational evangelism, such as street corner preaching, door-to-door witnessing, and other “drive-by” interactions with strangers.

Further, the message of reconciliation must be paired with the ministry of reconciliation. Words and actions must be combined to truly communicate the gospel. Our words will be as powerful only as the ways in which we demonstrate love for those we’re talking to. Far too often we’ve been guilty of preaching the gospel while not living its reality.

From the place of evangelistic love, the message of reconciliation can be effectively shared in both word and deed. This is a biblically based evangelism

as Jesus came to the world and communicated the gospel in ways people could understand, so we are sent to communicate in a language they can understand.

### Get going!

We began with a tragic story about the War of 1812 and the lives unnecessarily lost to a war that was already over. The only reason was a lack of communication. There was good news for those soldiers at New Orleans, but they didn’t hear it in time.

As followers of Christ, we are entrusted with the good news that the greatest war of all has been won. Jesus has conquered

**Israel Steinmetz** is dean of Academic Affairs for Artios Christian College and pastor of New Hope United congregation. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.







# Thanksgiving Without

by Michelle Heed

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior (Habakkuk 3:17, 18).

I come from a long line of situational thankers. Many of us do. I thank God for the food in front of me and for the accident that I avoided. On Thanksgiving I thank Him for my family and friends, the warm home, our health. However, when I don't experience those blessings, it's hard to thank God. An attitude of situational thankfulness can mislead to situational depression. It has for me.

I'm convinced there must be a better way. God calls us to rejoice when the crops fail, the livestock run away, when the job hands out pink slips instead of turkey bonuses.

Simon is my friend in the most liberal of terms. He is a beggar on the street; sometimes I help him out. A victim of leprosy, he has no fingers or presumably toes, since he limp-walks. He lost his ability to take care of himself.

When I see him, he lights up. He asks about my daughter, how she's doing in school. He asks if we've been on a trip, since he hasn't seen me in a while. He tells me that my car is getting old, and I should think about getting a new one. I ask about his church.

Simon treats me like a friend. This sentence

makes me miss him, and I will keep my eye out for him in town.

I never expected to say, "I want what this leper has," and yet, it's true. I admire Simon's grace and thankfulness as he deals with a harsh reality. He has learned to be content in all things, not just happy situations, as Paul said: "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4, 11). This thankful depth is what the pilgrims relied on.

Simon's secret is living in the moment, enjoying the people who are with him, noticing and enjoying the gifts he has (like friendship with an awkward white girl). Trusting that God will give him strength for the many unknowns.

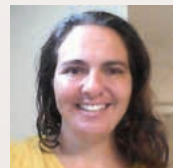
I need a thankfulness like Simon's. We all do. When situations are good, we should praise God. When situations are hard, we should not lose joy but change focus to see other good moments even in the unknowns.

This lesson does not come naturally to us. I wish it did, but then it would not be so precious. We learn by sitting at the feet of our Teacher-Comforter-King. In Christ's presence we can learn the secret to being content in all situations.

This year, along with family, friends, and good health, I am thankful for Simon, a beacon of light calling me away from just situational thanksgiving to a deeper, more constant lifestyle of praise. **BA**

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**Michelle Heed** writes from Kigoma, Tanzania, East Africa. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



# The Winners!



We are excited to announce the winners of the LeRoy Dais Young Writers Challenge. In first place, and published on the following pages, is a tie that goes to the brother and sister duo of **Elise** (14) and **Micah Keim** (16). They are the children of Jason and Amanda Keim of the Hammondville, Alabama Church of God (Seventh Day).

In second place is **Shelby Harris** (17), daughter of James and Misty Harris of the Fort Smith, Arkansas church.

We have another tie for third place – and these young ladies attend the same church: **Kassidy Hinds** (14) and **Layne Ling** (16). Kassidy is the daughter of Tim and Lisa Hinds. Layne is the daughter of Tony and Marinda Ling. Kassidy and Layne attend the Marion, Oregon church.

We also have an honorable mention: **Lizette Ramirez** (17), daughter of Leonides and Martha Ramirez of the Madera, California church.

Thanks to our judges for their work, and special thanks to the anonymous sponsor of this contest. The three youth groups representing these writers will share the award money.

We thank our participants for their bravery in submitting great work. The scores were so close! Congratulations to them, their families, and their churches.

Visit our website, [baonline.org](http://baonline.org), to read all of their fine articles. We hope to see these young writers in the pages of the *Bible Advocate* in the future.

*Jason Overman, Editor*  
*Sherri Langton, Associate Editor*



*Shelby Harris*



*Kassidy Hinds*

*Layne Ling*



*Lizette Ramirez*





# The Greatest Love

by Elise Keim

Friends are one of the most significant things in life. As C. S. Lewis said, "Friendship is the means by which God reveals to us the beauties of others."

The Bible talks quite a bit about friendship, including how to be a good friend and how friends impact us. They are so important that even Jesus had friends while He was here on earth: His disciples.

As we journey through life, friends are vital. Because of this, we need to have a sound understanding of what the Bible tells us about them.

Proverbs 27:17 states, "As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend." When iron is rubbed against another piece of iron, it creates friction. That friction eventually makes both pieces extremely sharp and/or smooth. This is a perfect example of how friends impact us. It is important that we associate with Christian friends instead of unbelievers because whomever you spend the most time with is who you will become like.

This is true for me. My closest friends and I all have similar vocabulary. When I think about it, it has to have something to do with us spending time with each other. I am sure in some way, major or minor, we are all like our friends. Therefore, if you hang out



# Panic or Pray?

by Micah Keim

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9).

One of the most terrifying times in my life was an accident that happened to my dad. He and I had been out all afternoon clearing brush from around our electric fences. We had just about reached the end of the trail, and I was using our brush cutter to cut down the few remaining branches. Dad was behind me, pushing the cut branches aside.

I turned back to ask Dad a question but did not see him. Then I felt the cutter's blade hit something. Whipping my head back around, I saw my dad stagger back with his arm pressed against his forehead. He stumbled to the fence and crossed over it. I shut off the cutter and rushed over to him. Blood was seeping down from where he pressed his flannel shirt against his head.

We made our way back to the house, and I rushed in to grab an ice pack and a set of keys. I raced back out and, after locking the door, slipped into the driver's seat of my dad's car. At the time, I had only my permit for a little more than two weeks and had very little experience driving on a paved road.

We had driven about ten miles when I glanced

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The best example of sacrificial  
love is Jesus himself.

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with people who are not Christians and have some bad habits, like bad language, you will probably become like them, finding their vocabulary slipping into yours.

My second and favorite verse about friendship is “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13). How many of you would actually do that? Lose your life for your friends?

Let me put it this way. Imagine if you were in Nazi Germany during World War II. A soldier marches up to one of your best friends and tells him or her that they have to be transported to one of the concentration camps, which is basically a death trap. What would you do?

In my personal opinion, you have two options: to either ignore the whole situation or run over and beg the soldier to take you instead. If you are the person God wants you to be, you will beg the guard to let you take your friend’s place.

That is one example, but the best example of sacrificial love like this is Jesus himself. He left heaven and came to this sin-filled world to die for sinners, like you and me, so He could spend eternity with us. Think about that for a minute. This sacrificial love is the greatest love.

Friends should build each other up. If you have Christian friends, as they sharpen you “as iron sharpens iron,” you will grow closer to the Lord and closer to your friend as well. Of course, not every one of us will have to lay down our life for our friends, but we still need to have that kind of sacrificial love as Christ had for us. It may be hard to love certain people, but with God’s help, everything is possible.

So, if you need a good friend, pray that God will bring the right person into your life. If you already have that good friend, pray for them and try to show unconditional love to them. Treasure the friendships you have. They are vital. **BA**

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**Elise Keim** is in ninth grade and enjoys writing, reading, and baking.

over at my dad and caught sight of how pale his face was under the ice pack. I started to break down, thinking that he might die right there in the vehicle. Dad turned slightly and started to talk to me. I am still not quite sure what he said, but whatever it was, it made me settle down.

As I was trying to calm down, I started to pray and slowly began to feel more peaceful. For the remainder of the drive, I was mostly quiet. We met my mom and she drove us the rest of the way to the emergency room. When it was all said and done, my dad was patched up with twenty-six stitches. To this day, he bears a scar over his left eye — a reminder of how God watched over and cared for us.

Have you ever been in a frightening situation like the one I was in? We all have at one time or another. Maybe a family member is sick, or perhaps you or a loved one is in danger. What is the first thing you do? Some of you may have done what I did, breaking down and crying. Others may kick into overdrive or start to panic.

What are we supposed to do? Acknowledge that God has the situation under control and pray for His help and guidance. The younger generation of today sometimes forgets that we have a powerful tool to use in communicating with God. We tend to think that we have everything under control. Then we get in over our heads. God lets us experience these circumstances to remind us that He is in control and that He will take care of us if we ask Him.

Prayer is one of the few ways that we can communicate with God, and He with us. Parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles, encourage your young family members to have a close relationship with God and to pray to Him regularly. Be an example for them and help them. Spend time with them in prayer or have a dedicated family prayer time at some point during the day. This can help them remember to pray rather than panic. **BA**

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**Micah Keim** is a senior in high school. During his spare time, he enjoys playing piano, raising beef cattle, and reading.

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Prayer is one of the few ways that  
we can communicate with God.

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# Questions & Answers



What is preterist eschatology, and what is CoG7's view?

**Eschatology** is the study of end things in Christian life (state of the dead, resurrection and immortality) and the study of end times in world history (Christ's return, millennium, resurrections of the dead, final judgment, and eternal kingdom). The word *preterist* indicates what is past, or gone before. Combined, the two terms refer to a school of interpretation in which much, most, or all of the prophecies of Daniel, Matthew 24, and Revelation have already seen their fulfillment in human history.

Preterist eschatology has several variant forms. The most consistent form, called *hyperpreterism*, insists that even salvation's ultimate events (Christ's literal return, final judgment, destruction of the wicked and all evil, and God's eternal reign over the redeemed) have already been realized in some sense. This is "fulfilled eschatology" at its utmost and is considered a sub-biblical view among most evangelical churches, including CoG7.

A more limited form of preterism affirms fulfillment of the Great Tribulation, prophesied by Christ (Matthew 24:15-28; Mark 13:5-23; Luke 21:8-24), in the AD 70 destruction of the Jewish temple and city of Jerusalem by Roman armies. This doesn't deny the future reality of Christ's return to judge the world, defeat all enemies, and usher in God's eternal kingdom and righteousness. This view, which helps to explain Christ's puzzling statements in Matthew 10:23; 16:28; 23:36; and 24:34, has its proponents among us.

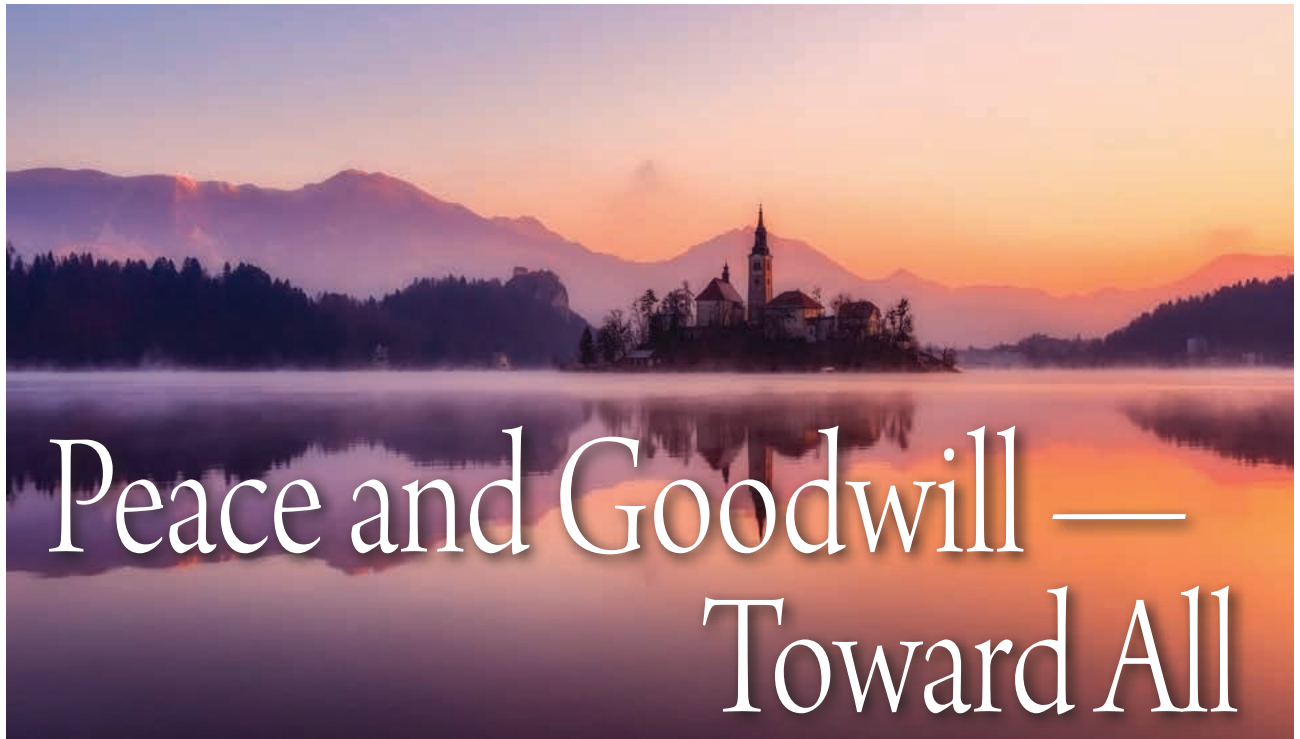
Confining the question to the book of Revelation, preterism is one of several approaches to interpreting the Bible's last book. The more common approaches are the historicist and the futurist. As the terms imply, historicist scholars find fulfillment of much or most of Revelation in world history, from the late first to the twenty-first centuries. Futurists see all the book, from chapter 4 on, still awaiting fulfillment in the future — beginning with the rapture (supposedly in 4:1, 2).

The preterist, however, views most or all of the prophecies in Revelation as finding their historic setting and fulfillment in the first century AD. In this view, chapters 6-18, at least, are to be read as symbolic descriptions of the actual events happening in the Roman Empire when Revelation was being written in the mid-to-late first century. It was written for the assurance, comfort, and encouragement of Christians then living through the testing, trial, and persecution brought against them by Roman rulers of that era.

The BA magazine's and CoG7's roots are mostly in the historicist school of prophetic interpretation, not the preterist. Our current Statements of Faith affirm the certainty of a future, literal return of Christ, accompanied by the resurrection of the righteous to eternal life, to rule and reign over the millennial restoration of all things to a new heavens and new earth. This is climaxed by the resurrection of the wicked to final judgment (annihilation) and by the universal peace and righteousness of God's eternal kingdom. Open study of all prophetic topics in Scripture is encouraged.

— Elder Calvin Burrell





# Peace and Goodwill — Toward All

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Reflections on a family  
broken over Christmas.

by Jonathon Hicks

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When I heard that the *Bible Advocate* was spending a year on the Ministry of Reconciliation, I was thrilled. Some of my first Christian thoughts were those of reconciliation. Today, after seven years as a pastor, I still think we need to hear this message and spread it with the greatest resolve. I base my view on a personal event.

## A boy's story

My mom and dad couldn't decide on a local church body to attend for a long time. When I was around five years old, they landed at the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Spokane, Wash-

ington. They made this decision primarily because of the belief that the Sabbath still stood for new covenant Christians. In the Spokane congregation, my family found a true church family. However, the security caused my parents to act foolishly.

Every year at Christmas, my mom, her two sisters, and all their families would gather in a hotel that could accommodate twelve crazy cousins. They were all faithful Christians from various Protestant traditions, so celebrating the birth of our Lord was precious for them. Discussion was always a mixture of edification from the Bible, joking the way families do, and discovering what new things had come to pass over the last year. During this time we recognized that we were family by blood and by the blood of Jesus Christ. It was wonderful.

But when I was seven years old at the annual gathering, an argument erupted: my aunt ver-

sus my mom and my dad over the date when our shared Lord was born. "Pagan," said my dad.

Being so young, I cannot remember more than that. But it was over. We did not talk to my aunt again until she was on her deathbed from cancer.

Not talking to my Aunt Arleen didn't stop me from praying. Nearly every prayer of mine for the next two or three years ended in hope for reconciliation with her.

## A pastor's reflection

Still now as a pastor, I look back and think, *Why was the date of Jesus' birth more important than our common faith in Him as our Savior?* Reconciliation and unity are much more important in the New Testament than being right about a date. Paul defines his whole calling as the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18). However,

because my family did not follow the New Testament's consistent encouragement toward unity, we lost contact with my aunt and a Christian sister for eleven years. What were we thinking?

We thought that we had security and truth, and we had nothing to do with those who didn't. But that is not the gospel. That is not God's eternal Word. Rather, His Word proclaims this:

For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:13-18).

Paul penned these words when the church in Corinth could not stand him. They wanted to be rid of him. But throughout the letter, and most poignantly here, Paul reminds them that he is willing to do anything for them. If he and the other apostles are in their right mind, "it is for you." But if they are beside themselves, "it is for God." Either

way, the Corinthian church and the apostles are united.

Further, in Ephesians 4, Paul lists all of the uniting "ones" of Christianity: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (vv. 4-6).

And because of this, we should lead a life of humility, gentleness, and patience, "bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (vv. 1-3).

those who believe in Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. Not to mention those who are filled with the Holy Spirit and worship "God the Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (v. 6).

Though I never saw my faithful Christian aunt again after that argument in the hotel, my mother did. Sadly, by that time, both families had missed marriages and births of grandchildren. Now Aunt Arleen is dead. I look forward to spending those eleven lost years with her in paradise.

I'm trying to live a different way than my parents lived then.

“Reconciliation and unity are much more important in the New Testament than being right about a date.”

What would Paul think when we dismiss the ministry of reconciliation, grounded on the uniting "ones" and demonstrated throughout his ministry, and instead focus on December 25? Better yet, what does God think right now as we are doing it?

### Church reckoning

When we as a General Conference say that we are "distinct yet inclusive," we recognize that God is not pleased with our disunity. We are different, we believe different things, and yet that should not separate us from

My mom is too. Let's commit to not separating families over the date of Jesus' birth. Yes, He was not born on December 25. Yes, the world celebrates that because it accommodates paganism. But yes, God's uniting loving sacrifice is stronger than this error. **BA**

**Jonathon Hicks** and his wife, Danielle, serve the Lodi, CA congregation. Scripture quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version*.







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The best Bible verse  
never heard.  
by Calvin Burrell

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Most of us have a favorite verse of Scripture and, if asked, could tell why we like that text a lot. Could we also explain how the verses just before and after our favorite impact and help unpack its full meaning?

Without revealing its location yet, I'll tell you my favorite verse for today and walk you through an exercise to help us "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18, another favorite). Here's my never-heard best verse, in New King James English:

... that in the dispensation of the fullness of the

times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth — in Him

How do you feel? Did you get a spiritual buzz from reading my favorite? Maybe not. Now read it again, if you will, and out loud if you can. If you know where this verse is in the Bible (without looking), you're one in a hundred. If you never heard it before, or don't recall hearing it, you're not alone.

### 'Tens' sections

Did you notice how the verse is divided into three parts of ten words each, plus a two-word ending? Look at it again, count, and think hard about what you just read and heard.

The first ten words link this verse with the previous verse in the text. They continue its

thought by telling us *when* God the Father will finally complete His perfect will, His good pleasure, His self-purpose — things He has already made known and begun, as the previous verse says. And when will His perfect will, good pleasure, and self-purpose finally be completed? My favorite verse promises it will happen *in the fullness of time*.

When will that be? The urgent thing now is not to calculate a time in the future when God will declare time to be full. Rather, it's to focus on grasping the core truth of today's verse — its middle clause (read it aloud): "He might gather together in one all things in Christ"!

Those ten words reveal the essential content of God's perfect will, good pleasure, and self-purpose (of the previous verse), which He will accomplish when time is full. Those ten words are



at the heart not only of our verse but also of the Christian gospel. They are good news for a broken world. Good news indeed!

Our verse's third ten-word segment amplifies the "all things" of its main middle section. Check it out, above. And its final two words — *in Him* — reaffirm the main section's 9th and 10th words on *how* this ultimate unification of all things will be achieved: *in Christ*. Got it?

## Meaning

Time to review: Read our best-verse-never-heard aloud again (below), emphasizing the middle ten words in italics. Then we'll tell its location:

... that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times *He might gather together in one all things in Christ*, both which are in heaven and which are on earth — in Him (Ephesians 1:10, emphasis added).

What does this remarkable verse by Paul early in Ephesians mean? Think about it before reading the next sentence.

In the context of this epistle and the new covenant, our verse speaks in far-reaching terms about *God's* plan to *reconcile* all persons who are separated from others and alienated from Him by their sin, to *renew* all pieces of the natural order that are polluted and dying because of our sin, and to do all this by and for His Son, Jesus Christ.

This separation and corruption among people and things are not described in our verse or its near context. Naming a few examples will help make it clear. Jews vs. Gentiles, male vs. female, and slave vs. free are among the splits in Scripture. Think also of nation

vs. nation, rich vs. poor, white vs. black, and other social, ethnic, gender, religious, and political schisms — the realities of our human condition.

## Changed by God's love

What a divided and damaged world we inhabit! Our diversity is not the big problem, but our selfish heart hatred for people unlike us will ultimately divide and destroy us all, if not checked.

The Christian gospel announces that our selfishness and heart hatred *can be* checked — forgiven and transformed by God's love in and through Jesus. As we confess our sin and turn to Christ in faith and fellowship through the written Word and Holy Spirit, love, acceptance, and forgiveness for others kicks in. Put Him to the test today, and watch reconciliation go to work big time!

Help change today's best verse from *never* heard to *ever* heard. In a hateful and hostile world, people need the marvel-

ous message of reconciliation with God, others, and nature — *now!* And they need the amazing assurance that universal peace will surely come when, in the fullness of time, all things on earth and in heaven will be *reconciled*, gathered together in one body, even in Christ.

We bless the Lord for the spiritual reconciliation we have found in Jesus. In gratitude for our peace with God, we practice life with others now as if the final reunion of all people and things in perfect harmony were a reality. In our hearts and prayers, it already is! **BA**

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**Calvin Burrell** is former editor of the *Bible Advocate* and former director of GC Missions. He retired in 2015 and lives with his wife, Barb, in Stayton, OR. They attend the Marion, OR church.



## Wow!

Not just verse 10, we commend the whole of Ephesians 1 as the Greatest Bible Chapter Never Read. As you read and study the long "Blessed be God" passage (vv. 3-14), underline each gospel truth and bless the Father for it. Note how all the riches of God's grace are *in Christ*, in Him, to the praise of His glory. In the chapter's second half (vv. 15-23), Paul prays that we have clear views of the "exceeding greatness of His mighty power toward us who believe" (vv. 18, 19). The same power of God that raised Jesus from the dead now works His reconciliation (see also Ephesians 2:14-18) through us, and will eventually restore all the divided and decaying pieces of creation into a perfectly reunited whole.

How do you say "Wow!" in your language?

— CAB



## Teamwork

A bunch of young boys sat in the dugout, eager to find out what position each would play on the Bobcats. Coach announced that Leo would be their starting pitcher. Ricardo got first base, Jonah second, and so on. "Jason, you will be our backup pitcher," coach announced. "Now remember, every position is important. Our team is only as strong as our weakest member."

In their first game, the Bobcats played the Bulldogs. The game was close, but the Bobcats still lost 7-8. Being so close encouraged them, though, and they won the rest of their games. With a season record of 9-1, they were going to the playoffs!

Jason was thrilled, though he hadn't pitched in any games. But playing some during each game made him feel a part of the team.

To prepare for the playoffs, coach mixed backups and starters in a practice game. Jason got to pitch with all the starting infielders. Ricardo complimented Jason, "You may not pitch as well as Leo, but you snagged some balls that should have been hits!"

*If only I could pitch in a real game,* thought Jason.

Winning all their playoff games, the Bobcats were headed to the championships against the Bulldogs. Before the game, coach encouraged them. "We almost won the last time we played this team. Together, we can win."

By the start of the ninth inning, the Bobcats led by one point. Leo pitched to the Bulldogs' starting hitter. The batter hit the ball hard. Suddenly, Leo was down! Coach ran to the mound and helped him off the field.

"Jason, get out there and warm up!" coach yelled.

Jason ran to the mound and threw some practice pitches. "You can do this!" Ricardo yelled to him.

Soon Jason faced the batter. His first pitch went high, but the batter swung. The ball flew fast, but Jason reached out and caught it! One out and two to go!

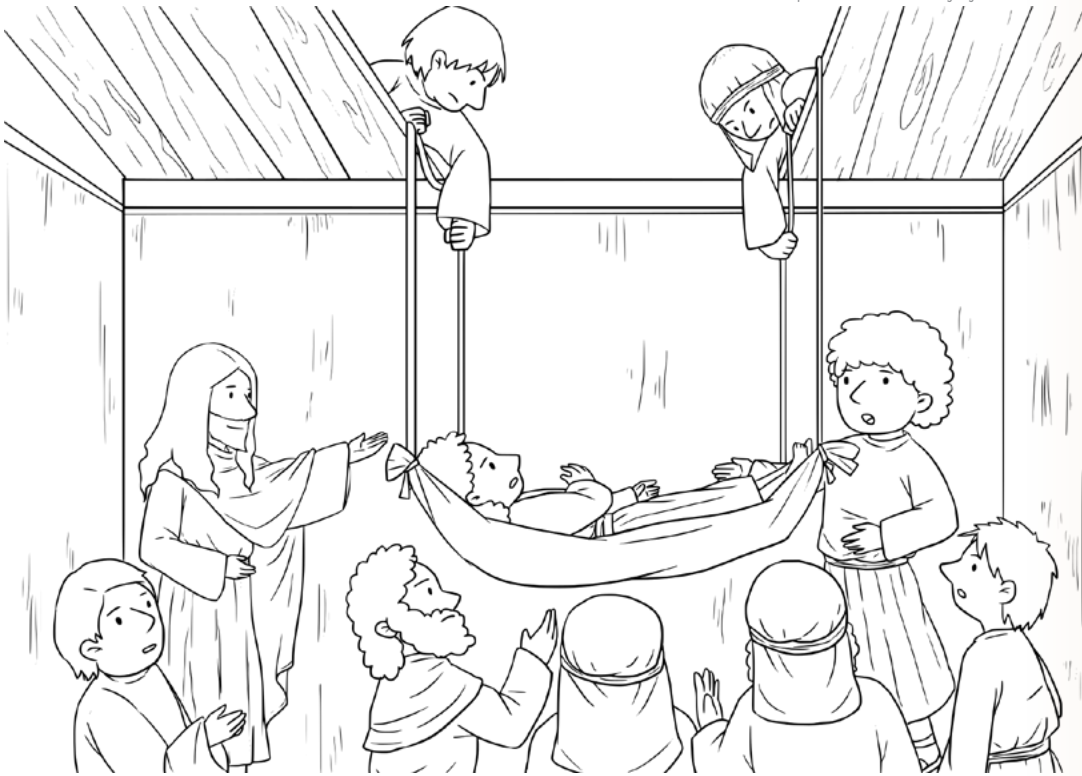
The next batter hit a high fly ball. The ball was caught, but not before the runner on first had reached second. With two outs, the best Bulldogs were coming up to bat. The next batter hit a line drive for a single, putting runners on first and third. Ricardo and Matt, the catcher, came to the mound to encourage Jason. "Don't give him anything too good to hit. Remember, we got your back."

Jason's first pitch was a little low and his second a little high. The batter was getting antsy. Jason's next pitch was just outside. The batter went for it and connected. The ball bounced up and to the right of Jason. He leaped for the ball and snagged it. Quickly he threw it to Matt as the runner on third rushed toward home plate. The throw to home was a bit high, but Matt snagged it just in time to tag the runner at home. The Bobcats won!

During the group hug, coach asked, "How did we win?"

"Together!" they all shouted.

In God's eyes, we're all players on the same team, and we work better together no matter what position we play. Let's do our best and stay in the game!



## Science Corner - The Power of Together

Try this experiment to see how strong some relatively weak objects can be when they "work together." You will need a 12 inch x 12 inch cardboard square and lots of paper cups.

### Directions

How strong do you think one paper cup is? Strong enough for you to stand on? Place one paper cup, open side down, on the ground. Then carefully stand on it. What happened?

Next, place nine paper cups on the ground forming three rows of three cups each, open side down. Place the cardboard square on top of the cups. Do you think they can hold your weight? Carefully stand on the cardboard square. What happened?

All nine cups shared your weight and thus could hold you up. Isn't it amazing what they could do when working together? For fun, remove some of the cups and spread the remaining ones evenly under the cardboard square. Try to stand on them. Can they hold you up? How few cups does it take to hold you up?

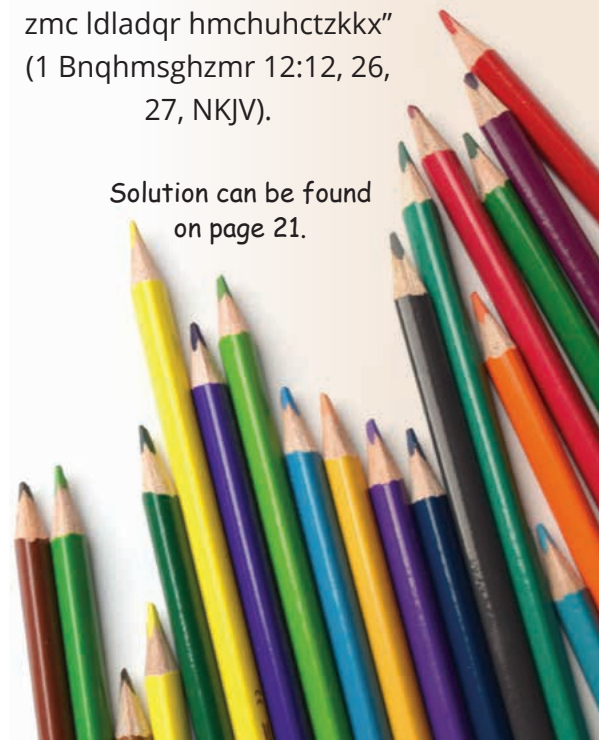
## Alphabet Puzzle

The Bible selection in the next column talks about the importance of each member of God's body working together. To solve the puzzle, look at each letter and write the one that comes after it in the alphabet. (Note: A comes after Z.)

"Enq zr sgd ancx hr nmd  
zmc gxr lzmX ldladqr, ats  
zkk sgd ldladqr ne sgzs nmd  
ancx, adhmf lzmX, zqd nmd  
ancx, rn zkrn hr Bgqhrs. . . .  
Zmc he nmd ldladq rteedqr,  
zkk sgd ldladqr rteedq vhsq  
hs; nq he nmd ldladq hr  
gnmnqdc, zkk sgd ldladqr  
qdinhd vhsq hs. Mnv xnt  
zqd sgd ancx ne Bgqhrs,  
zmc ldladqr hmchuhctzkx"  
(1 Bnqhmsgzhmr 12:12, 26,  
27, NKJV).

Solution can be found  
on page 21.

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







# Be the

by Whaid Rose

History will recall 2020 as the year like no other. Its global pandemic, economic recession, and civil unrest over racial injustice are unlike anything seen in modern times.

This calls for pause and reflection, especially on the part of Christians. Because we are salt and light in the world, our actions should cause people to glorify our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:13-16), and how we respond to the current political and social upheavals will be a matter of curiosity to future generations.

Therefore, we continue our conversation about racial reconciliation, preceded by two previous articles. In them I used the story of the 1967 collapse of West Virginia’s Silver Bridge to highlight the critical need for “bridge persons.” We turn now to that classic story in John 4 in which the ultimate bridge person — the Lord Jesus — is mightily at work.

## Bridge Builder

Here we see Him building a bridge across a racial and religious divide that had existed for centuries. In 722 BC, the Assyrians invaded Israel’s Northern

Kingdom and took many Jews into Babylonian captivity. However, only the cream of the crop was taken, so Assyrians were imported to maintain control over who remained. This led to intermarriage, resulting in a mixed race known as Samaritans.

To make matters worse, the Samaritans instituted a separate system of worship, which intensified the Jews’ hatred of them and resulted in some eight hundred years of ethnic and religious tension. By the time Jesus arrived on the scene, things had degenerated to the point that Jews and Samaritans had nothing to do with one another. In fact, the Jews called the Samaritans dogs!

That’s why Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman is so remarkable. Not only does He initiate a conversation with her, He asks her for a drink (v. 7). This catches her off guard, revealed by her response (v. 9). In today’s language, she asks Jesus, “Don’t You know that we don’t drink from the same water fountain?”

Yet, with tenderness and love, Jesus cuts through her biases and stereotypes one layer at a time. The woman soon perceives that He is no ordinary Jewish person (v. 19). Eventually recognizing Him as the Messiah, she hurries back to her neighborhood to call family and friends to “Come,

see a man” who has radically changed her life (vv. 28-30).

This didn’t immediately resolve the centuries-old conflict between Jews and Samaritans, but it created a new opportunity for healing and reconciliation. That’s what bridge persons do, and here Jesus shows us how.

## Godly principles

Notice His bold intentionality. Jesus is on His way to Galilee (v. 3) but chooses to travel by way of Samaria (v. 4). He goes out of His way to meet this woman, which requires walking across a social and ethnic boundary line that had kept people apart for too long.

For us, this may mean a walk across the room or across the street to the neighbors’ house, or initiating a conversation at the grocery store, at school, or maybe at church. A helpful resource for starting such conversations is a book I highly recommend titled *Be the Bridge: Pursuing God’s Heart for Racial Reconciliation*, by Latasha Morrison.

A black woman, Morrison experienced growing uneasiness over the historical and cultural disconnection within the mostly white environments she worked in, both in corporate America and as staff member at a Christian church. She found that “few

# Bridge

people understood the history of Black America, much less the full implications of our country's discriminatory past." She also found that many of her "non-White friends" had little or no appreciation for the ineptness of whites in this regard. This inspired Morrison to build a bridge between these two worlds, which evolved into a movement. Now reconciliation is being fostered as people come together in a posture of humility around *Be the Bridge* resources.

Not only is Jesus intentional, He also finds common ground: a mutually acceptable place to meet with the woman. Jacob's well (v. 6), with historical ties going all the way back to Isaac and Abraham and a place to which both Jews and Samaritans lay claim, serves as the perfect spot!

Finding common ground on which to connect with people who are different than we are is critical in the work of reconciliation. This requires focusing on what we share in common — our similarities and mutual interests, not our differences and disagreements.

Finally, Jesus leans into one of the hottest socio-political issues of His day, daring to take His stand on the right side of that issue. This is no small matter. Undoing social and racial barriers

never is, especially this one. The Samaritan woman is a social outcast. Some speculate that this is why she comes to the well at noon (v. 6) instead of early morning. Her checkered past, including five broken marriages, keeps her out of the "in group."

Worse yet, she is a Samaritan, placing her on the wrong side of the railroad tracks. But Jesus has no regard for such a boundary line. He knows that the evil of racism only makes an already broken world more broken and flies in the face of the God who made all humankind of one blood (Acts 17:26).

Jesus enters the Samaritan woman's space and affirms the beauty of God's image in her, and He offers her salvation. This changes her life forever. Racism is more than a skin issue; it's ultimately a sin issue, and the gospel is its best cure. What happens when the villagers come running to Jesus at the Samaritan woman's behest, John leaves to our imagination. The impact of unconditional love and acceptance is often too powerful for words. Imagine the joy, the healing, the ripple effect.

## Co-mission

Jesus invites us to do the same in our day, to join Him in His grand mission in the earth, cap-

tured in this beautiful sentence: "Behold, I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5). Those who do will make the greatest difference in our nation's current crisis.

And it's not complicated. Just build a bridge. Better yet, be the bridge! After all, you're a leader, and leaders are bridge persons!

BA

**Whaid Rose**, former president of the General Conference, is dean of the Artios Center for Vibrant Leadership and pastors the Newton, NC CoG7 congregation. He and his wife, Marjolene, live in Denver, NC. Scripture quotations are from the *English Standard Version*.



**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).**

# Doing Ministry Together

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by Ken Grant

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And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11, 12).

I have been doing ministry as a follower of Jesus ever since coming to faith as a fifteen-year-old. Team ministry, as Paul describes in Ephesians 4, was something I came to at a later age.

The genesis was my involvement in short-term mission teams organized by my church in response to an expressed need in a foreign country. While most of us were eager to get on an airplane and use our knowledge and skill to impact another land, our leaders knew that we first had to

become a healthy, strong, united group. Then we could work together and bring real impact to people in another place.

The lessons I learned in this team-building helped me not only for our short-term mission trip but also for my faith community moving forward.

## Coming together

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love (vv. 1, 2).

We first had to learn to remove selfish thinking for our group to work in the manner that our Lord desired. The apostle Paul understood that our impact on the lives of others is a consequence of how we personally live, so we had to show humility toward one another. Our impact also requires that we work with

each other in understanding as each of us grows into the people God created us to be. Central to Paul's entreaty in verses 1, 2 is that we endure or suffer with others as they work through the process of putting off their old self and putting on their new being in Christ (vv. 22-24).

The body of Christ is unique by design. This is often a source of friction. Differences in point of view, personality, and a number of other factors challenge us to respond not in bitterness and anger, but in kindness and forgiveness (vv. 31, 32). As we commit ourselves to desire the best in each other, the group as a whole becomes stronger and more unified.

In coming together and spending time with one another, we learned the important characteristics Paul referenced. We learned humility, right thinking about ourselves in relation to others, gentleness, trusting the work of the Holy Spirit in each other, and patience — having a



# EPHESIANS 4

view of God's work over time. As this process developed, we could work together to minister as God intended.

## Growing together

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love (vv. 15, 16).

Paul's greatest desire for the members of the church of God is that we grow up – to increase in every aspect of our being to become more and more like Christ. This process often happens most effectively and quickly as we commit ourselves to minister in the name of Jesus. As we step out in faith, our sinful tendencies are exposed. We are encouraged to take on more and more of Jesus' qualities that enabled Him to serve and speak into the lives of others and bring real transformation.

As each of us becomes more like Christ, our group, whether a short-term mission team or

a local church body, becomes stronger together. Its dignity as a unit is exalted because each part of the whole is contributing positively as God designed. When we operate properly, energized by the Holy Spirit, godly growth results, and the entire body can love others with the love of God.

Probably my greatest gift – and growth – from preparing for mission trips was understanding my identity in Christ and my larger place among those God calls His own. No longer estranged from God, I am part of a group of believers that goes back to the beginning of creation – those who have trusted the Lord for their salvation and, as a result, live lives worthy of their identity as God's children. I learned that I am part of a structure with its foundation in Christ. Its growth is a product of unity that comes about as we put off our sinful pride and trust Christ in every area of our lives (2:19-22).

## Working together

One body of believers that is unified in "the bond of peace," defined by one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all (vv. 3-6), will be a powerful wit-

ness to the world and will demonstrate God's love wherever it goes. Whether in a foreign land or right here at home, a unified, loving body of believers will transform the lives of others around them and reflect God's enduring work in the world. **BA**

**Ken Grant** writes from Santa Ana, CA. Scripture quotations are from the *English Standard Version*.



### Puzzle Solution

"For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. . . . And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually" (1 Corinthians 12:12, 26, 27, NKJV)



# Slow Cooker Conversion

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The long and winding road  
of grace and truth.

by Sarah Whitney

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**M**y mother-in-law, Linda Whitney (Grandma Linda, to my kids) had more questions than most teens her age in the 1950s. She loved and respected her parents, but at times she wasn't sure whether she agreed with their beliefs.

Linda's mom, Vernetta Jones, had a houseful of kids, so there wasn't much time for them to sit and talk about the Church's teachings. They would talk for a bit, but then her mom would be called away. "Ask Elder Dugger!" she would say over her shoulder.

"He can explain it better."

"Why don't we celebrate Christmas?" Linda asked her dad, Russell. "All my friends do, and I like all the lights. Our house is so dark!"

Russell knew the Bible and was strong in what the Church taught. He was also from a generation that taught children should be seen and not heard. Young people should respect and trust their elders, who knew more than they did.

## Seeking answers

So many do's and don'ts were preached from the pulpit in those days, Linda wasn't sure what she agreed with. But she knew where to find the answers: the Bible! She read and studied it for herself, but some things were con-

fusing for a young person to fully understand. It would take years of studying and maturing for her to learn what God expected of her. It might not be exactly what her family taught, or her church, but what her Creator revealed to her would end up changing her life.

One day Linda decided to take her mother's advice and write to Elder Dugger. Would this busy man have time to read a letter from a kid? She waited a long time, but eventually a reply came – a thick letter! Elder Dugger had thoroughly answered each one of her questions. Thanks to his answers, she began to read and study her Bible with a new understanding.

## Life changes

About this time, Linda and her family moved and began attending a new church. Under the preaching of Pastor Elder Heuer, they were inspired to live holy lives. They learned to examine every area of their lives for anything that might offend their Lord.

After Linda graduated from high school, the family moved again. There wasn't a Sabbathkeeping church anywhere nearby. Tragically, her dad, a kind, good man, was drinking by this time. Linda vowed she would never become an alcoholic like him, not realizing that the same disease ran in her blood.

One day Linda met a handsome, charming young man. They soon married and made a home of their own, with her husband working long hours as a logger. Over the years, they had three kids, and often extra kids were at their house. Life was full.

Their friends and family members made an arrangement. Each family would take turns hosting all the kids at their house for the weekend so the other couples could party. The parties at Linda's house were the best, in some people's opinion. The next morning would find partyers passed out in the yard and all over the house, and the mailboxes on the corner knocked over — *again!*

Linda and her family were soon joining the neighborhood decorating contests for *all* the holidays. She went all out. Her house was the darkest at Halloween and the brightest at Christmas.

## Firm beliefs

The next few years brought hard times. Linda lost a child she had hoped to raise, and her husband was unfaithful occasionally. Both her parents died. Though her life was almost unbearable at times, she never completely gave up.

But even during those tough years, Linda observed the Sabbath and refused to eat pork. On Sabbaths she would take her kids to her sister's house for church with her family. Friends and neighbors would roll their eyes and talk about how strict she was about not eating pork. "Once

“Conversion isn't always an immediate, miraculous change. It can happen over time.”

she threw away a really nice pot because someone had used it to cook pork in!" a neighbor laughed.

Linda didn't care what they thought. She knew what she believed.

## Ups and downs

Sometimes backsliding isn't an intentional, sudden turning around or a rejection of the truth. It is periodically wandering off the path and going in circles, trying hard to stay straight in the fog of life's circumstances. That's what happened to Linda.

In comparison, conversion isn't always an immediate, miraculous change. It can happen like a slow cooker — working over time. It often comes as a result of daily struggles with choices that lead us to become something we never imagined possible. Such a conversion may be slow, but it is a hard-won victory worthy of angels' applause.

So it was with Linda. She had a glimmer of hope that her life didn't need to always be out of control. She also feared that she couldn't be a part of her future grandchildren's lives if she didn't sober up.

In rehab Linda began to see God in a much more powerful way. She learned to call on Him, lean on Him, and not beat herself up when she slipped. Realizing His mercy and grace, Linda became stronger each day.

Despite her progress, Linda faced temptation to return to her old way of life. The road home from work took her right past the bars she used to haunt. When the tug of habit became too strong, she would grip the steering wheel and cry out, "Jesus, Jesus, JESUS!" until the car and her thoughts were filled with that powerful, wonder-working



name. Every day Linda repeated her battle until she arrived on the peaceful road home.

Some days for Linda were easy, but some were wearing. Temptations would hit her when she least expected, and she would find herself alone in her car with the blinker on, ready to lose all she had gained for the flashing lights of the tavern.

Again she cried, "Jesus! Help me!" and He would come, not with a flash of lightning but with a strengthening of resolve — just enough to keep her car on the road, headed for home.



## Turnaround

As the years went on, Linda became an inspiration to her friends and family, and even to strangers. Many of them turned to sobriety and to a faith in Jesus. Linda even hosted a church in her home. Instead of the wildest parties on Saturday nights, her home became known as the best place to be on a quiet Sabbath afternoon.

This little home church plunged into the Scriptures daily. As they were washed in the Word, the Holy Spirit revealed

truths to them that others have studied their whole lives to find. These believers had a simple yet strong childlike faith that gladly obeys. When they came across a verse in their studying, they would embrace it and ask, "How should we then live?"

Out went books and movies that were contrary to this new walk. Out went the Christmas tree. Some of the neighbors shook their heads with confusion and rolled their eyes with amusement, but Linda and her friends were as bold as ever. She looked up leaders of her church that she had known in previous

years. Elders Dugger and Heuer were gone, but it wasn't hard to find others who had the same passion. They took turns visiting these new converts each Sabbath.

About once a year, Linda would do a house cleaning. She would pull out books or other things that she had brought into her home that year. If she felt they didn't glorify God, out they went! Linda also examined her life for habits that needed a refreshing.

There is no way of knowing how many people's lives were

changed for the good because Linda allowed God to turn her life around. She went on mission trips overseas. She was a missionary every day, everywhere she went. She witnessed in the store, on the airplane, and on the sidewalk. Linda was a willing vessel for God to use.

## New story

Linda fought the good fight until the day she died. She never claimed it was easy, and she never condemned others who struggled. She was a shining light of hope and healing to all who were touched by her example.

Linda Whitney died several years ago. My older girls remember sitting on her lap as she warned them about the dangers of alcohol. She was open with them about her struggles and victories.

Grandma Linda's story may be over, but theirs is just beginning. I wrote this story for them, so they would never forget. I wrote it for my young son, who never met his grandmother, so he can learn. I wrote it for myself, and for all of us, so that when this life finds us struggling or confused, we will call on Jesus. He is always near and will answer — every time! **BA**

**Sarah (Lemley) Whitney** writes from Kalama, WA, where she lives with her husband, Luke, and their three children.



# Reflection

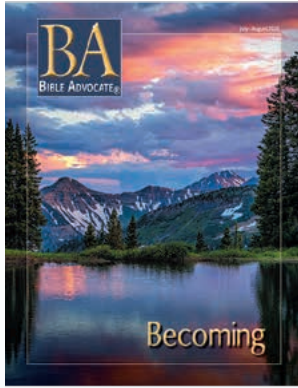
To bless and encourage, to comfort, uplift,  
That is the prayer of my heart;  
To care for the needs of a sister or brother,  
With strength and hope to impart.  
To carry a burden, to lighten a load,  
To give them a shoulder, a smile,  
To help them see Your love encircling them,  
Helping to walk the next mile.  
This is my prayer and the wish of my heart,  
A love that others may see,  
And as I'm uplifting and comforting, Lord,  
I pray they'll see You more than me.

Sharon Lee Roberts





## Readers Write



*Editor's note: The September-October BA and the subject of race and reconciliation struck a chord with a good number of readers. Space prevents us from printing every letter, but the following is a good sample of the sentiment of many.*

### **Defending police**

Statements in Whaid Rose's and Israel Steinmetz's articles brought me up short. I'm in agreement that what we see of the treatment received by George Floyd appears to be indefensible. But the widespread outcry and weeks of protests, rioting, and destruction sparked from the media saturation of that event are also indefensible.

I feel that at this time in this country's history, a much greater injustice has been, and is being, done to the police who risk their lives every day to protect us. Statistics show that more unarmed whites have been killed by police than unarmed blacks. Meanwhile, the deaths of police — and the misery and heartache to their families — are largely ignored by the media.

I am in no way denying the

terrible treatment that blacks have received in American history, but we will make a big mistake if we are seen, in any way, to support this wave against police. The many heroic acts by law officers go, for the most part, unknown and unreported. Meanwhile it seems that any possible negative report becomes widespread — many times reporting only one side of the story. The "experiment" in Seattle, Washington, should give us a preview of what this country will be like if we continue to harbor disrespect for law and order.

H. D. C.  
Denver, CO

*Response from Whaid Rose: There are many layers to the discussion of racism in America, more than can be adequately covered in a single article. At its deepest level is the long history of inhumane treatment of blacks brought to this country as slaves, and the trauma of that experience that continues to affect present generations of African Americans.*

*Oddly enough, those inclined to dismiss this are easily able to understand how the trauma of abuse, addiction, and even divorce affects families for generations, and how the trauma of war severely affects veterans, not just physically but emotionally and mentally, and is passed down through generations.*

*Christians unconvinced of the stark realities of racial injustice should listen, not to whatever sources are informing their opinions, but rather to their black brothers and sisters within the*

*body of Christ who are telling them that this is real, that they are living it every day. When one part of the body hurts, we should all hurt with it (1 Corinthians 12:26).*

*Rioting and looting are destructive and cannot achieve justice; darkness cannot bring light. But rioting is also evidence of the lingering effects of this trauma, and what is most needed is a trauma-informed response, not tougher law enforcement.*

*My article isn't addressed to the people rioting in the streets but to Christians. Addressing racial injustice should not automatically be associated with support of rioting and looting, nor the undermining of law enforcement.*

*The killing of any person — black, white, or brown — in the manner that George Floyd was killed should elicit empathy and compassion in the heart of every human being, especially Christians. Pointing to Floyd's past or criminal record instead is not only a deflection but also a serious failure of Christlike compassion, and a betrayal of our calling to be salt and light in our broken world.*

*Response from Israel Steinmetz: While rioting and destruction are indefensible among peace-loving people, outcry and protest are biblically based, and Constitutionally protected, forms of pleading for justice.*

*While some feel that police suffer greater "injustice" than people of color in the US, there is no metric by which this could be substantiated. Databases tracking fatal police incidents (e.g., the FBI,*

*continued on page 30*



# GC Ministries News

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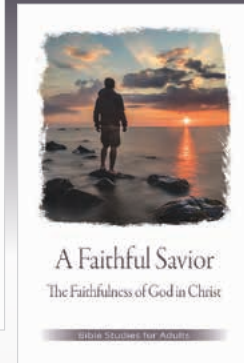
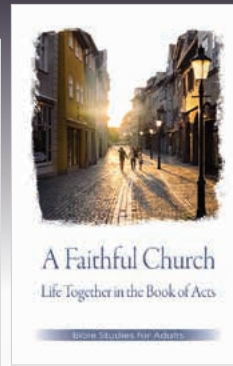
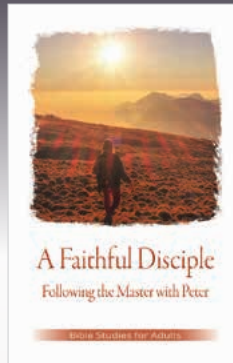
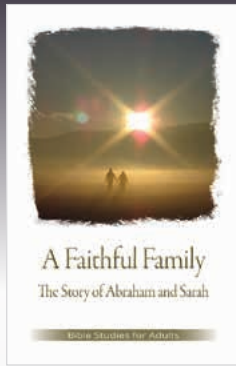


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## GC Convention 2021

While COVID-19 has complicated convention planning, your Convention Committee is working on a powerful GC gathering in July 2021. God must have had a plan when President Loren Stacy and Executive Director Jody McCoy chose the theme “Faithful” for this convention. The pandemic has disrupted our lives, but it cannot disrupt the faithfulness of our God.

### General information

Location: Covington, Kentucky (*across the river from Cincinnati*)

When: July 5-10, 2021

Theme: “Faithful”

Registration: Watch for the Convention website  
to open in early January 2021





# On Mission ... In South Sudan

by **Makuey Gai Tudel**

South Sudan is a member of the International Ministerial Congress of the Church of God (Seventh Day). The country is located in northeastern Africa, bordering six countries: Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, DR Congo, Central African Republic, and Sudan. Its rich biodiversity includes lush savannas, swampland, and rainforests that are home to many species of wildlife.

Prior to 2011, South Sudan was part of Sudan, her neighbor to the north. South Sudan's population, predominantly of African culture and descent and tending toward Christianity or animist

beliefs, was long at odds with Sudan's largely Muslim and Arab population.

## Church history

In 2002, three individuals from different Christian faiths lived in Dimma, an Ethiopian refugee camp. They were the first to start communication with the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Denver, Colorado. These individuals were advised to contact Pastor John Njogu, General Conference representative in Nakuru, Kenya.

But in 2005, they voluntarily moved from Ethiopia to their home country in Southern Sudan, affecting their communication. In January 2009, one of the

three left for Nakuru, where he met with Pastor Robert Crawford, IMC representative of Zone 5, and Pastor Njogu. In August of the same year, Pastor Njogu was sent to Bentiu in Southern Sudan, and he baptized five souls into Christ Jesus, including one of the original three persons. This helped stabilize the communication in Ethiopia.

At present, the Church of God (Seventh Day) numbers over forty baptized members in South Sudan. She has extended her influence to Ethiopia, Uganda, Sudan, and Egypt, where some families from the Church went for refugee resettlement and safe haven due to the civil war in 2013.



## Church challenges

Even though the gross domestic product is increasing in South Sudan, the country remains poor, with a literacy rate of 27 percent. The lack of health care and food security also contributes to poverty. South Sudan is a vast landlocked country that lacks developed cities. Eighty-three percent of her 12.8 million people reside in rural areas that don't have access to many basic necessities.

Due to the ongoing civil war, over 2 million South Sudanese are refugees in neighboring countries, and 7.4 million people need urgent humanitarian assistance. Many of these face severe food shortages. Malnutrition is at a critical level, and 5.5 million people lack access to clean water. More than half of the population do not have access to primary health care services. Some 1.7 million children, as well as pregnant and lactating mothers, are at the risk of acute malnourishment.

Many of our church members are living in the internal displaced persons camp, guarded by the United Nations peacekeeping forces in both Bentiu and Juba, the capital of South Sudan. This is where we have our church shelters and get other basic needs from humanitarian agencies.

Despite tremendous successes, a lot of challenges hinder the growth of the Church. Above all is aggressiveness from other Christian faiths and animists. These conflicts are catalyzed by the ongoing civil war, the main challenge the Church faces every day. We are confronted physically and emotionally by other church groups. Jeering, bullying,

and even physical attacks come mostly from different Sabbatarian and non-Sabbatarian Christian groups.

Christians account for 60.4 percent of South Sudan's population, with animist believers taking up 32.9 percent. Muslims account for only 6.2 percent of the population. The Catholic Church is the largest Christian presence, at 37.2 percent; 23.2 percent are Protestant. This makes it hard for the gospel of Jesus Christ to reach people who would rather study catechism than the Bible.

The wider population is developing negative attitudes toward Christianity. Some view it as the religion of colonial powers that destroyed traditional beliefs, which people are now embracing more than before. The Catholic Church has made a lot of changes to accommodate many traditional beliefs, like cultural dances and rituals. This has affected Bible-based churches that want to follow the words of God.

One of our biggest challenges

is the lack of Christ-centered leadership skills and Bible-based knowledge. This affects Church programs and contributes toward a lack of progress. Few have training. Notwithstanding, we remain strong and rooted in the words of the Lord God Jesus Christ — like the man who dug deep foundations and built his house on the rock.

## Church evangelism

Local pastors have not arranged crusades, Bible camps, or missions from sister conferences in South Sudan. Only Pastor Njogu visited us twice, in 2009 and 2012, before the 2013 civil war began. Since then, our church members are converts from animism and other churches. They accepted our Bible-based church as the result of our preaching the gospel from house to house in our surrounding blocks and villages.

We have constructed worshiping shelters in the camps where

## South Sudan

Population:  
12,841,000

Capital: Juba

Land area:  
248,777 sq mi /  
644,329 sq km

Official language:  
English

CoG7 congregations: 3

Membership: 40+

President: Makuey Gai Tudel







our members live, especially in Bentiu, Juba, and Uganda. The others are family churches that gather in their houses on the Sabbath to worship in Sudan and Ethiopia.

As a church, our vision is to look for our own land in Bentiu and Juba so we can construct church buildings if peace and calm return to the country. We are seeing small changes in the warring parties since they signed a peace accord in 2018. Not as many fights happen now. If this continues, we will leave the camps and live in the towns. This will give us an opportunity to establish ourselves and do full ministering to our members and unbelievers.

### A testimony

This story comes from one of our sisters, Nyayiena Kuol. She had been a Sabbathkeeping Christian for a long time but never experienced Jesus Christ in her life. Nyayiena is a married mother of eight: five sons and three daughters. She lives with her husband, who has taken a second wife who is not a believer. According to their culture, wives live in separate houses, far from each other, to avoid family conflict.

As a result of our preaching

from house to house, our team approached Nyayiena in her shelter with a message of love and compassion. She was fascinated by the words we preached, and she asked us to come back

again so she could learn more about this new faith.

The team went back and preached the gospel to her and to those with her in the house that day. She asked for the location of the church and was shown the shelter where we conduct our Sabbath services.

On the following Sabbath, Nyayiena came as a guest and was given the opportunity to greet the church members and introduce herself. It was some months before she decided to join the membership. A year later, she requested rebaptism.

Immediately after receiving the Lord Jesus Christ, Nyayiena preached the gospel to her household. As a result, five souls were converted, including her husband, all of whom were baptized into Christ Jesus. Now Nyayiena leads members of her family to the Lord Jesus Christ by her faithfulness. Every Sabbath they gather for worship in Juach village outside the United Nations civilians protection camp.

### Rooted in the Word

Despite the many challenges affecting the ministry of the Church of God (Seventh Day) in South Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Sudan, and Egypt, we have great hope that nothing shall uproot us

from the Lord Jesus Christ, who planted us as seeds of His kingdom. Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 6:4: "But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses." Therefore, we are all called to be with the Lord Jesus Christ and share in His sufferings.

If you or your congregation want to support our ministry in South Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Sudan, contact IMC/GC missions.

### Makuey Gai Tudel

is a pastor of the CoG7 in South Sudan. He and his wife, Rebecca, live with their four children and other relatives in Nakuru, Kenya.



## Readers Write

*continued from page 26*

*the CDC, the Washington Post's "Fatal Force") show police killing far more civilians each year than civilians killing police.*

*While more whites have been killed by police than blacks, blacks make up only 13 percent of the American population, while whites make up 76 percent. Once the numbers are adjusted, blacks are 2.8 times more likely to be killed by police officers than whites, and a higher percentage of blacks killed by police are unarmed.*

*Respect for law and order is a Christian priority and can be expressed by Christians holding police accountable for violating law and order.*



## Working Together with God

Which do you find more motivating, more encouraging of a good attitude and of good efforts: working *for* someone or working *with* someone? Your answer probably depends on who that someone is. If it is your boss and someone you deeply respect as a trusted and capable person, just being able to work *for* that person may motivate you to do good work. But what if that wonderful, capable person not only hires you but also rolls up their sleeves and joins you in doing the work that needs to be done? That's elevating! You're being treated like a partner, not just a hired hand.

Now what if that wonderful, capable person is Almighty God himself? Wow! That's almost unimaginable. Why would the all-powerful, all-knowing, everywhere-present Creator of everything partner with mere humans? I don't know. But such was the amazed conviction of the apostle Paul and, through him, it is the clear teaching of the Word of God.

Paul seems to never have completely wrapped his mind around the truth that God had called him into partnership in His great redemptive work. This point appears again and again in Paul's epistles, sometimes only suggested and other times stated explicitly. Even better, Paul was convinced that God was also in partnership with all other believers in Christ, doing His work in us and through us. The accomplishments are always God's. But we believers are blessed with the opportunity to be used by God, to work alongside God, as partners of God.

Here are two examples of this suggested truth. Paul tells the Philippians, "for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13, NASB

throughout). To the Colossians, Paul writes, "For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me" (Colossians 1:29).

Here are two examples of this truth stated explicitly. In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul addresses a division in that church: members aligning themselves with Paul rather than Apollos, or with Apollos rather than Paul. In verses 5-9, Paul rebukes this behavior, pointing out that it is God, not Paul or Apollos, who deserves credit. Who are Paul and Apollos? "We are God's fellow workers," Paul proclaims, servants of God through whom God is accomplishing His work.

Surely Paul had the same concept in mind as he dictated his second epistle to the Corinthians. After telling these believers, and us, that we have been made ministers of reconciliation (5:18, 19) and ambassadors for Christ, through whom God is making His appeal to unbelievers (v. 20), Paul begins chapter 6, "And working together with Him [God], we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain — for He says, 'At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you.' Behold, now is 'the acceptable time,' behold, now is 'the day of salvation'" (vv. 1, 2).

Wow! God's fellow workers! Workers together with Him — mere humans in whom and by whom God extends His power to accomplish His redemptive work. If that opportunity and blessing doesn't excite and motivate us, what will?

— Loren Stacy



# A few attractions that await your GC Convention 2021 adventure



July 5-10, 2021  
Covington, Kentucky



**CHURCH OF GOD™**  
(SEVENTH DAY) UNITED STATES & CANADA



Featured: Ark Encounter, National Underground Railroad  
Freedom Center, Creation Museum, Newport Aquarium,  
Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens,  
BB Riverboats, Garden of Hope

