



Found Faithful



Inside

2021: Faithful



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Faithful or Falling?

It's 2021, and I bet you are as ready to leave 2020 behind as I am. But a new year doesn't mean a new world. The confused, chaotic forces unveiled last year remain. Our theme for this year is "Faithful." What does it mean to be faithful in a decaying culture like ours?

Though the Bible is increasingly unpopular, believers rely on it for the answer. First Corinthians 4:1, 2 is the focus of this *Bible Advocate*. Here Paul writes that we are "stewards of the mysteries of God" and that stewards must "be found faithful." Are we?

Like the church in Corinth, believers are caught between our carnal natures and a hostile culture. We can't take Paul's admonition lightly. He warns of a "falling away" too (2 Thessalonians 2:3). Carnality and culture are always an intoxicating, subverting mix. We see its power as many depart from the faith.

In her remarkable new book, *Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World*, Tara Isabella Burton gives a journalistic account of how religion in post-Christian America is changing rapidly. This sentence sums it up: "Among the most common sayings I heard among the people I interviewed was, 'I make my own religion.'"

Religion in America is a believers-without-a-Bible phenomenon. A Barna study reports that three-quarters of Millennials agree with the statement "Whatever is right for your life or works best for you is the only truth you can know. . . ." If that's not enough, 47 percent of practicing Christians of all ages agree. Sociologist Christian Smith finds similarly that only 40 percent of young Christians surveyed said that their personal moral beliefs are grounded in the Bible. Do we have the resources to resist these trends?

Let's not fall but be found faithful. This year we'll study faithful examples from Scripture in their context to learn how to endure ours. Daniel comes to mind. An exile in Babylon, he resisted the pressures to conform and was found faithful before God – and before those arrayed against him (1:19; 2:25; 5:12; 6:4, 11, 23). As a faithful steward of God's mysteries, Daniel knew who he was and Whom he served).

Dare to be a Daniel. Welcome to 2021!

— Jason Overman





How our feelings can
derail our faithfulness, and
what to do about it.

by David Kidd

Why do we sin? One reason has to do with our emotions. We can seethe over someone who has done wrong to us or spoken against us, and then lash out at them or slander them. We can envy what a person has to the point of wishing them ill.

Even though we believe we may be right in our negative feelings, the wrong emotions can get us into trouble with God. By recognizing this truth and respond-

ing to it, we can be found more faithful to God.

Hot in the desert

Do you remember when the Israelites complained bitterly against Moses and Aaron for lack of water (Numbers 20:2-5)? They griped that it would have been better to have stayed in Egypt than be brought into the wilderness to die. Moses and Aaron turned from them and fell on their faces before the Lord, and His glory appeared to them (v. 6). God instructed Moses to bring water from a rock for the people by speaking to it (vv. 7, 8).

However, Moses made a mistake. Rather than speaking to the rock in the presence of the assembly, he said, "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for

you out of this rock?" He then struck the rock twice (vv. 7-11). The Lord was displeased with Moses' outburst: "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them" (v. 12).

The severity of the punishment highlighted the seriousness of Moses' mistake. There is an important lesson here regarding why Moses slipped up. Was it because he lacked knowledge? No. God filled him with understanding. Was it because something was wrong with his relationship with God? No. Theirs was described as a personal, face-to-face friendship (Exodus 33:11). Was it because Moses was full of pride and wanted to show off? No. Numbers 12:3 describes him as the humblest man on the face

of the earth. Moses was certainly a righteous and holy man. What, then, caused him to sin?

Put yourself in Moses' shoes. This wasn't the first time the Israelites had complained bitterly about their situation in the wilderness. Moses had endured their rebellion against him and God many times before. How would you feel if you'd been wholeheartedly serving your people around the clock, and all they could do was grumble? Moses felt angry. Perhaps he also felt betrayed and unappreciated. He may have even had righteous anger at the way the Israelites were disrespecting God. Consequently, Moses lost control of his emotions and sinned against God.

Emotions and sin

Moses is not the only highly esteemed saint who did this. Consider King David and his adultery with Bathsheba. Wasn't it lust that caused the man after God's own heart to sleep with Uriah's wife? Or what about Job, one of the most righteous men to ever live? In his terrible time of testing, he kept his integrity and did not sin. But after being worn down by the poor counsel of his so-called friends, Job bemoaned his situation so severely that God rebuked him: "He who rebukes God, let him answer it. . . . Would you condemn Me that you may be justified?" (40:2, 8). Job, too, fell victim to the emotions of demanding vindication. He repented in dust and ashes (42:6).

If these faithful men could let their emotions cause them to sin, then we can too. Human

emotions are good, but we must beware because they are easily manipulated by sin.

Take disappointment, for example. Perhaps you have been disappointed with the direction your church is going or with situations in your workplace or relationships. Sometimes disappointment can cause us to be unfaithful to our responsibilities.

Worry can also lead us to sin. Remember how Saul was commanded to wait for Samuel while the enemy was gathering? Samuel didn't arrive when Saul expected him, so Saul took upon himself the priestly duties that were not his to perform (1 Samuel 13).

“Human emotions are good, but we must beware because they are easily manipulated by sin.”

Worry often causes us to be unfaithful to God's commands. Sometimes when we can't see how our needs are going to be met, we might seek to meet them in inappropriate ways, such as working on the Sabbath or cheating on our taxes. It's no wonder Jesus told us not to worry (Matthew 6:25-34).

Even the powerful emotion of love can cause us to sin. If we love anything or anyone more than God, we break the com-

mandment concerning idolatry. Jesus also said if we love mother or father or anyone more than Him, we are not worthy of Him (10:37).

Bitterness and resentment can cause us to be unfaithful to our Lord, whose life we are called to imitate. Sadness can motivate us to do a variety of inappropriate things to comfort and cheer ourselves, like excessive drinking, overspending, or engaging in unwholesome entertainment. Some may even curse God when sadness sinks them in great despair.

Darker emotions caused by the deep trauma of rejection or abuse can lead to sin. Failing to overcome the emotions associ-

ated with these, like exaggerated anger and fear, a person may treat themselves, and others, without love or compassion — and even harm themselves.

Realizing the strong link between our emotions and sin, Jesus wisely instructed us about the attitudes of our hearts. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, He taught that if we have lust in our hearts, we have already committed adultery. Or if we are angry with our brother

without cause, we have committed murder (Matthew 5:21-30). Paul added to this, exhorting us in Ephesians, “Be angry, and do not sin” (4:26).

Reigning over emotions

If such a humble, obedient, and self-controlled man as Moses, in close relationship with God, could get carried away and err through emotion, then we need to be careful. Here are three positive guidelines for

to the flesh, we will reap corruption. But if we sow to the Spirit, we will reap everlasting life (Galatians 6:8).

Third, if we have struggled with the same emotion for a long time, we should seek help from a professional counselor in overcoming it. We certainly need help from God, our Counselor, as well. First Peter 5:6, 7 instructs us to cast all our care upon Him, for He cares for us. We can bring all our bitterness, anxiety, fear, jealousy, loneliness, and de-

“God’s will is that sin does not reign over us through our negative emotions.”

guarding our emotions.

First, we must be careful what we say and do when our emotions are stirred, remaining extra vigilant. We must check ourselves and call upon the Lord when we feel our hearts burning.

Second, we must keep sowing to the Spirit and building up our minds in Christ. The more we are filled with the Spirit and growing in spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, fasting, and service, the more emotionally stable and faithful we will be. God has not given us a spirit of fear but of love, power, and soundness of mind (2 Timothy 1:7). If we sow

spair to Him. He’s listening. He will refresh us with the mind of Christ. Read Psalms and see how honestly the writers expressed all their feelings to God. Let Him hear your cries. He is the God of all comfort.

Practical steps

If you’ve been battling with severe feelings of worthlessness, depression, rejection, and other similarly debilitating emotions for many years, the three suggestions for reigning over your emotions may be easier said than done. Or perhaps you don’t know where to begin.

A good starting place is tapping into God’s incredible strength, walking closer to Him in the Spirit. Three practical, simple steps over a three-week period can help you do this.

Week 1: Take time to prayerfully examine your relationship with God and honestly assess how it can be deepened. Make a list of your conclusions.

Week 2: Take action on one of your findings. Set quality time aside for God each day, bringing your need to Him in prayer and reading Scripture. Think about how to apply what you are learning during this time.

Week 3: Continue with Week 2’s disciplines, but add another need and spiritual discipline, like fasting and confession, based on Week 1’s findings. Take small steps in this direction, with prayer and thanksgiving.

We all have specific issues, so it’s best we tailor our own plan. If, in light of any serious emotional problems, you feel unable to tailor your own plan, seek counsel from a pastor or trusted Christian friend.

God’s will is that sin does not reign over us through our negative emotions, and that we be found faithful. God is also faithful in helping those with their eyes fixed on Him for the perfect peace that the world cannot give and that surpasses all understanding. **BA**

David Kidd and his wife, Angella, live in Tauranga, New Zealand.



Who is Your Master?



by Kelsey Gjesdal

"I just need to check my Instagram one more time before bed."

"If I don't worry about it, no one will."

"I cannot believe I just did that. People are going to think I'm a loser."

At the start of my New Testament Survey class, I did a study on Matthew 6. I had always looked at the Sermon on the Mount as a collection of thoughts — random lifestyle directives from Christ. However, when I studied Matthew 6, I found it is more than just a collection of teachings.

Jesus says in Matthew 6:24, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." This verse is the hinge of the chapter and, I believe, of the entire Sermon on the Mount.

The driving question behind Matthew 6 is "Who is your master?" The first eighteen verses of the chapter are about not practicing righteousness to be noticed by people, but instead practicing righteousness for God's eyes and His reward alone. Three times in the chapter Jesus says that our "Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you" (vv. 4, 6, 18). Verses 25-34 are all about anxiety and choosing to have faith in our Father instead of worrying.

So who is your master? Is it man? Money? Worry? Or is it God?

Our culture today is enslaved to many masters.

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, anxiety disorders affect 40 million US adults over eighteen. A study by James A. Roberts found that female college students spend about 600 minutes and males 459 minutes a day on their smartphones. Stephen Willard states that "the average person checks his or her phone a whopping 150 times." Even more disturbing is what John Brandon, contributing editor of *Inc. com*, reports — that "We tap, swipe, and click on our phones 2,617 times per day."

How many people are mastered by fear of what others think, video games, television shows, the need for more and more possessions, busyness, the desire for success or popularity, or "me time"? We are controlled by many things, often without realizing it. I struggle with worrying about my grades, what others think of me, my health. The list continues.

What is the answer to these misplaced masters? It is found in Matthew 6:33: "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus paints a beautiful picture of our heavenly Father, who rewards His children for doing good and meets their needs. When money, worry, or reputation masters us, we are filled with darkness, anxiety, and dissatisfaction. When God is our Master, we practice righteousness for His honor. Instead of focusing on the things of this world, we focus on God's heavenly kingdom, seeking

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What Color Am I?



The Bible's description of the human family is more than skin deep.

by John Lemley

I learned early on that if people are different colors, I did not have the preferred color. When my mother and longtime friends would get together and the subject of skin color came up, my mother was sure to say with a tone of disgust, "We are all pale and bleached out. Everything shows. Every scratch and blemish. Every emotion is displayed for the whole world to see."

I grew up in a wooded area of northwestern Washington State. Everyone I knew talked about and acted toward people

the same, regardless of their ancestry. I never got the slightest indication that people of some national origins made for better friends than people of other ancestral backgrounds.

A couple of examples. World War II was barely over, yet I always heard Japanese neighbors spoken of and treated with genuine kindness. Neighboring Japanese children were invited to my third birthday party.

An elderly couple of African ancestry lived in the next house about a quarter of a mile down the gravel road from our house. Difference in age, not skin hue, limited our contact. I never got a hint that they were in any way different from anyone else we knew.

Encountering racism

So a lifelong shock came in 1960 when my family took a

road trip from our home, traveling east to West Virginia, south to Louisiana, west to California, and back north to Washington.

I will never forget a scene while going through a busy city in Texas. A pretty, very pregnant young woman walked across the street in front of us while we were stopped at a red light. She looked tired and thirsty under the scorching Texas sun. Then she approached a drinking fountain. We saw the unbelievable sign "Whites Only."

Words cannot describe how bitterly broken the young woman looked. She desperately needed a drink. The light turned green, and the traffic moved us ahead as though nothing unusual had happened. My father regretted for the rest of his life that we didn't try harder to get her a drink. Also in Texas we saw three restrooms at service stations:

men, women, and blacks. It was all so foreign to everything I had known and experienced.

Discovering color

Throughout my adult years, I have been blessed by following my parents' noble example. I am wealthy with friends from all over the world! I have dearly loved Christian brothers and sisters of every skin tone. My mother was right: Whatever color I am, it leaves a lot to be desired.

But what color am I? A year or so ago I heard comedian Sam Adams talk about his color. He was filling out a form that asked for his race. *White* and *black* were on the list, followed by a blank line he could fill in. He went to a paint store, looked at the color charts, and found out he was Chocolate Indulgence. "What a relief," he said. "Black and white are the two blandest colors in the crayon box."

I was quite young when I figured out I was not white. I had white shirts; my skin was not that color. So recently, inspired by Mr. Adams' example, I went to a paint store and found my color. It was a very light shade of brown. Not pretty at all! Every mark and every piece of dust showed up clearly. As my eyes followed that color chart, the tints became darker and darker. The skin tone of everyone I knew was on that chart.

My conclusion: We are all different shades of the same human color.

During my seventy-plus years, I have met lots of people. My conclusion has been reconfirmed every time. I have never seen a black person or a white person. Have you? Everyone I have ever

seen is the same color I am — just a different shade. Some are darker and some are lighter (showing every blemish).

Biblical perspective

What does the Bible teach about human skin color? The Bible categorizes the human family, but never once by color, skin tone, pigmentation, or amount of melanin. In Genesis 11, the whole earth was of one language. Obviously, the whole earth was of one color also. God divided the human family by giving the people different languages, not different colors.

I realize that arguments from silence are one of the weakest forms. But it is worth noting that color is never used in Bible descriptions of the human family. People are recognized as belonging to different nations (1 Chron-

icles 16:31), kingdoms (2 Kings 19:15-19), and families (Genesis 12:3) — quoted and translated as "kindreds" in Acts 3:25. The descendants of Ham are divided according to their families, tongues, countries, and nations (Genesis 10:20). The people who came to Jerusalem for Pentecost were from nearly twenty different nations (Acts 2:5-12).

The word *color* in the Bible is used when referring to precious stones, cloth, and feathers — not people. White things in Scripture include such things as goats, baskets, and snow. Hair, clouds, and night are among the black things (see sidebar).

The Song of Solomon appears, at first glance, to be an exception. Chapter 1:5, 6 includes the word *black*. The bride describes herself as black, apparently, according to verse 6, as the result

Color in the Bible

"Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

People are not described or defined by their skin color in the Bible, but many other wonderful things are.

Black: clouds (1 Kings 18:45); marble (Esther 1:6); night (Proverbs 7:9); ravens (Song of Solomon 5:11); heavens (Jeremiah 4:28); horses (Zechariah 6:2); hair (Matthew 5:36); cloth (Revelation 6:12).

White: baskets (Genesis 40:16); teeth (49:12); seed (Exodus 16:31); owls (Leviticus 11:18); donkeys (Judges 5:10); linen (Esther 1:6); eggs (Job 6:6); snow (Psalm 51:7).

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

— Martin Luther King

of a suntan. Her beloved is “white and ruddy” (5:10). The Hebrew word translated “white” here is not the standard word for the color white. Instead, it means “dazzling” or “glowing.”

Together eternally

My all-time favorite scripture on this subject is Revelation 7:9, 10:

After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb.

I am richly blessed with dearly loved brothers and sisters in Christ from Jamaica, England, Canada, Australia, Kenya, Mexico, Guatemala, India, the United States, and other lands. Many of them are now sleeping in Jesus, waiting for His glorious return and the glad resurrection day. No matter what land we are from or what language we grew up speaking, we will be together around God’s throne, praising Him for the salvation that is ours through our Lord Jesus Christ. What a day that will be! **BA**

John Lemley writes from Vancouver, WA, where he lives and ministers with his wife, Lois. Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.



Who is Your Master?

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His will and storing up eternal treasures. When we seek God’s kingdom and righteousness, allowing Him to be Master instead of everything this world tries to throw at us, we are filled with light because God, who is light, is shining through us. When God is our Master, we do not need to live in worry. God is our Father and lovingly cares for His children. We can trust Him.

What master is keeping you

from seeking God’s kingdom and His righteousness? Are you willing to surrender it to Him, sit at His feet, and seek Him wholeheartedly? Truly, if we surrender to our Father and allow Him to be Master over us, we will have what we need. **BA**

Kelsey Gjesdal lives in Albany, OR, with her parents and three siblings, and attends the Marion CoG7. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.




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Questions & Answers



Does Scripture teach that we will be reunited with loved ones in the kingdom of heaven? When people say, “Daddy’s happy now. He’s with Mother again,” I just smile. I would dearly love to see my parents again, but I can’t think of where the Bible tells me so. Is there any basis for thinking we will have loving, eternal reunions with anyone but Jesus?

The biblical evidence on this subject may be meager, as you suggest, but it is there — strongly implied, if not directly stated. To begin the case for such, we simply affirm that God’s plan is that His children will maintain their own personal identities into the future life of His eternal kingdom. The Christian concepts of bodily resurrection and judgment to come, with eternal rewards and punishments, fully presume that we will know ourselves then. They also presume that we will be fully aware of the continuity of our personal identity between this present mortal life and our future immortal life with Christ (1 Corinthians 15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 20-21).

If we will know *ourselves* in God’s great forever, then it makes total sense that we will also recognize others of faith in Christ whom we have known and loved in the present life. All of that will help to complete a perfect future. And it will provide a certain familiar context for eternity, without which everything then would have a total newness about it, as if our minds were a blank sheet again as they were when we were first born (cf. Revelation 21:24-27).

Most of Christian thought and hymnody as-

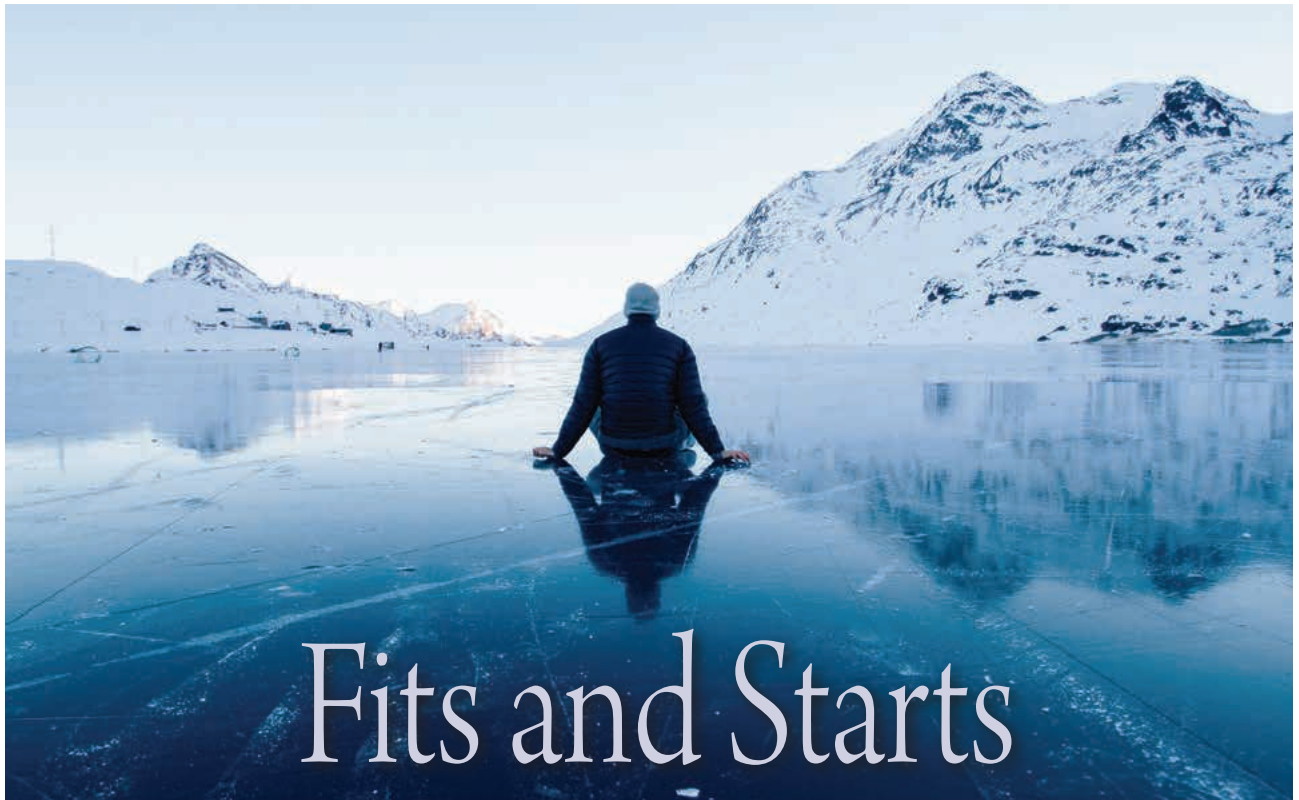
sumes that we will recognize our loved ones in the kingdom of heaven. The old gospel song “I’ll Meet You in the Morning,” for example, has a phrase in the chorus that speaks of renewing old acquaintances. And the song’s sentiment of people knowing us by the smile we wear, while not taken directly from the Bible, seems true to the spirit of Scripture and its promise of perfect joy ahead.

With all the biblical thoughts that support your anticipatory smile about seeing your deceased loved ones (in Christ) again, surely we can find it in a single text. Here’s one: “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out” (Luke 13:28). If patriarchs, apostles, and prophets will be recognized in eternity to come, why not others who will share their eternal glory? The fact that you would love to see your mother and daddy again is an encouraging indication that *you will see them*, since it is part of God’s promise that He will give those who delight in Him the desires of their heart (Psalm 37:4).

So take comfort in these words from the apostle Paul:

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. Therefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13, 14, 18).

— Elder Calvin Burrell



Fits and Starts

The progressive journey
of sanctification and
second chances.
by Martin Wiles

For a long time, I committed more “fits” than “starts.”

For those not familiar with the idiom “fits and starts,” it refers to irregular intervals of action and inaction, as in “His presidential campaign is proceeding by fits and starts.” The expression began in the late 1500s with “as by fits.” The noun *fit* meant a paroxysm or seizure. *Start* was added about a century later, according to *The American Heritage® Dictionary of Idioms*.

Many of the folks I’ve known during my lifetime have fallen more into the *fit* category, me

included. From infancy, people had told me the story of Jesus dying on the cross. How could they not? My dad was a preacher, which meant Mom and I went to church every time the doors opened. But hearing just meant I knew some Bible stories.

Growing pains

A few months before my ninth birthday, Dad took me into his home office and told me why I needed to follow Jesus as my Savior. I understood — and decided I would.

Things progressed well, until I hit middle school. That’s when things changed. Not all my friends followed Jesus in my new school. Nor did they make any effort to obey all the commands my parents had taught me to obey. They pressured me to follow suit, but I stood strong. Then adolescence took over.

My fourteenth birthday brought more changes. By this time, I had decided I wanted to delve into some of that behavior and those attitudes my middle school friends had invited me to indulge in. Now I was in another school with a much rougher crowd. I had only two or three friends who traveled the way my parents and church taught me to go. I chose the wrong path.

High school was a blur. Still is. I continued going to church; I had no choice. And I even kept reading my Bible and saying my prayers. But the fits caught me, and the starts became almost nonexistent. Occasionally, I’d feel bad about the things I did, but God’s still small voice grew stiller and quieter.

Finally, in my mid-twenties, I tired of the fits and decided to start — again. Of course, God hadn’t left me. I had moved, and,

as always, He waited for me to come back. When I did, I discovered open arms, forgiveness, and second chances.

Good company

I wish I could say my journey from then to now has been consistent starts, but it hasn't. Yet I feel as if I'm in good company. The greatest missionary who ever lived said, "I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate" (Romans 7:15).

Many Bible scholars believe that Paul's words reflect his personal experiences after he met the risen Christ on the Damascus Road, not before. Which is significant. If Paul was speaking of afterward, then his life as an apostle was also characterized by fits and starts. Although he took the gospel message to the known world, Paul didn't always trust, didn't always get it right, and didn't always obey. Still, God used him through the fits.

The theological word for the process of fits and starts is *sanctification*. As Paul taught, it is not a process we can do by ourselves; sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit in us (Romans 8:1, 2; 15:16; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). Two important elements go along with the word and its meaning.

Elements

Sanctification isn't automatic; it requires our participation. In fact, if we don't put in any effort — if we don't walk in the Spirit — we'll find ourselves doing more fits than starts (Galatians 5:16). The writer of Hebrews alluded to this when he wrote, "You have

been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God's word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food" (Hebrews 5:12).

This Spirit-led process begins the moment we choose to follow Christ and continues throughout our lifetime until we draw our final breath, or until Christ returns, whichever comes first. Paul writes of progression sanctification: "Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we urge you in the name

would love nothing better than to convince us our fits have disqualified us from God's service. Our place is on the shelf. Our service is over. We're a failure. Such messages never come from God. On the contrary, John encourages us, "My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous" (1 John 2:1).

When we choose to follow Christ, He clothes us in Christ's righteousness and forgives all our

“Sanctification isn't automatic; it requires our participation.”

of the Lord Jesus to live in a way that pleases God, as we have taught you. You live this way already, and we encourage you to do so even more" (1 Thessalonians 4:1; cf. vv. 2-10).

While we may not arrive at perfection this side of Christ's coming, there should never come a time when we stop striving to grow spiritually, to know more about God and His ways, and to get closer to Him.

Unbelief is the only sin God won't — and can't — forgive. Christians don't have to worry about committing it, because we have already believed. Satan

sins. Our part is to confess and start — and keep starting in spite of the fits.

So, don't let the fits get you down. They are a part of our fallen nature and of the journey. With the Spirit's leading, you can enjoy more starts than fits. **BA**

Martin Wiles

writes from Greenwood, SC. Scripture quotations are from the *New Living Translation*.





Working the field side by
side with Jesus.
by Dirk Anderson

In a flash, God could have made an ark for Noah and his family. But He didn't.

Instead, God instructed Noah to build it. Noah spent decades building that boat. It was grueling work. Cutting trees. Hauling lumber. Making sure that every piece fit together just right. Not only did he work with his hands, Noah found time to preach righteousness (2 Peter 2:5). It was a sacrifice. But oh, how it paid off!

Working for the Lord is a blessing that cascades down on one's family. When Noah and his family finally finished the ark,

they entered it. Then they rested from their labors, safe from the storms outside. How ironic that this Old Testament hero, who spent so many years in hard labor, was named Noah. In Hebrew his name means "rest."

Like Noah, we are called to build the ark of God — not a boat but a church. A place where people can enter and be safe from the storms of life. A place of refuge where hurting souls find peace. A place of safety. A place of rest.

Co-workers

Jesus could have stayed on earth. He could have taken the good news to the Roman Empire. He could have evangelized the whole world all by Himself. But He didn't. Instead, He gave us the privilege of being co-workers in the field with Him. Like Noah,

we share in the joy of saving souls.

Jesus told His disciples, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). Let's look at this passage in greater detail.

My yoke. Yokes aren't common today, as they were in Jesus' time. So what does "Take My yoke upon you" mean?

A yoke was a wooden bar that fastened two oxen together so they could plow or pull a heavy weight. It enabled them to walk side by side, plowing through the

fields. Imagine an ox without a yoke on its neck. It would go this way and that way — wherever it felt like going. It may even stop and sleep for a few hours. An ox without a yoke might try to be productive, but its efforts would be chaotic.

To reap a harvest, the ground must be plowed evenly so that seed can be planted and bear fruit. In this way, we understand Jesus' meaning in Matthew 11. A yoke is a symbol of our subjection, direction, and work with Him.

Just as Noah "walked with God" (Genesis 6:9), we should yoke to Jesus in His labor in the field of ministry. If we want to experience closeness with God in our lives, we go where He is. Jesus can always be found in the field of labor for others. His yoke is the privilege of being so closely connected with Him that He is right by our side.



Learn of Me. What did Jesus mean by "Learn of Me"? Learn what?

As said previously, an ox with no yoke is virtually useless. Jesus' yoke restrains our direction in life. When yoked to Jesus in the field of labor, we learn His ways, His character. Where He plows, we plow. When He turns left, we turn left. When He moves forward, we move forward. When He stops and waits, we do too. Yoked with Him, we learn to become one with Him, and then the harvest comes.



Find rest. We see the irony in these words. The yoke is used for work, but Jesus said that with His yoke "You will find rest for your souls." Not the rest of indolence and ease, but the peace of knowing we are building the church of God, a refuge of safety in the last days.

Strong as an ox

It has been said the late Paul Anderson was the strongest man who ever lived. An Olympic champion, Paul left professional weightlifting to pursue his real

Imagine being yoked with Paul Anderson. Imagine the strongest man in the world at your side to help you. You could say, "I'm not afraid of any weight, so long as I have Paul helping me."

The good news is, we have Someone much stronger to help us so we don't shoulder the burden of the Lord's work alone: The all-mighty Son of God is by our side. He is our resurrected Lord: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). He has all the power we will ever need and is eager to help us. We just

“Jesus’ yoke is the privilege of being so closely connected with Him that He is right by our side.”

passion: Christian ministry. In the early 1960s, he began touring the United States doing exhibitions and preaching.

As a child, I saw Paul at a Christian academy in Florida. A table was set in the middle of the gymnasium, and a couple dozen people from the audience were told to sit on top of it. Paul disappeared underneath it. And then, to our wonder, he hoisted the table up off the ground, people and all. Paul had the strength of an ox.

need to take His yoke, subjecting ourselves to His direction and work. When we do, we will have more strength than we could ever imagine. And rest! **BA**

Dirk Anderson and his wife, Marina, live in Jacksonville, FL, where they pastor the Jacksonville congregation.



■ [Focus on the Faithful]



by Jason Overman

“Faithful” is our theme for 2021, and in this space over the next six issues, we’ll look at six Bible characters whose faithfulness in their own unique context speaks to us in ours. Our goal here is to challenge and encourage the Church of God to embody faithfulness, in our own time, after the examples of the mothers and fathers of faith who have gone before us.

The paradigm

When we think about the faithful of Scripture, our minds turn almost immediately to Abraham. Of all the Bible heroes of faith, he stands out as the most paradigmatic for Christians. We call him the “father of the faith,” and for good reason. Abraham is mentioned seventy times in the New Testament, starting with its very first verse. And his faith is his most mentioned characteristic.

Matthew wanted us to know from the start of his Gospel that Jesus was the seed of Abraham (1:1). This claim indicated that Jesus belonged to Israel and was

the long-awaited climax of her story and of God’s promises that began with Abraham. This Jesus, who would “save His people from their sins” and was “God with us” (vv. 21, 23), was also for Matthew the perfection of the faith Abraham had prefigured.

Even before Messiah came, Israel knew Abraham as the model of faithfulness. The prophet who most clearly foretold His coming (Isaiah 53, 61), pointed Israel back to their foundations in Abraham as well:

“Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness, you who seek the LORD . . . Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you” (Isaiah 51:1, 2).

The steps

Jesus *looked* to Abraham in His teachings. And every New Testament writer, except Jude, wrote of him — of these, none more than the apostle Paul. He saw in the coming of Christ that God’s ancient promise to Abram — to bless all nations — had been fulfilled. For Paul, a faith like Abraham’s and faith in Messiah were essential to this life of blessing in Christ through the Spirit (Galatians 3:8-14).

Here is the bedrock of covenant faith with God: “For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness’” (Romans 4:3). This believing faith is a living faith. It’s why Paul wrote to “walk in the steps of that faith” that Abraham had; those “of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham” (Romans 4:12; Galatians 3:9, KJV). These steps of faithful Abraham teach us that justifying faith and sanctifying faithfulness are two sides of the same coin.

The active faith of faithful Abraham is summarized in and pivotal to the message of the great Faith Chapter. At the heart of Hebrews 11 are three references to the steps of the faithful father, covering the beginning, middle, and end of his walk with God.

The beginning

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going (v. 8).

Abraham’s first step of faith was taken when God called him from his family and country: “Get

Abraham

out! Go!” Genesis 12 describes this beginning and God’s five “I will” promises to bless Abraham, his children, and all nations through him (vv. 1-3). We call him faithful Abraham because in believing, he departed without hesitation, building altars of worship to God as he journeyed (vv. 4-9).

The middle

By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents (Hebrews 11:9).

Perhaps the middle steps of faith are the most treacherous. It was a relatively quick trip to Canaan, but the long wait of camping as strangers in the land tested Abraham most. There were trials, temptations, and distractions while he waited. God had to take him out of his tent to look up at the stars and remind him: *I will give you the family I promised* (Genesis 15, 18). We call him faithful Abraham because he believed and never gave up.

The end

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had re-

ceived the promises offered up his only begotten son (Hebrews 11:17).

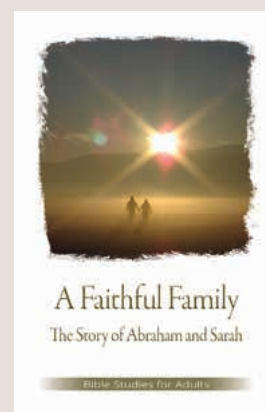
When we think about faithful Abraham, we probably think first of his last great test. Having received his promised son in old age, he was asked to sacrifice Isaac. In this final step of faith, his end was much like his beginning. Abraham acted without hesitation, knowing that God’s call transcends even the loyalties and identities we put highest (Genesis 22:1-5). We call him faithful Abraham because even in this most extreme test, he said yes to God. In doing so, he demonstrated not only his faithfulness but also God’s faithfulness. God would give His only begotten Son for the world.

The faithful

For those who would be found faithful, we look with Isaiah to Abraham’s example. For those who would follow Christ in living faith, like Paul, we step out with father Abraham leading the way.

Each of us has a beginning, middle, and end in our journey. Like Abraham, we have flaws and failures, but that’s not what made him the father of the faith. It’s

not what defines or directs us, either. We’re faithful like Abraham when we trust Jesus Christ despite our limitations, when we lay every loyalty and love on God’s altar for His purpose, when we say yes each day to His call and command, when in every trial and temptation, we look up to the stars and remember God was faithful first! **BA**



For an in-depth study on the life of Abraham and Sarah, order the new Adult Bible Study, *A Faithful Family*, from our online store at cog7.org. This 13-lesson study on faithfulness is great for personal, family, and small group Bible study.

An Interview with Amber

After sixteen years serving the Church in various educational capacities, Amber Riggs has stepped down as co-director and dean of administration for Artios Christian College. She continues to live near Eugene, Oregon, with her husband and four daughters. The BA caught up with Amber to ask about her experience and what's next for her.

BA: What drew you to work in Christian education, and how has the reality of working in it differed from your expectations when you started?

Amber Riggs: When I was nineteen, I had a powerful experience of staying up all night, alone, interceding for the Church. Around the same time, I also felt a strong conviction to transfer schools and major in youth ministry. But I didn't dare hope I'd ever have an opportunity to serve the Church through vocational ministry. I just wanted to be better equipped to build up the Church as a member and volunteer.

About five years later, I was offered a job coordinating a distance-learning program for the many members God has called to serve in areas other than pas-

toral ministry (to complement the pastoral training program). It was downright surreal.

Not long after I began working on this, an instructor asked me where I saw myself in ten years. I loved what I was getting to do so much that I never saw myself doing anything else. I certainly had no ambitions or expectations to ever direct the whole training system. It's strange to realize that I walked into a training system and am walking out sixteen years later as co-director of a college. Even though a college was the goal from the very beginning, it seemed so far away. But God keeps bringing people to the team who are able to build on the foundations of that training system and fine-tune it.

BA: What are your hopes for Artios moving forward?

AR: My greatest hope is that more people take advantage of the courses, webinars, coaching, and other resources Artios offers. While they are particularly relevant for pastors, these resources are valuable to any Christian who wants to influence their families, churches, communities, and workplaces to more closely partner with God's plan for the twenty-first century church.

And I hope that Artios continues to cultivate a culture of team leadership that values a variety of gifts.

BA: As co-director of Artios, you were the first woman in CoG7 history to serve as a director of one of our ministry training schools. What has that experience been like, and what would you like to say to other women in the General Conference regarding their contributions to the Church?

AR: When it comes to the mission of God to renew all creation, it is "all hands on deck." His plan involves partnering with *all* of us through His Spirit-given gifts and callings.

Our cultural traditions often undergird an idea that some gifts are masculine and some gifts are feminine, and that some traits are masculine and some traits are feminine. But in the Bible, David wasn't deemed feminine because he cried out to God or wrote emotional songs. Rather, he cried masculine tears. Priscilla wasn't seen as trying to be masculine because she taught Apollos a deeper understanding of the gospel. Rather, the Spirit empowered her to teach in a powerful way, and she retained her femininity



even as she taught. The New Testament cites many examples of the Spirit empowering women in a broad range of what we often consider masculine gifts. It also cites examples of Paul enthusiastically partnering with these women.

Our cultural traditions have also shaped us to think about roles — even ministry roles — in terms of power: who can have power, who can't have power, how can I get power, how can I retain power. But Jesus' ministry had a different relationship with power: He laid down His "rights" and, instead, used His power to build up the church. In fact, this is the model Paul gives for how we should relate to one another (Philippians 2).

Even though I was co-director and thus had certain responsibilities, Artios practices team leadership. This looks like men and women in various roles and giftings working together while paying attention to the Spirit's work in and through each of us. It is definitely "all hands on deck" and absolutely exhilarating. I would love for everyone to have this type of ministry experience. But it definitely requires a marriage of laying down "rights" with an awareness of how the Holy

Spirit is at work, and then a fierce faithfulness to partner with God as we personally and collectively embrace His Spirit-given gifts and callings to build up the church.

BA: What's next on the horizon for you?

AR: To echo Eric Liddell, "I feel God's pleasure" when I get to take what I'm learning and create something with it that builds up the Church. I still plan to partner with Artios in that way, but through other roles. I'm also continuing my long-term role of co-directing a much smaller ministry training school with much younger students — aka the Riggs Family Homeschool. God's been connecting me with some creative opportunities to build up the Church in ways that more tightly integrate with that role, including developing a home Bible curriculum and working on some writing projects. So I'm excited about pursuing those opportunities.

The BA thanks Amber for her long service to the Church, and wishes God's blessings in all her new endeavors. **BA**

Welcome, Makayla!

As we say goodbye to Amber Riggs, we say hello to Makayla



Ross, who replaces Amber as co-director of Artios, with Israel Steinmetz. Makayla joined the LifeSpring staff in 2009. She has been the longtime registrar of Artios and a member of its core leadership team.



Amber and Bryan Riggs with their four daughters (L to R): Laura, Zoe, Faith, and Anna.



Faithful Father

"Are we almost there, Dad?" asked Danielle.

"Almost."

Danielle and her friends had been learning how to rock climb. She found it challenging, exciting, and scary — all at the same time.

"Danielle, would you like to try that 5.10 route today?" asked Dad. "I believe you can do it."

"You think I can?" Danielle wasn't so sure. She hadn't climbed anything that difficult before. "All right, I'll do it."

Soon Danielle was starting up the steep rock face, with her dad belaying her. It wasn't too difficult at first. Danielle's confidence was growing. She could do it! She continued climbing, reaching for one small handhold after another. And then, the holds disappeared. Danielle could see nothing within her reach to grab onto. She looked to the left and then to the right. What was she to do?

"I can't find anything to hold on to," Danielle yelled down.

"Keep looking," her dad calmly replied. "Sometimes the smallest little bulge is enough to grip."

Then, up above her, Danielle saw it. It looked like a little rocky knob! She stretched for it, but it was just out of reach. Even standing on her tip-toe toes, she came a few inches short of that knob. Danielle was beginning to tire, standing so long on the small footholds. She had to do something. She decided to make a leap for that knob. She jumped. Her hand reached for that little rocky knob and slid right off.

Immediately, Danielle started falling. Although she had feared falling, she had been taught that she would fall only twice as far as the distance she was above her last placement. That placement was 10 feet below her, so the total distance she would likely fall was just about 20 feet — assuming her belayer stopped her fall quickly.

For some reason, though, as Danielle fell, everything moved in slow motion. And strangely, she felt no fear. In fact, for the first time in a while, she had complete calm and peace. Danielle was falling, but she knew that soon she would stop. She was taking a nice ride, so to speak.

Suddenly a tug on her harness interrupted her little reverie.

"Danielle, are you OK?" yelled Dad.

For the first time, Danielle thought about her body. She did a quick monitoring of her legs, torso, arms, and hands. Everything seemed fine, barring a few scratches on her chest, arms, and hands. "I think so," she replied.

"Do you want to rest awhile?" her dad asked.

"I think I'm OK now. I'm ready to climb again."

The climb was still difficult, but Danielle's fear was largely gone. She knew that if she did fall, her dad would catch her. She knew he believed in her and would be there for her, encouraging her until she made it to the top.

Danielle did make it to the top that day, and she was ever grateful for her dad. She never would have made it without him.

Does Danielle's dad remind you of another Father?



valleyofshadowofdeath-MMBOX PRODUCTION.jpg

Science Fun: God is Trustworthy

We don't have to be afraid when we face difficult situations, because God is trustworthy. We can know that He will be with us and help us. Try this experiment that will require someone you know to trust you. Will you prove yourself to be trustworthy? You will need a sandwich zip top bag, water, sharp pencils, and someone who trusts you.

Directions

Fill the zip top bag about $\frac{3}{4}$ full of water. Then hold the bag over a sink, gripping the top part of the bag. Poke a pencil right through the side of the bag. Continue pushing the pencil until it comes out the other side. What happened? Poke another pencil through. Once you've practiced this and haven't spilled a drop, get a new bag, fill it with water, and see if you can find someone who trusts you. Then, instead of holding the bag over a sink, hold it over the person's head!

Kids Time activities are abridged from the BAP children's curriculum. Order at cog7.org/online-store.

Swap Letters Puzzle

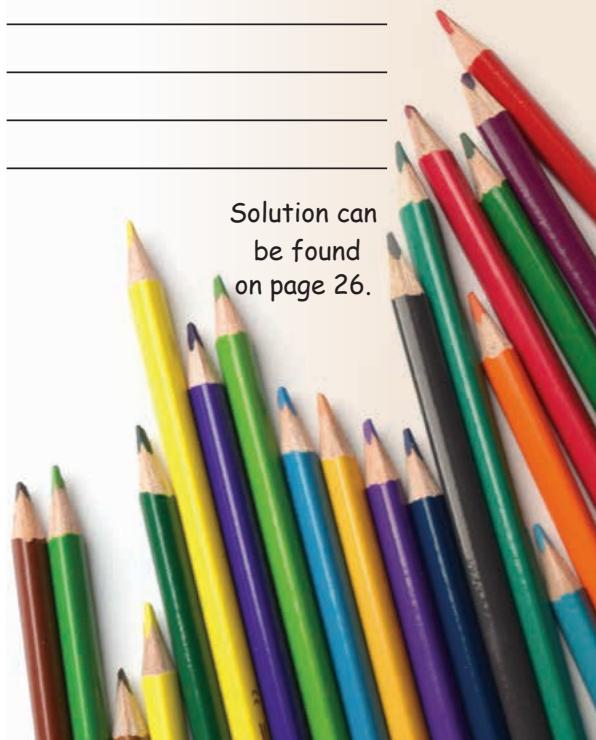
Draw a line between every pair of letters, starting at the beginning. The first few lines have been drawn for you. Then, swap the letters in each pair. Finally, add spaces and punctuation to form a verse about trusting in God.

htleroidmsyrtne
tgahdnymhseidlym
ehraturtsishnmi
nahdhelespemyme
hraltaespofjryon
awdtimhsynoigrpi
aesihpmasm1827:

thelordismys

The Lord is my s

Solution can
be found
on page 26.





Truths hidden
throughout the ages are
revealed in Christ.
by Dorothy Nimchuk

Everyone loves a good mystery. It challenges us. Man is ever self-challenged to conquer the world: Nebuchadnezzar, Darius the Mede, Cyrus the Persian, Alexander the Great, and Rome, to name a few. Alexander cried when there were no more worlds to conquer.

But wait: More worlds are on our horizon! Man looks upward into the heavens, not to glorify the Creator but to conquer space and therein glorify himself. And the race is on to explore the mysteries of the vast universe. Daniel's prophecy regarding the last days' increase of knowledge (12:4) has truly come to pass. Ad-

vances in technology that were unheard of a few short years ago are becoming the norm.

Mysterious beginnings

Mystery in Scripture differs from how we think of the word in our day. It signifies a truth hidden long ago but later revealed. For example, prophets reaffirmed the promise, first made in the Garden of Eden, of a Messiah who would be an antidote to lawlessness. They were not privileged to see its fulfillment, though they would have rejoiced to see His day. Prophets also hinted at future events that must occur prior to a second coming of the Messiah, and Jesus expanded on the same.

Another mystery connection is in the phase of the promise: the "mystery of lawlessness," already at work (2 Thessalonians 2:7) and spawned in the garden when man disobeyed his Maker. Satan

and his cohorts would try every tactic to bring man to his knees and continue to work without letup.

God created man to commune with and glorify Him. All of human pursuit in worldly knowledge He regards as foolishness. The natural man, in turn, considers the ways of God as utter foolishness. He turns his back on God, ignoring His warnings and choosing the way purported to make him *as wise as God* (Genesis 3:5). But sin divides, and man was driven from the Almighty's presence into a world filled with harsh consequences. Even so, out of this maze of repercussions, God promised reconciliation through the Seed of the woman — another mystery (v. 15).

Born under lowly circumstances and growing up among them, Jesus went unacknowledged by the Jews. Blinded, not having the love of God in them, enemies of

the gospel for the Gentiles' sake, the Jews were still beloved by God for the sake of their godly ancestors (Romans 11:28). Paul calls this a "mystery" too (v. 25). Through mercy shown to the Gentiles, the Jews would also obtain mercy. Paul reminded the Romans that, when Elijah felt dejected and alone, God told him there were still seven thousand men who had not bowed down to Baal. In like manner, Paul said there was still "a remnant [of Israel] according to the election of grace" (v. 5).

Mysterious future

Jesus spoke in parables to the many who followed Him, but spoke plainly to His disciples in private, of another kind of mystery. The Jews were dull hearted, unseeing, unhearing, unable to understand. However, to the disciples were "given . . . to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 13:11). At Pentecost, Peter delivered this same message, kept secret from before the world began, to Jews gathered at Jerusalem from every nation. Distraught, repentant Jews were baptized into Christ by the thousands.

Had the Jews not been blind to Christ's identity, they would not have crucified Him, and the Romans had no reason to do so. If Christ had not died, we would have no other recourse for salvation, for it required a perfect blood sacrifice to institute it.

God intended for everyone everywhere, Jew and Gentile alike, to know the mystery of His will and be one in Christ, even as Christ is one with God, "*Christ in you, the hope of glory*" (Colossians 1:27, 28, emphasis added).

The prophets and apostles laid the foundation of the mystery of the gospel in Christ, the Cornerstone (Romans 16:25). We must be careful how we build. Jesus is the only foundation, and through Him we obtain reconciliation with God.

Prior to Christ's second coming, a "falling away comes first, and the man of sin [margin: *lawlessness*] is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4). This "mystery of lawlessness" (or *iniquity*, KJV) is at work in our world today, as from the beginning, according to God's plan, even as "the glory of this mystery . . . Christ in you" nears its completion in anticipation of Jesus' revelation (v. 7; Colossians 1:27).

Ministers of mysteries

In our natural (biological) birth we were formed in the image of our parents. Our spiritual rebirth in Christ *re-forms* us in His very image, and our bodies become temples of God. We are warned

not to defile our bodies, for the Spirit dwells within. Are you worldly wise? Become a fool in the world's eyes, but wise toward God.

"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness" (1 Timothy 3:16). Gaze into the heavens, not to seek new worlds to conquer but to glorify God, the Creator of it all. Be reconciled to God. Worship the One who reveals the hidden things of the gospel according to His eternal purpose and timetable. Look up. Set your mind on things above. Appreciate God's handiwork and His plan for new heavens and a new earth. Be in Christ as Christ is in God, so we all become one with God. Share God's wisdom with a spiritually deficient world. Step up as "stewards of the mysteries of God" that is this glorious gospel (1 Corinthians 4:1).

Everyone loves a good mystery! **BA**

Dorothy Nimchuk and her husband, Nick (retired pastor), are isolated CoG7 members in Medicine Hat, Alberta.



What happens when someone
has wronged us? Let it go?
Seek revenge? Get a proper
perspective on the answer from
the biblical story of Jacob and
Esau in "Reconciliation in God's
Time" — our Online Exclusive.
Read it at baonline.org

Against a Too-Human God

by Paulo Renato Garrochinho

For many Bible scholars, it is strange that John Calvin did not write a commentary on the book of Revelation. He did not even take the time to preach systematically about it, as he did with many Bible books. Martin Luther concluded that it was “undeciphered prophecies, with no certain interpretation, they are nothing but hidden and silent prophecies, which has not yet brought the profit and the fruit that it should bring to Christendom.”

Revelation is not as enigmatic and strange as Luther and Calvin thought. Fortunately, the Reformation did not end with these two men, despite how much they accomplished.

Man has always liked to create a god in his image, a god that suited his passions, delusions, immorality, and madness — a *too-human god* that is easy to manipulate. But the last book of the Bible reveals to us a God above man, transcending him infinitely. This God — YHWH, I AM THAT I AM — took the initiative to reveal Himself to deluded man.

It is God who reveals Himself to man, and not man who, through his searching, discovers God. This God reveals Himself the way He wants, when He wants, and where He wants. This God, through Jesus, despite His absolute transcendence and power, encouraged John on the island of Patmos: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades” (Revelation 1:17, 18).

This God consoles and guides us in the midst

of our sorrows and uncertainties. To all those who suffer, God says, “Fear not. I have the keys of death and hell.” The keys are God’s power and sovereignty over all living beings. God is sovereign because He leads our lives according to a well-defined purpose. We know where we are going: to be with God in His eternal kingdom. We are not abandoned nor forgotten.

The last words of the Bible comfort and assure us that the One who gave His life for us on the cross of Calvary will come without delay. God is the Lord of time and history, so time is always for Him the present time, the time of expectation. We need not be anxious, but rather prepared for His second coming. We are walking toward God, for the consummation and restoration of all things. God will not only come but, in the present, already works and directs all things. Nothing is out of His control.

Today, more than ever, we are privileged to interpret our existence, not from below by human effort and false hope, but from above — from God in His providence and sovereignty. Knowing that He has the keys of death and hell, we find comfort and strength and need not fear. **BA**

Paulo Renato Garrochinho pastors the CoG7 in Portugal. He lives in Vila Nova de Gaia with his wife and is responsible for the work of the Church in the north area of Portugal. Scripture quotations are from *New International Version*.





I Hear the Call

I hear the call to the highest peaks,
The cry to the deepest trenches,
And I fear the barren summits,
And dread the darkest tempests.

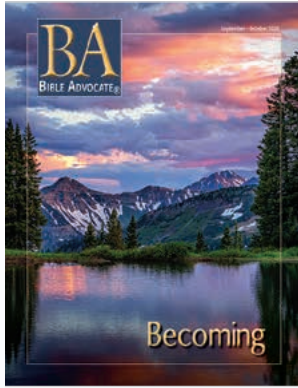
I know the Creator of the mountains,
The Maker of the deep,
And I trust the One who calls and guides
To tend and grow and love His sheep.

I hear the call to climb higher,
The cry to dive deeper yet,
And I feel the rising fear within
But I seize faith, rise up, and step.

Alisha Plummer



Readers Write



Remembering Native Americans

I just finished reading the September-October 2020 issue of the *Bible Advocate* and enjoyed it. However, when slavery was mentioned, it implied that this was America's original sin. As with other discussions on racism, it is bewildering why the Native Americans were not mentioned.

When we came into their land, we murdered, kidnapped, and raped their people, broke their treaties, infected them with disease, and tried to destroy their culture. Ultimately, we herded them on to reservations. Because they have not spoken up, it seems they have been ignored.

Will you kindly convey my words to Mr. Whaid Rose and other contributors of the BA, thanking them for their consideration? Perhaps this topic will be covered in a future issue.

K. C.
Email

Main truths

A Church editor, a Christian college dean, and a former CoG7

president weighed in on the furor over racism in this culture (Sept/Oct BA). In all three articles, analytic readers may find a sentence or two for honest debate. Looking past those, here's the main truth I found in each:

- "This Jesus justice [reconciling peace through Christ] is ours to share. . . . Resist wrath; do justice!" (Jason Overman, p. 3)

- ". . . the injustice of racism . . . must be faced head-on by Christians who have all too often been complicit in it." (Israel Steinmetz, p. 24)

- ". . . our nation continues to suffer from the legacy of slavery and racial injustice. . . . How can we as the body of Christ speak into this national conversation? . . . Hopefully, we won't have to confess that we stood by and did nothing, or that we became caught up in the divisiveness of it, but rather . . . that we were 'repairers of the breach.'" (Whaid Rose, p. 19)

Based on the Bible, what's to fuss about in any of that? Thank you, men!

P.S. The one black brother among this trio has this to his credit: In handling the inevitable conflicts that came his way in eighteen years of serving the Church at the highest level, he never — to my knowledge — "played the race card" against his critics. Thank You, Lord Jesus!

C. B.
Stayton, OR

Supreme privileges

Today we hear a lot about special social privileges — both pro and con; however, sometimes the fiery and passionate rhetoric concerning those

privileges drowns out the two most supreme and important privileges of all.

First, there is the infallible God-ordained privilege spoken to the whole of global humanity regardless of gender, nationality, racial, ethnic or social standing, which states, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). As can be seen, action is required: belief and faith in the Son of God.

Then, there is the just as infallible second privilege spoken to Christians (those who have wisely claimed and acted on the first privilege stated above), which states, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

Incidentally, both of those two most supreme, God-ordained privileges are eternally ours only by, through, and in Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Claim them, live in them, and rejoice in them with thanksgiving today and forever.

J. W.
Email

Puzzle Solution

The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him (Psalm 28:7, NIV).



Notice: As this issue goes to press, there is a possibility that the convention will be postponed due to COVID-related restrictions.



CHURCH OF GOD
(SEVENTH DAY) UNITED STATES & CANADA

Call to Convention

It is my great pleasure to once again extend this Call to Convention to each member and friend of the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day). After 2020, aren't we all ready for the in-person fellowship and worship our conventions allow us to enjoy? Plan now to attend!

Our 2021 Biennial Convention is scheduled for Monday evening, July 5, through Saturday night, July 10, in Covington, Kentucky. Most convention events will take place at the Northern Kentucky Convention Center. Three beautiful, newly remodeled hotels are available to attendees. Marriott and Embassy Suites hotels are just across the street from the convention center, and Holiday Inn (a kid-friendly option) is within walking distance.

Six major worship services are planned! They will include wonderful music, fervent prayer, encouraging personal testimonies, challenging sermons, and more — all focused on our 2021 convention theme "Faithful." Scheduled speakers are Elders Loren Gjesdal, Kenneth Lawson, Ruben Beard, Samuel Holland, and Loren Stacy.

As many seminars or workshops will be offered as meeting space allows (English or Spanish). Additional programs and activities will be available for most every age group: children, teens, young adults, and seniors. General Conference business sessions will be conducted Tuesday through Friday mornings. In these, members will receive up-to-date reports of the State of the Conference, the General Conference Ministries, and the General Conference finances. Qualified voters

will elect members to our board of directors and to our Nominating Committee, and can debate and decide any bylaw amendments or resolutions that may be proposed.

Covington, Kentucky, provides many great opportunities for individual or group outings. The world-famous Ark Encounter is less than an hour away; a Monday group outing is planned there for all who wish to come a day early. The Creation Museum is even closer! The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center and a beautiful riverfront park are just across the Ohio River, and a wonderful aquarium is nearby.

Make plans now to attend the 2021 Biennial Convention in Covington. I look forward to seeing you there!

— Loren Stacy
General Conference President



On Mission ... in El Salvador

by **Jesús Salmerón and Ismael Osorio**

El Salvador is a country in Central America known as “the pinky of the Americas.” It is made up of fourteen departments and 262 municipalities. El Salvador has a population of almost 7 million. Another 3 million El Salvadorians live in other countries. With a tropical climate, El Salvador has only two seasons: winter and summer. It is located 150-700 meters above sea level, and it is full of active volcanoes and peaceful lakes. The country’s people are loving, friendly, and hard working.

CoG7 history

In August 1955, the first servants of God arrived in the Republic of El Salvador to begin a work of preaching and evangelizing. This is how the Church of God in El Salvador began.

In 1957, the first preaching camp was officially opened in Villa Delgado, department of San Salvador. In that same year on April 13, the first baptisms were performed — nineteen people.

In the 60s, the Church grew and established an official headquarters in the Monserrat neighborhood, located in the capital of San Salvador. Due to daily growth, the Church was legally recognized by the State in 1962 and was issued an approval of

legal status, thus giving “legal birth” to the Church of God in the Republic of El Salvador.

In 1978, at a meeting held in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, we were one of the eleven founding countries of the International Ministerial Congress (IMC), and we have been active members ever since. We formed part of Zone 2, which includes Mexico, Central America, and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean Islands.

Evangelistic work

In recent years, a priority has been to work on the mission of reaching more souls for Christ. So one of the commitments that the General Administration of the Church has made is to train peo-

ple and prepare an evangelistic plan in each location. It has also focused on motivation and orientation through seminars presented on a national level through the district directives, where the support of the executive government is also present.

One of the projects we proposed, which has resulted in more souls converted through baptism, is appointing at least one dedicated evangelist in each district or area. This person attends small groups and follows up with new members.

Challenges

One of our visions is to overcome social challenges in El Salvador. In some ways these are obstacles for the gospel to reach more places where the Church doesn't currently have a presence.

Unemployment. This is one of the difficulties that the Church faces, creating anxiety, stress, and uncertainty among our people. When unemployment impacts the family, people can desert the Church, and this weakens the Church's spirituality. We seek to face this issue in the following ways:

- Provide useful resources and counseling when someone is going through a similar situation.
- Keep positive thoughts and focus on the things that can be achieved.
- Take time to reflect on people's abilities and talents.
- Take advantage of time at home and use it to study.
- Keep in touch with loved ones.

We try to ensure that the Church plays a part in helping un-

employed people. The Women's Department, Social Projection Department, and other ministries provide food and offer vocational courses, such as screen printing, sublimation, bread making, tailoring, chiropractic massages, and more. We also developed courses in electricity, baking, and other skills in order to create job opportunities.

Crime. Growing in the midst of a crime crisis becomes a challenge for the Church and for the Christian family in this country. There are assaults, kidnappings, robberies, extortion, and murder. The most vulnerable are adolescents and young people. In addition to being victims of these crimes, they are often encouraged to become members of the groups carrying out the crimes. To protect the young people in the Church of God, we have done the following:

- Identified that these high crime areas, controlled by criminal groups, are overseen by the older brothers who are also residents of the area.
- Organized the National Youth Department. Its main

mission is to keep youth active with spiritual activities, including camps, conventions, Super Sabbath-like gatherings, and seminars. We also have schooling for parents where preventive measures are discussed. Sometimes we invite the civil authorities (National Civil Police, Ministry of Health, and others) to participate in these activities so that they can explain the issues that afflict youth, based on their professional knowledge.

Migration. This third challenge comes as a consequence of the previous two. High crime and lack of employment force many to separate from their families or even leave the country. Sadly, in some cases we see them partially or totally abandon the faith, often resulting in adultery, family disintegration, and worldliness. Another side effect of migration is a weakness in the core of the servant's work for God. As a measure of prevention, we developed marriage fellowship meetings where issues related to the divine design of marriage, family harmony, and other topics are discussed.



Central American leaders, left to right: Walter Apen (president, Guatemala), Jesus Salmeron (president, El Salvador), Gustavo Leyton (president, Nicaragua), Jose Torres (president, Costa Rica).

El Salvador

Population: 6,702,000

Capital: San Salvador

Land area: 8,124 sq mi /
21,040 sq km

Official language: Spanish

Religion: Catholic (50
percent), Protestant
(36 percent), Other (14
percent)

CoG7 congregations: 123

Membership: 3,228

President: Minister Jesús Amílcar
Salmerón López



Miracle story

Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find" (Matthew 7:7). Although confident of the sovereignty of God, there was still a great need for a place where the Church could celebrate her multiple activities several times each year in different sectors. This is expensive. Based on this need, God placed an idea in the minds of the executive government of the Church.

The idea was to motivate all of the leaders and Church members to give generously to buy a place that would supply what the Church needed. We called for a prayer chain and fasting, asking God for a favorable response. There was literally not one penny to buy the place we needed, but we had an unshakable faith to achieve it because Jehovah was going to provide. On January 3, 2014, the project was revealed to the Church. Members received it with pleasure and with a commitment to make an offer.

A few days later, a beauti-

ful place had been found with the proper features the Church needed, and an appointment was made with the owner. A group of brothers who were preparing to tour the facilities knelt and cried out to God in prayer, declaring that this place would be for His holy people.

After that day, the Church made an offer. The cost of the property (\$300,000) seemed difficult to achieve because we needed an advance of \$100,000 with the rest to be paid off in three months.

The Church began to take offerings and pray fervently. Surprisingly, the seller called the president and said something in his heart told him that this property was to be sold to the Church. It was then that he voluntarily extended the payment agreement, allowing twelve months for the property to be paid off. This was the divine answer in favor of His people!

At that time, another interested party with a lot of money had arrived to buy the property and could have paid it off immediate-

ly. The seller replied, "I am going to sell it to the Church, and they will pay me in installments."

"I don't understand!" said the wealthy man. "I'll give you all the money now. But you will sell it to someone else who can fail you?" The seller replied, "It will be the responsibility of the Church. My wish is that they are the owners of this place."

Thanks to God, the property called The Eden now belongs to the Church of God and was paid off in ten months! Today the seller says that since the sale, he has had enormous blessings. He has paid off his debts, and his company has grown.

Today the Church has a place for spiritual activities and mass gatherings, as well as for families to gather. The location is three blocks of land that is full of vegetation and has facilities such as a swimming pool and more, with very pleasant weather.

We bless God for this miracle. Honor and glory be to God!

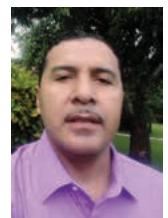
Minister Jesús Amílcar Salmerón López

is the president of the executive board of the El Salvador Conference. He is married to Sonia Migdalia Guzman de Salmeron and has four children and five grandchildren.



Minister Ismael Osorio Gómez

is secretary of the executive board of the El Salvador Conference. He is married to Zulma Azucena Hernandez de Osorio and has two young children.





Found Faithful

For well over a year now, as we Focus on Jesus and Follow His Plan, we have stressed our God-given assignment to be ambassadors for Christ and ministers of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5). We may gain insight into our roles from what the apostle Paul wrote concerning himself and his fellow workers:

This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me (1 Corinthians 4:1-4, ESV throughout).

In this brief passage, Paul makes three observations apropos to our situation.

First, we are servants of Christ. Regardless of which role or position Christ has given each of us within His body, we must not think more of ourselves (or less of ourselves) in relation to our fellow believers. We are all servants of Christ. (William Barclay points out that the Greek word translated “servant” here is the word used for slaves forced to row Roman warships.)

Second, all servants must be faithful. Synonyms for *faithful* include *trustworthy*, *loyal*, and *devoted*. God’s Word includes many statements concerning a servant’s faithfulness in performing their duties. “Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him,” observed King Solomon (Proverbs 10:26). And think of the many parables of Jesus about faithful and unfaithful servants. Those who fulfill their assignments are faithful and re-

warded. Those who do not are unfaithful and condemned.

Third, Paul speaks of judgment. Who determines whether or not we are faithful in fulfilling our Christ-assigned responsibilities? Paul mentions three possibilities. First, a servant of Christ may be judged by other people. This is the situation Paul faced as members of the Corinthian assemblies aligned themselves with or against him, Apollos, or others. Second, a servant of Christ may be judged by themselves. Paul dismisses both of these first two possibilities as being unreliable and ultimately unimportant. Finally, a servant may be judged by their Lord. This is the judgment Paul embraces. The only judgment of our faithfulness that really matters is that of the One who has given each of us our assignments: Christ the Lord.

To sum up: We are all servants of Christ; we must all be faithful and trustworthy in the assignments Christ has given us; and ultimately it is Christ, not others or we ourselves, who will determine whether or not we have been faithful.

This passage causes me to pause and think. My ultimate salvation is not in question. I am saved by a solid, committed faith in Christ for which I take no credit; it is the gift of God. But am I faithful in the assignments Christ has given me? Am I acting as an ambassador for Christ and a minister of reconciliation? Am I loving my God and my neighbors and my fellow believers as Jesus loved? Today and every day, oh Lord, may we be faithful!

— Loren Stacy



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