

May - June 2023



Light and Lamb



Inside

2023: Come and See



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Heart of the Matter

As we continue our “Come and See” theme, we come to the heart of the matter. If we recognize the holiness of God on one hand, and the sinfulness of man on the other, we now come and see Jesus, both human and divine, bridging that distance. That is the Christian faith, and our confession, in a nutshell. *Jesus!* Understanding and communicating who He is and what He has done is our greatest joy and task.

In the same place Jesus says “Come and see,” we find two core descriptors of Him. Light and Lamb, Jesus is called in John 1 (vv. 4-9, 29-36). And between these two metaphors, John uses another pair of words to describe Jesus. He is the fullness of “grace and truth” (vv. 14-18). These pairs go together, don’t they — truth and Light, grace and Lamb? Together they illustrate the nature of our Father and His Son. We cannot have one without the other.

In life and ministry, Jesus revealed the grace and truth that defines God. He pierced the darkness of sin and death and rescued those held captive there. Jesus completed His work as Light and Lamb in His crucifixion and resurrection. As God’s truth and grace, He condemned sin and saved sinners by the ransom of His own self. This is the heart of the matter. This is who Jesus is — the total testimony of the Word of God delivered to us: Light and Lamb, grace and truth. We understand.

But we must communicate it too. It’s our testimony. This Light and Lamb has now come to us, and we are changed. It must be our confession and conviction that the grace and truth of God is transforming us. Being conformed to Christ’s image, our greatest witness is simply to reflect the Light and the Lamb in our lives, to embody the grace and truth of our Lord and Savior. That is the surest way our invitation to come and see Jesus will be answered.

The General Conference Convention is in July. I hope to see you there. “Come and See” is the Convention theme too. We will focus on the heart of the matter: *Jesus!* May the Light and Lamb be found among us.

— Jason Overman





Light and Lamb

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Come and see God's
love in Christ.
by Jody McCoy

In a perfect world, it's easy to be kind to others because they are kind to us. We're even willing to sacrifice for others because they've sacrificed for us. We think it's fair to return the favor because they deserve it.

This strong sense of fairness, or justice, is part of our human nature. We can be giving to those who are giving to us.

However, in the world since the Fall, not everyone is kind, and not everyone plays fair. So what do we do when we're faced with injustice? We have

no answer in ourselves but only through God's Son, Jesus.

Justice vs. revenge

Select any playground in any culture and watch what happens when one child shoves another. Inevitably, the shoved child will shove back. That's also human nature.

God's law establishes our right to be treated with dignity and respect. So when someone breaks that law by being unkind or unfair to us, we feel fully justified in returning evil for evil because we believe they deserve it. We call it justice, but it's actually revenge. Proverbs 16:25 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."

God's law requires us to treat others with dignity and respect, period. There is no escape clause

for when we are mistreated. God's law requires us to lead in kindness, not to follow in kind. Our job is to trust that God is good and just. He sees the injustices we suffer, and He will deal with them in His time.

Apostle Paul emphasizes this:

Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:19-21).

We think of ourselves as good because we desire to see justice done and good prevail. This God-given desire is truly good,

but we also have other strong, conflicting desires within us. We mistakenly see ourselves as good because we fail to judge ourselves by our actions, which flow from our nature. A good nature does not return evil for evil; it overcomes evil with good. Do we do that?

The injustice in this world tests us and reveals who we truly are. When our desire for justice drives us to return evil for evil, we discover that we're not the good people we thought we were. We want to do good, but we lack the power to *do* it.

Paul describes it this way in Romans 7:

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me (vv. 18-20).

Authors of evil

With just a strong sense of justice, we are powerless to remain just in an unjust world. As evil and lawlessness spread like poisonous gas, we inhale its deadly fumes. It suffocates our inclination to obey God's moral law. Why should I follow the rules when no one else does? That's not fair to me.

Evil persists in this world through such attitudes and how we carry them out through our actions. We become the authors of evil as we vent our anger over injustices. I'm sharp with the grocery clerk because someone

stole my parking spot. Because I was sharp with him, the grocery clerk is impatient with the next customer. And on and on. Instead of overcoming evil with good, we perpetuate evil by poisoning someone else's day because someone poisoned ours.

We've seen humanity's repeated death spirals in the moral decay before the Flood and in the hardened hearts of God's elect before Jesus' first coming. We also see it in the love of many growing cold today in the age of Christianity before Jesus' second coming. This stems from our human nature desiring what is just and good but lacking the power to do it. Left to itself in an unjust world, humanity abandons

the shadow of death a light has dawned" (NIV). That light is Jesus.

The gospel message of Christianity is unique among all religions, which say that man saves himself by meriting his own salvation. In other words, God saves the good people. But Christianity alone says that man cannot save himself, because there are no inherently good people. God alone is good. That's why God, in His great love, sent a Savior: the Light of the world.

Christianity isn't self-help; we can't fix ourselves, because goodness doesn't come from us. God wants to heal us, but that healing requires us to trust Him for salvation.

“Christianity isn't self-help; we can't fix ourselves, because goodness doesn't come from us.”

its own nature to embrace an evil nature. This nature self-righteously commits brazen acts of immorality, violence, and injustice — ironically, all in the name of justice.

Light of the world

Fortunately, there is good news, according to Matthew 4:16: “The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of

The Gospel of John says:

“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. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (3:16, 17).

God loves us unconditionally, as Paul says: “But God

demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). God sent His only Son, Jesus, to pay for our sins and satisfy the demands of justice for us. Though His love is unconditional, salvation has conditions. Though God offers salvation to everyone, we receive it only by receiving Jesus as our Savior. Thanks to Jesus, we are not condemned for our sin:

“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name

cover the sins of the people. No one would expect God to fill that role.

While Jesus is fully God, He also became fully human (see “Q & A,” p. 11). As a human, Jesus dealt with the same limitations, troubles, temptations, and fears we have. In addition, throughout His life on earth, He carried the burden of why He came. That night in the Garden of Gethsemane, the full weight of a terrifying crucifixion bore down on Him. In His humanity, Jesus struggled for strength and asked His friends to pray with Him, but they fell asleep.

“Grace is never free; it always costs someone. The Father and Son paid that price for us.”

of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:18, 19).

Lamb of God

There is more good news for our sinful nature. Jesus came to earth as the sacrificial lamb (John 1:29), the physical manifestation of God’s grace. In the Old Testament, lambs were sacrificed to

In His battle against the overwhelming impulse to save Himself from the approaching brutality, Jesus sweat great drops of blood. Terror tried to consume Him. Every fiber of His humanity screamed, “Run, run!” Oh the horror! But He stayed for you and me.

Jesus faced the wrath of a holy God against evil, borne in the cruelty of men and the brutality of a crucifixion, a just wrath that had been destined for humanity.

Growing in grace

Grace is never free; it always costs someone. The Father and Son paid that price for us. The only rational response to God’s sacrificial act of giving His only Son, and Jesus’ sacrificial act of giving Himself, is unbridled gratitude. We enter a loving relationship with God when we give our lives to the One who gave His life for us. When we do so, we enter His grace. He gives us the power of His Spirit in return.

In His grace, we can transcend our need for justice, because we’re no longer under the law. However, God doesn’t take away our rights under the law. Instead, it’s our responsibility to surrender our rights as we grow in His grace. His presence in us gives us the power to love others unconditionally the way He loves us. We can forgive because He forgave us. We can suffer injustice from others because He suffered injustice at our hands for us.

Christianity is founded, not on a principle but on the person of Jesus Christ. Through the power of His Spirit in us, His good nature grows within us as we let go of our old nature. And that is good news! **BA**

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





Christ Our Peace

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by **Kelsey Gjesdal**

Peace is hard to find these days. Our lives are crammed with busyness. We hear stories of tragedy and anxiously watch inflation raise the cost of living. We may face broken relationships, conflict-filled marriages, or health problems, and wonder when we will get a moment to rest and find peace in the turbulent waves of life.

I have walked through trials that left me wondering, *Lord, where are You, and what are You doing?* The disciples wondered that too. One day Jesus had finished teaching many parables to a large crowd, then climbed into a boat with His disciples to cross the sea. As they traveled, a storm arose, one big enough that experienced fishermen feared for their lives as the boat took on water. When the disciples came to Jesus for help, they found Him fast asleep on a cushion.

And they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (Mark 4:38-41, ESV).

Why was Jesus sleeping while the boat sank? It made the disciples think He didn’t care. Sometimes we face trials that leave us wondering the same thing.

Through Jesus’ example, we learn a profound lesson about peace. Amid the storm, He sleeps — but not because He doesn’t care. We

know the Lord cares for even the birds and the lilies, and that we are much more precious to God than those things (Matthew 6:25-33)! When we call, He calmly rebukes the waves and tells them, “Peace!” As with His disciples, our Savior rides through the storm with us, just as He promises: “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5).

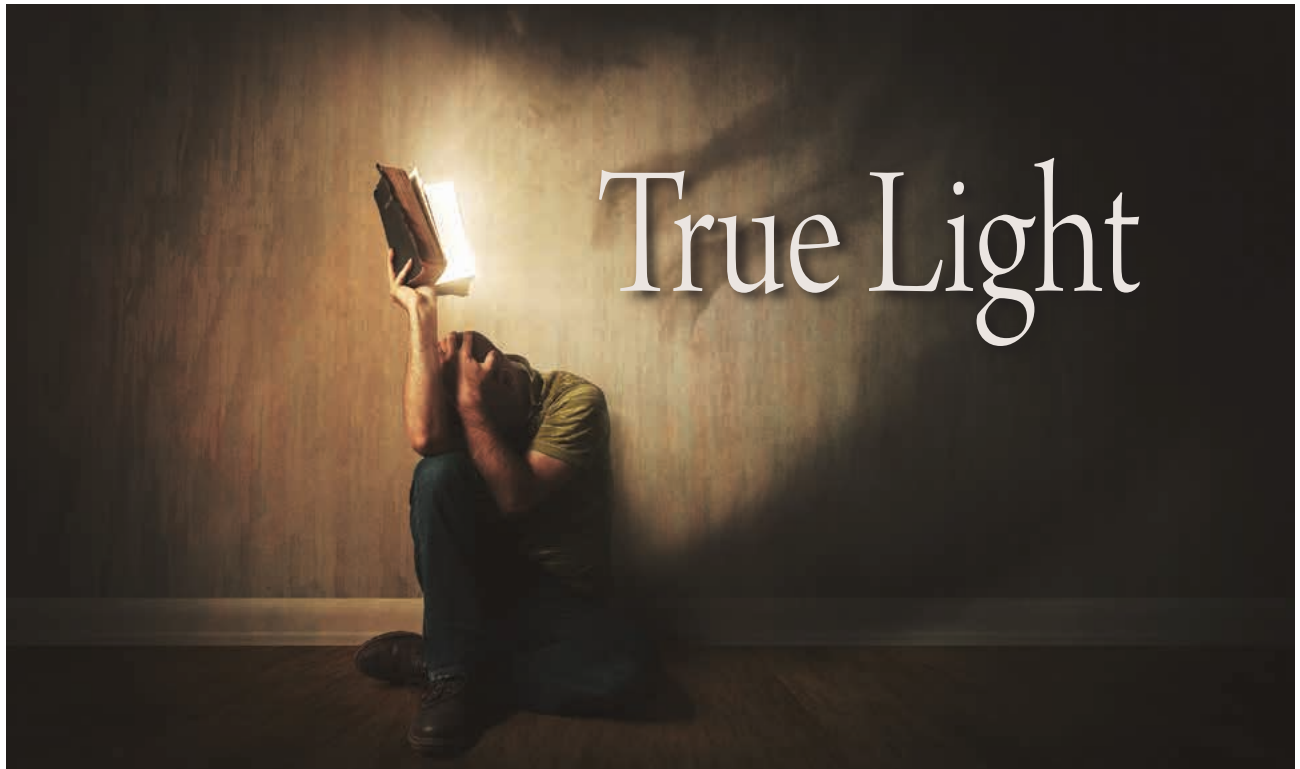
Unlike the disciples, Jesus is never frantic about the storm, because He knows the power the Father has given Him. That same peace Jesus possesses is made available to us: “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful” (John 14:27).

Christ did not promise an easy life; He said we would face tribulation (16:33). When we feel as though we are riding the turbulent waves of life and our boat is sinking, we know that we have access to the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). We can find courage in His arms. And whether He calms the storm or rides it out with us, we know we are never alone.

Run to Christ and let “the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension . . . guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7). Let Him speak over your heart, “Peace! Be still.” **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*, unless otherwise noted.





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Facing the battle with
darkness within and without.
by Dr. Donna M. Sherwood

I grew up in Jamaica in an era when there were frequent power cuts. Being suddenly plunged into darkness was a regular occurrence. Darkness is uncomfortable, inconvenient, unproductive, and sometimes downright dangerous! As such, we made bottle lamps and bought ready-made lamps, flashlights, candles, and a few standby generators. Such was our preparation to cope with pending darkness.

Dealing with power cuts is still the case for many people in different parts of the world. But what about the darkness of the

soul that needs a light source much greater, more accessible, and longer lasting than our man-made light?

God has provided that greater light: His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus said of Himself, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12, NIV). Sadly, then as now, the light shines in darkness, but the darkness doesn’t understand, appreciate, or accept Him (1:5). Many settle for fake light sources, such as people, places, and things, but they always disappoint and lead to ruin. The only hope for the world is Jesus Christ, the true light.

Witnesses

Like John, we have been sent to bear witness of this light. Many in the past professed to

be the true light and some still do, only to fail. Darkness can’t dispel darkness; only the true light can. He does this by giving us all things for life and godliness so we can escape the world’s corruption and embody God’s divine nature (2 Peter 1:3, 4).

In essence, the job title of the citizens of God’s kingdom is “light of the world,” the same as Jesus’ title (Matthew 5:14). The atrocities of this world’s darkness thicken every day. Therefore, we must allow the true light to dispel our darkness so we can be authentic witnesses of Jesus Christ.

Arming for battle

The return of our Savior is imminent; the prophecies and signs of the times indicate that He is even at the door. If ever there was a time for God’s children to put on Christ and shine His

light, it is now! This is what Paul emphasized:

Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day . . . But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts (Romans 13:12-14).

Effectively bearing witness of the light first necessitates dethroning and expelling the works of darkness and intentionally putting on the armor of light. Most, if not all, Christians are aware of the armor of God in Ephesians 6:11-18. But did you know that light is armor as well? It is a protection for battle.

Without a doubt, we are in a spiritual war, and the war is fully engaged. We need the true light as our protection. But if we attempt to wage war, encumbered by the weight of our own sin, we will court death. We risk being defeated by the enemy of our souls, the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10), whose job description is to kill, steal, and destroy (John 10:10).

The challenge to rid ourselves of sin is probably harder today than ever before. We live in a time when sin is being relabeled, repackaged, and topped off with a cute bow. Isaiah 5:20 sets us straight: "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness" (KJV). With God, darkness is still and will always be darkness. Refashioning sin to look like something else is part of that darkness.

When we allow the true light to be our armor, we can protect ourselves from the deeds of darkness aimed at destroying us. And

as God's special people (1 Peter 2:9), we can be more effective in proclaiming to the world the light it needs to see.

Responsible ambassadors

We are mandated to not only bear witness to the light but also shine for Him before others in our daily deeds. Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good

works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Notice that He instructed us to not just *shine* (i.e., reflect the glory of God) but to *so shine*! The word *so* is an intensifier adverb that modifies an adjective, verb, or other adverbs. Hence, our shining must be of a high standard, empowered by divine energy. Christ himself energizes us both to will and do His good pleasure and good works (Philippians

What are Ambassadors of Light?

Ambassadors of light embody special characteristics. They . . .

- Live in the light: "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).
- Reject the darkness: "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Ephesians 5:11, KJV). "Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly" (1 Thessalonians 5:22, 23, KJV).
- Abhor the practices and places of darkness: "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good" (Romans 12:9, KJV).
- Enjoy fellowship with God: "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth" (1 John 1:5, 6, KJV).
- Bear much fruit: "Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. . . . Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples" (John 15:2, 8, KJV).
- Are selective in their associations: "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Corinthians 15:33, KJV).
- Keep the commandments of the Lord: "If you love Me, keep My commandments. . . . He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me" (John 14:15, 21).
- Practice disciplines of the light, such as studying the Word (2 Timothy 2:15); singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19); fasting (Matthew 17:21; Isaiah 58); praying (1 Thessalonians 5:17); generous giving (Ecclesiastes 11:1; Acts 20:35); solitude (Psalm 46:10); joyfulness and thanksgiving (1 Thessalonians 5:16, 18); authentic love (1 Corinthians 13).

— Dr. Donna Sherwood

2:13). We must always shine so we can bring glory to our heavenly Father. If our light turns a spotlight on us, it is an abuse of the light in us and of the true light.

Furthermore, there is no point in being light if we are hidden: “Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house” (Matthew 5:15). As ambassadors of light, we ought to be diligent carriers of the true light and embrace opportunities to have the greatest influence in reflecting it.

God’s love sent us the true light (John 3:16). Equally so, from the platform and motivation of love we shine our light to honor God with all our heart, mind, and strength and to serve our neighbors.

We all have dwelled in darkness, but now we are called to live as children of light (Ephesians 5:8). The responsibilities and functions of being ambassadors of light are high, holy, and huge. To whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48). The light of Jesus Christ is a free gift, but treasuring, serving, and living this gift is significantly ours as co-laborers with Christ. Being a passive and complacent lighthouse is irresponsible. We are called to be active, disciplined, and joyful ambassadors, partnering with God to dethrone and dispel the darkness.

The parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13 illustrates the necessity and responsibility to join the adventurous challenge of co-laboring with Jesus as ambassadors of the kingdom of heaven. Is there oil in our lamps?

Light of hope

The stronghold of darkness presents a constant battle, internally and externally. Sometimes we win, sometimes we fail. We have all missed the mark, which is what sin is. Even with the best resolve, we fall short and even deliberately rebel.

That’s why we can relate to the full-on war Paul describes in Romans 7:14-24. He is transparent about the extent and agony of his struggle with darkness, which brought him into captivity: “O wretched man that I am!

Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (v. 24, KJV).

If your light is flickering, gone dim, or gone out, or if you’ve never embraced the true light, there is hope. Come and see the true light, Jesus Christ. Then share it freely with others. **BA**

Dr. Donna Sherwood is a CoG7 writer who lives in London, England.



Bad News, Good News

Well versed in acceptable and unacceptable behavior, my sister’s grandson committed a definite no-no. Quickly looking around, he realized Nanny witnessed the dreadful deed. He said, “Now, Nanny, don’t you talk to me about Jesus!”

Isn’t that the way we adults often respond? We know what we should and shouldn’t do. We’ve heard it often enough. We’ve experienced the consequences of past poor choices, yet, as Paul says in Romans 7:18, we find ourselves repeatedly drawn to the forbidden.

We know when we mess up. However, we don’t like to face the reality of our misdeeds, particularly from those who witness them. We’re guilty, but we don’t want to hear about it.

Still, we must face our sins and repent of them in order to experience God’s plan for our lives. The bad news: We can never live as we should on our own. The good news: If we know Jesus as our personal Savior, we have God’s Holy Spirit to guide and live through us. Only then can we make the right choices. And we will no longer worry about who witnesses our actions.

As Paul acknowledged, our struggle against temptation will continue as long as we live on this earth. However, we can join him as he declared in Romans 7:25, “Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (NIV).

— *Diana C. Derringer*

Questions & Answers



How can Jesus be both all God and all man? Does the Church of God (Seventh Day) teach this?

First, it is important to understand that as divine, God exceeds our ability to grasp all that He is. Thus, it is imperative we receive in humility whatever God reveals of Himself to us. The mysteries of God are still true, regardless of whether humanity understands them. However, on this topic of the nature of Jesus Christ, the Bible's revelation is clear. The "how" may not be as easily grasped, but the truth of God's Word remains.

Taking the last question first, yes, the Church of God (Seventh Day) teaches Jesus is both divine and human. From our Statement of Faith #2:

From eternity, the Son was with the Father, shared the Father's glory as the pre-incarnate Word, and with Him created and sustains all things. Jesus the Christ (Messiah) was born of the virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, thus uniting two natures — human and divine.

In discussing your first question, we realize Jesus of Nazareth did not become both God and man by His divinity being *turned into* flesh. Rather, His divine nature *took on* the nature of created humanity. As such, in understanding that the divine Son added to Himself all the attributes of a human, the unity of His being and person was retained, now as both God and man.

As an illustration, there exists the rational nature of a person and the uniqueness of their fleshly body. Each is fully relevant, yet both are contained in a unity as one being. For some, this exercise is futile, rightfully insisting on "what saith

the Word of God." A brief look into the Word of God reveals that, yes, the Bible also teaches Jesus walked on this earth as both fully God and fully man.

Scripture declares Jesus is truly God (John 20:28; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8) and truly human (Romans 1:2-4; 1 John 4:2, 3). John 1:1, 14 reveals this union, or Incarnation, best: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

Further, Jesus claimed the divine name "I Am" (John 8:58). He understood Himself to be fully God. To validate His divinity for humanity, Jesus did things only God can do (Mark 2:1-12; Luke 7:48-50). But Jesus also displayed the weaknesses and vulnerabilities possible only to one who is fully man (Luke 19:41; John 19:28; cf. Philippians 2:5-11).

Understanding Jesus as both God and man is of fundamental importance for a valid Christology. Apostle Paul states that affirming the divinity of Jesus is required to be saved (Romans 10:9). And the apostle John emphatically warns that those who deny Christ's true humanity are promoting the doctrine of antichrist (2 John 1:7).

The apostles understood and declared Jesus as fully God and fully man. With the Word of God as the authority for God's revelation to us and the foundation of the apostles as the basis of the church, we do well to receive the clearest revelation the Bible offers us. We shouldn't try to make it "fit" the confines of human understanding, thus compromising the mystery of who God is.

More on this doctrine may be found in *This We Believe*, available through the Bible Advocate Press (cog7.org/books/).

— Elder Chip Hinds

David Discovers Meekness



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by **Marcia Sanders**

“Dad, thanks for bringing me to the fair. This has been a great day!” David exclaimed. “You’re welcome,” Dad replied. “After visiting the different animal pens, which one was most interesting?”

“Probably the sheep because we were just talking in Sabbath school yesterday about how Jesus is our Shepherd. So I was curious about what sheep and shepherds are like. That’s why I talked to that guy who had several animals in the competition.”

“So, what did you learn?” Dad asked.

“Lots! Did you know that sheep like to stay together in the flock? The more they sense danger, the tighter their group is. Man, I wish our goats were more like sheep and didn’t scatter so much. That guy said that he just calls, and they come to the sound of his voice. Then he heads back and they follow him to the paddock. Imagine if we tried to do that with our goats!

“Sheep are pretty smart too,” David continued. “If someone else goes into their pasture and calls to them, they just ignore him. They follow only their shepherd’s voice.”

“That is interesting,” Dad said. “How does that fit with what you’ve been studying in Sabbath school?”

David thought for a moment. “Well, I think I need to be more like a sheep and stick close to other sheep, which would be my family and church friends who all love Jesus. I also think I need to listen for Jesus’ voice when I’m making decisions.”

“That sounds good, but how would you do it?”

“Hmmm,” David responded. “By reading my Bible more often so that I will better know His

voice, and by praying and asking Him about problems and decisions when they come up.”

“That sounds good,” Dad said. “I think it’s also important to remember just how much Jesus loves us. Do you recall that verse about Jesus being the Good Shepherd?”

“I think so,” David answered. “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

Dad smiled. “That’s right. But how about Isaiah 53:7? ‘He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.’”

“I hadn’t thought about Jesus being compared to a sheep,” David said. “Only about how He is like a shepherd.”

“Can you imagine being taunted, accused, beaten, knowing you’re in the right and they’re in the wrong and you’re going to die anyway?” Dad asked. “Yet Jesus was meek. That means He didn’t argue back, didn’t threaten — just accepted His Father’s will. What can you take away from that example?”

David thought again. “Being a sheep is a lot harder than I thought. I’m not good at silently accepting consequences, even when I’m in the wrong. I have a lot to learn.” **BA**

Marcia Sanders writes from Fort Smith, AR, where she attends the Church of God (Seventh Day) with her husband, Randy. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



GC CONVENTION 2023

COME AND SEE

COVINGTON, KY



General Conference Convention

We are quickly approaching the Biennial GC Convention, to be held July 10-15 in Covington, Kentucky.

Have you been convinced yet that you need to be there? From fellowship with friends, old and new, to the sweet Spirit of the Lord in our long-awaited gathering, or the encouraging and equipping workshops and evening services – even the necessary business of our church organization, not to mention the engaging children’s/youth/young adult programs: There’s something for everyone!

Bring the whole family for a wonderful vacation. The area holds many exciting things to see and do together, including the Ark Encounter, Newport Aquarium, and more. Expand your search and visit the great Mammoth Cave just three hours away. The Great Lakes and Nashville are within striking distance. What a beautiful part of the country to explore!

Our afternoon workshops will afford you a glimpse into the current GC Initiatives: Personal Evangelism, Small Group Ministries, and Welcoming Church. Take in the opportunity to learn more about our GC Ministries: *Bible Advocate*, Missions, and Artios. Need to know more about church finances? Dealing with anxiety? How to develop a preschool program? One or more topics will certainly propel you on your journey!

Pay attention to the group excursions for the Ark Encounter (Monday) and the Creation Museum (Friday). Options include riding a chartered bus for the group rate. You can also drive yourself (different discount). These differences are spelled out on the cog7.org/convention website. The deadline to register for group excursions (via bus) is **June 16**.

Good eateries are not far from the Convention

Center. Please consider staying on site and purchasing a few meal tickets. These help offset the cost of our meeting rooms. Meal tickets must be purchased in advance – by **June 30**.

Register today, if you haven’t yet done so! All who register by **April 30** pay the early bird registration fee. Anyone registering after this date will pay the regular fee. (This includes any registrations that may have been started but not completed via payment.) Even after you complete your registration, you can return to the site and make changes, such as buying more meal tickets, selecting an excursion, or signing up for a volunteer spot.

Speaking of volunteers, please consider signing up to help for an event, for a day, or for a program. The success of our convention relies on all those who donate their time to make it happen. Many opportunities are listed on the registration site. We need your smiling face and caring hands to fill the need.

All registration information can be found at cog7.org/convention. We are looking forward to your presence. “Come and see” what God has in store for us!

– GC Convention Committee

Deadlines

April 30 – Early bird registration

June 16 – Group excursions

June 19 – Hotel reservations

June 30 – Meal tickets



Mission: Jubilee!

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Jesus fulfills a promise of the law and the prophets.

by **Bob Hostetler**

It was early on the morning of the Sabbath.

Bearded, robed men passed between rows of pillars as they took their seats in the dusky room, lit by a clutter of low-hanging oil lamps. In the center of the room, an angled desk topped a low platform. Backless benches lined all sides, and a balcony filled with the wives and daughters of the men looked down on the room below.

A row of dignified men sat in front of a heavy curtain at the end of the room. One of them rose from his seat and spoke briefly to several others in the room, one of whom was the

builder from Nazareth, Yeshua ben Yusef — Jesus, the son of Joseph.

He walked to the raised desk, the same place where, as a boy, He had celebrated His bar mitzvah. All eyes in the room followed His lean form, made more gaunt by the recent ordeal He had endured during a forty-day fast in the Judean wilderness.

An air of expectation mingled with smoke from the lamps as He ascended the rostrum. Rumors about Him had been spreading through the countryside. This moment had been anticipated by many.

Jesus' strong voice commenced the service with a series of prayers and recitations. Then He waited, briefly, while the *chazzan* carried a scroll to the podium. Jesus took the bulky scroll with a skill that betrayed practice, and deftly unrolled it. He found the passage He sought,

lifted His eyes to the congregation, and spoke without another look at the text.

"The Spirit of the Lord is on Me," He said.

Puzzled looks shot among the men; this was not the *haphtarah*, the scheduled reading, for the day. Up to that point, Jesus had led the synagogue service in customary fashion, but this was unexpected, a strange departure. He was reading from a passage of His own choosing.

Jesus continued, old words ringing with new meaning: "Because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Silence followed His reading. Jesus rolled the scroll together, handed it back to the *chazzan*, and sat down in His seat, as any

rabbi of that day would do when he was ready to begin teaching. He gazed around the room. “Today,” He said, “this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Sound the Jubilee

That sermon in Nazareth, recorded in Luke 4, was Jesus’ inaugural sermon, the first official act of His public ministry. And His text, in verses 18, 19, was not part of the schedule of readings for synagogue worship. In other words, He did something that was not done: He chose His own text, marked in our Bibles as Isaiah 61:1, 2. And He chose it for a specific purpose. He used it to announce His mission, an announcement that would have been understood by everyone listening as applying to Himself words that prophesied the Messiah, words that referred to “the year of Jubilee.”

This custom of the Jews, ordained by God, designated not only every seventh day of the week as a Sabbath — a day of rest — but also every seventh year so the land would be given a rest from cultivation and productivity. And after every seventh Sabbath year (i.e., every fiftieth year) a year of Jubilee was intended. In that year, all slaves were to be set free, all whose poverty had forced them to sell their lands would receive them back again, and those who had lost family members into slavery or imprisonment would be reunited with their loved ones (Leviticus 25).

Jesus announced His mission as a Jubilee. What the law prescribed, what Isaiah promised, Jesus said He fulfilled. He came to bring good news to the poor,

the kind of news that was designed to cause dancing in the streets every fifty years. He came to bring broken families together, to bind up the brokenhearted, to heal the hurting. He came to free the slaves, open the doors of darkness, untie men’s hands, and unfold their wings. He came to proclaim the acceptable year, the year of God’s grace, the year of Jubilee — but not once every fifty years. That was already supposed to be the case.

Jesus came to bring a worldwide Jubilee, that every year, every day, would speak good

women, and children to join His Jubilee. He calls everyone to heal and help and bless and bring good news everywhere they go.

Regardless of your career, you can follow Jesus in His mission and spend your life spreading His kingdom. Paul said, “Life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus — the work of telling others the Good News about God’s mighty kindness and love” (Acts 20:24, TLB).

That is the mission of Jesus and the work He assigns to you. Reach out in mercy, grace, and

“Jesus calls everyone to heal and help and bless and bring good news everywhere they go.”

news to the poor, liberty to the captives, healing to the brokenhearted, forgiveness for the guilty, freedom for those who feel controlled, release for those who feel trapped, deliverance, laughter, relief, joy . . . Jubilee.

Spread the Jubilee

The mission of Jesus was not just *His* mission; He “went around doing good” Himself (Acts 10:38, NIV). He also commissioned others to accept, adopt, and adapt His mission. And though the messengers change from one generation to another, the mission remains the same. Jesus still invites men,

love to all who need it (and everyone needs it). Find ways of surprising people with love. Don’t worry so much about correcting their wrong actions or bad language. Instead, help captives find release, help the blind to see, help the oppressed to be set free, and help everyone experience the reality that Jubilee has come . . . to them. **BA**

Bob Hostetler
writes from Las Vegas, NV.



And He Shall Be Called:

- **Advocate** (1 JOHN 2:1)
- **Almighty** (REV. 1:8)
- **Alpha and Omega** (REV. 1:8)
- **Amen** (REV. 3:14)
- **Apostle of our Profession** (HEB. 3:1)
- **Atoning Sacrifice** (1 JOHN 2:2)
- **Author and Perfecter of our Faith** (HEB. 12:2)
- **Author of Eternal Salvation** (HEB. 5:9)
- **Beginning and End** (REV. 22:13)
- **Blessed and Only Ruler** (1 TIM. 6:15)
- **Bread of God** (JOHN 6:33)
- **Bread of Life** (JOHN 6:35 6:48)
- **Bright and Morning Star** (REV. 22:16)
- **Capstone** (ZECHARIAH 4:7)
- **Captain of Salvation** (HEB. 2:10)
- **Chief Cornerstone** (EPH. 2:20)
- **Chief Shepherd** (1 PET. 5:4)
- **Christ** (1 JOHN 2:22)
- **Creator** (JOHN 1:3)
- **Deliverer** (ROM. 11:26)
- **Eternal Life** (1 JOHN 5:20)
- **Everlasting Father** (ISA. 9:6)
- **Faithful and True** (REV. 19:11)
- **Faithful Witness** (REV. 1:5)
- **Faithful and True Witness** (REV. 3:14)
- **First and Last** (REV. 1:17)
- **Firstborn from the Dead** (REV. 1:5)
- **Gate** (JOHN 10:9)
- **God** (JOHN 20:28)
- **Good Shepherd** (JOHN 10:11)
- **Great Shepherd** (HEB. 13:20)
- **Great High Priest** (HEB. 4:14)
- **Head of the Church** (EPH. 5:23)
- **Heavenly Man** (1 COR. 15:48)
- **Heir of All Things** (HEB. 1:2)
- **High Priest** (HEB. 2:17)
- **Holy and True** (REV. 3:7)
- **Holy One** (ACTS 3:14)
- **Hope** (1 TIM. 1:1)
- **Hope of Glory** (COL. 1:27)
- **Horn of Salvation** (LUKE 1:69)
- **Husband** (2 COR. 11:2)
- **I Am** (JOHN 8:58)
- **Image of God** (2 COR. 4:4)
- **King Eternal** (1 TIM. 1:17)
- **King of Israel** (JOHN 1:49)
- **King of the Jews** (MT. 27:11)
- **King of Kings** (REV. 19:16)
- **King of the Saints** (REV. 15:3)
- **Lamb** (REV. 13:8)
- **Lamb of God** (JOHN 1:29)
- **Lamb without Blemish** (1 PET. 1:19)

101 Names and Titles of Jesus

- **Last Adam** (1 COR. 15:45)
- **Life** (JOHN 14:6)
- **Light of the World** (JOHN 8:12)
- **Lion of the Tribe of Judah** (REV. 5:5)
- **Living One** (REV. 1:18)
- **Living Stone** (1 PET. 2:4)
- **Lord** (2 PET. 2:20)
- **Lord of All** (ACTS 10:36)
- **Lord of Glory** (1 COR. 2:8)
- **Lord of Lords** (REV. 19:16)
- **LORD [YHWH] our Righteousness** (JER. 23:6)
- **Mediator of the New Covenant** (HEB. 9:15)
- **Mighty God** (ISA. 9:6)
- **Offspring of David** (REV. 22:16)
- **One Mediator** (1 TIM. 2:5)
- **Only Begotten Son** (1 JOHN 4:9)
- **Our Guard** (2 THESS. 3:3)
- **Our Great God and Savior** (TITUS 2:13)
- **Our Sanctification** (1 COR. 1:30)
- **Our Redemption** (1 COR. 1:30)
- **Our Righteousness** (1 COR. 1:30)
- **Our Passover** (1 COR. 5:7)
- **Power of God** (1 COR. 1:24)
- **Precious** (1 PET. 2:6)
- **Prince of Life** (ACTS 3:15)
- **Prince of Peace** (ISA. 9:6)
- **Prophet** (ACTS 3:22)
- **Resurrection and Life** (JOHN 11:25)
- **Righteous Branch** (JER. 23:5)
- **Righteous One** (1 JOHN 2:1)
- **Rock** (1 COR. 10:4)
- **Root of David** (REV. 5:5 22:16)
- **Ruler of God's Creation** (REV. 3:14)
- **Ruler of the Kings of the Earth** (REV. 1:5)
- **Savior** (TITUS 1:4)
- **Son of David** (LK. 18:39)
- **Son of God** (HEB. 4:14)
- **Son of Man** (MT. 8:20)
- **Son of the Most High God** (LK. 1:32)
- **Stone the Builders Rejected** (ACTS 4:11)
- **True Bread** (John 6:32)
- **True Light** (JOHN 1:9)
- **True Vine** (JOHN 15:1)
- **Truth** (JOHN 14:6)
- **Way** (JOHN 14:6)
- **Wisdom of God** (1 COR. 1:24)
- **Wonderful Counselor** (ISA. 9:6)
- **Word** (JOHN 1:1)
- **Word of God** (REV. 19:13)

*This list is revised from online material
by the United Evangelical Church.*



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Toward

by **Brian Franks**

The first time I said the words in front of the church, I thought the world would come crashing down. They were some version of “Sorry, I messed up. I didn’t handle that right. Please forgive me.”

I thought no one would ever come back to the church again. My aura of perfection would be gone, and they would find some new perfect leader to follow.

However, the response surprised me. Some called it refreshing to hear a leader apologize and admit a mistake. Some said it was about time. I realized they knew the moment the mistake happened. Ouch! Some had even told me, “You’re going to make mistakes; every leader does. Just humble yourself, say you’re sorry, fix it, and move on.”

Nowadays, I still try to get things right, try to honor God. But when I mess up, it’s not so much work to admit my fault and ask for help. It’s freeing, actually. Seeking humility feels better than keeping up a facade of perfection, and it encourages the church to do the same. If the leader apologizes for messing

up, the rest of the church has no pressure to keep up facades either.

My church will probably tell you I missed a few “sorrys” along the way. I’m sure I have. But I hope now it’s at least from mere ignorance and that in time, someone will point out the fault, instead of my apologizing.

True leader

This journey has been made easier by looking to our true leader in the faith, Jesus Christ. I would contend strongly that Jesus never messed up, never failed, never missed something. That makes His humility all the more inspiring. He didn’t fail as we do. He didn’t say the wrong thing or stew in His pride. He didn’t pursue His own path in contradiction to God’s plans. He had more reason than anyone not to be humble. We have this theological gem from Paul, illuminating just what God was doing with Jesus’ incarnation:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking

the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:5-8).

Jesus, the Son of God, whom our Statement of Faith recognizes as existing with the Father before the Incarnation, humbled Himself from that place of esteem and perfection to become human. For those who would argue that Paul means Jesus only *seemed* or *looked* human, but was not, we have Hebrews 2. It says Jesus was made a little lower than angels for the Incarnation (v. 9), that He was made of flesh and blood as we are (v. 14), and that He was made like us in every respect so that He could be a sacrifice for our sins (v. 17).

Humble life

Given all this, what a humbling position Jesus took on Himself to save such wretched sinners as we are. Jesus had an attitude of humility not just on the cross or during His ministry but during His entire incarnated life. He was born in an animal pen to a poor family. They had to flee to Egypt as refugees for a time before

Humility

settling down in a small country town far away from the big capital city of Jerusalem.

Jesus took up a trade rather than be trained as a disciple of some Sadducee or Pharisee, work in the king's court, or become a well-off but despised tax collector. Even in His ministry, Jesus didn't have a home to stay in or even a pillow for His head (Matthew 8:20; Luke 9:58). At the Last Supper, Jesus even took the literal role of a servant and washed the dirty feet of His disciples (John 13:4-17). Of course, His incarnation is capped by the humiliation of His crucifixion and death.

Aside from these actions, Jesus' teachings reinforce the priority of humility for a Christian. After the foot washing, Jesus went so far as to tell His disciples that they must emulate His leadership humility and that they would be blessed by doing so. In another place, He told His disciples they would not lead as the Gentiles did, in power and greatness, but rather in humility and sacrifice (Matthew 20:25-28; Mark 10:42-45).

Paul continues the thread in Philippians 2 and then justifies the call with the example of Christ, quoted previously:

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others (v. 3, 4).

In short, Paul argues that the example and power to be humble come from Jesus himself. Therefore, we have no excuse to not be churches, leaders, and believers marked by humility. We would do well to dwell long and often on Jesus' example and teachings to us as Christians, and especially as leaders. Seek humility as of utmost importance.

Caveats

Let's conclude with two caveats.

First, we face a danger of projecting false humility, which can only be cured by being honest with ourselves and welcoming accountability from others. That kind of humility seeks truth.

Second, we can wrongly equate humility with being a doormat for everyone to walk all over — the other extreme. This is humility that lacks courage. Jesus never showed a humility achieved by cowering to the

whims of everyone else. Rather, He joined His humility to truth and love — what humility needs for proper strength and direction.

May God bless us with humility after the example of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **BA**

Brian Franks pastors the congregation in Tulsa, OK, where he lives with his wife and four children. He is also the dean of Academic Affairs at Artios Christian College. Scripture quotations are from the *English Standard Version*.



**Read this issue's
Online Extra about
spending time with Jesus,
by Shirley Brosius
Visit baonline.org.**

Throwing Stones



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by **Samara Harvey**

The woman stood in the center of the Pharisees, her eyes lowered in guilt. She had been caught in the act of adultery, and the law was clear on her punishment. She knew these would be her last moments.

As she awaited her death, she noticed the Pharisees questioning a Man in the crowd. “Teacher,” they called to Him, “this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” (John 8:4, 5).

The Man they spoke to bent and wrote in the dust, seemingly unaware of their presence.

They continued to pepper Him with questions until He finally spoke: “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (v. 7).

The woman stood aghast. Who was this Man? Then, to her growing astonishment, the crowd dispersed, one by one. The Man was still writing on the ground. Eventually, He rose and looked her in the eyes. “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” (v. 10).

Trembling, she lowered her eyes. “No one, sir.”

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin” (v. 11). Filled with awe, the woman left, knowing her life would never be the same.

Who is this Man called Jesus? In our life experiences, our understanding of who Jesus is grows. In our times of deepest remorse, He reminds us that He freed us from guilt through His death on the cross. In our times of deepest despair, He reminds us that He is the risen Savior and our Living Hope.

These are the truths I must keep in mind when I encounter other people. As a human being

living on planet Earth, I often find myself judging them and comparing my sin to theirs. I am all too ready to throw stones at those caught in the midst of sin or those whose sins are more evident to outsiders. But if I really know who Jesus is, I won’t judge a fellow sinner.

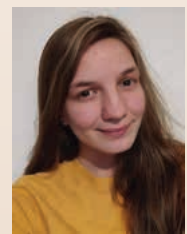
Jesus invites all of us to a life free from sin. He was the only one in the crowd that day who had the right to throw a stone, yet didn’t. Instead of condemnation, He offered the woman a second chance.

Everything about this encounter is amazing. Not only was this woman’s life completely altered, but I believe those in the crowd left changed as well. Jesus made them come face to face with their true nature. They were no different from the woman caught in adultery, just as we are no different from her.

As followers of Christ, when we see another in the throes of sin, may we remember what our Savior has done and where He first found us. May we open our hands and release the stones. And most of all, may we show others the love and grace Jesus Christ so freely poured out upon us.

I can never comprehend the fullness of Jesus Christ, but this I know: Jesus had every right to condemn us, and yet humbly came here and chose to save. By His grace alone, we are free from condemnation. To Him be the glory and honor, forever and ever. Amen. **BA**

Samara Harvey is the daughter of Jon and Cathy Harvey and a senior at South Dakota State University. Scripture quotations are taken from the *New International Version*.





Compassion On-the-Go

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by Virginia A. Johnson

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36).

As a child, I thought compassion meant only to feel sorry for someone. During my early teenage years, I observed my parents and neighbors behaving kindly toward others in need. Their small kindnesses helped open the door to my understanding of genuine compassion.

That door opened wide after I gave my heart to Christ at age 17. I understood why the Father, in love for humanity, gave His Son. Jesus won the hearts of the common people, not just by the miracles He performed but by His active compassion for them.

Let us look at two New Testament examples that reveal His caring heart.

Feeding the hungry. One day while Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, He climbed up the side of a mountain. People came with their sick, and He healed and ministered to them. Jesus knew that the crowd had pressing physical needs: After three days with Him, they had nothing to eat. In His compassion, Jesus didn't want to send them away hungry (Matthew 15:29-32).

Where could they find enough bread to feed four thousand men, besides women and

children? What food was available? Only seven loaves and a few fish. After instructing the crowd to sit down, Jesus took the loaves and fish and blessed them, then broke them into pieces. He gave the pieces to His disciples, then told them to hand out the food to the crowd.

The result? "They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over" (v. 37). Jesus' miracle not only fed the hungry thousands but also reminded His spiritually slow-witted disciples of His power to care for needy people.

Healing the blind. Two blind men sat on the side of the dusty road outside Jericho. When they heard that Jesus was coming toward them, they cried out to Him, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" (20:30). In His compassion, Jesus touched their eyes, and they were healed. In gratitude, they followed the Son of David (vv. 31-34).

We discover treasures in these two miracles of Jesus actively revealing His compassionate nature to the people He encountered.

In feeding the four thousand, Jesus was sensitive to the physical needs of the people and used what was available. He also stated His concern for the crowd's future safety. What would happen to them after they left His presence if they didn't eat?

When Jesus encountered the two blind men, He paid attention to their cries for help. He stopped and asked them what they wanted

continued on page 24

Broken ... Now Free



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Finding forgiveness after
a life of self-abuse and
abortion.

by **Priscilla Tate Gilmore**

My boyfriend's voice was flat and emotionless. "I've found someone else."

How could he do this to me after all the time we spent together? I said to myself. What about our plans to get married? I had no idea that my boyfriend's leaving, my dad's rejection, and my search for love would lead to alcohol, promiscuity, and a decision to abort my baby.

Everything made me cry. My father told me I couldn't come home. In his mind, I had a job and was making money. Yet my two sisters and brother-in-law

moved home when they had problems. *Why not me?* I wondered. I felt worthless.

—

At eighteen and nowhere to go, I went to a psychiatrist for support. I felt like a zombie after taking the prescribed antidepressants. Then he suggested that I socialize with other people and encouraged me when I told him co-workers had asked me to go to bars. He didn't know that I would become an alcoholic. *Let's put another nail in my coffin.*

My idea of committing suicide intensified to a plan of action. When I placed the knife on my wrist, the phone and the doorbell rang at the same time. The psychiatrist was calling to check on me, and the woman at the door was a co-worker returning my vacuum. I understood then that

God stepped in to protect me from irresponsibility and madness, and to show me that He loved me and knew what I was doing.

The co-worker took me for a drive, but I didn't tell her everything.

—

In the bar one night, I took a guy home. This happened a lot in my quest to find love. I told myself that if guys wanted me to have sex with them, they must love me. Then I got pregnant in a one-night stand. Not knowing who the father was and fearing what my family would say, I opted to abort.

Even though I vowed to never choose abortion, it was the only way to keep my pregnancy a secret. I believed the lie that in the early stages of pregnancy

the fetus was “tissue.” Then I reasoned, *I will never think about it again.*

Alone and afraid, I sat in the hallway of the hospital and hoped that a nurse would come and tell me the procedure could not be performed. Then I would have a reason to walk out. I wasn’t strong enough to walk out on my own two feet and say, “I’m not going to do this.” I shoved feelings of wanting to be a mother deep inside.

Feeling numb after the abortion, I struggled to move forward. But when I thought about what I had done and how depressed I was, back to the bars I went.

I found myself pregnant *again*. This time I determined to keep the baby, believing it would remove the heartache. Unfortunately, I miscarried and returned to the same lifestyle.

My way of living always left me feeling worse. So when a friend invited me to church, I attended and asked Jesus to come into my life. But I kept the dark places of my heart off limits. Because I didn’t fully surrender everything to Jesus, I returned to bars on Saturday night and attended church on Sunday.

On one Sunday afternoon, I met a man in the park. We chatted, then dated and talked about getting married. When he drank, he became violent, and I broke up with him before realizing I was pregnant.

When I told my family the news, they were not pleased. However, I determined to love the baby and be the mother and parent I always wanted to be.

My boss, a Christian, told me I could not raise the child alone. I believed I needed to find a husband who would love me and be a father to my son, but I did not believe I was good enough to have such a relationship. So I was drawn toward unhealthy relationships, all of which ended before they could develop into anything permanent.

When my son was eight years old, I experienced date rape and found myself pregnant again. I felt that I was being punished for all my past choices.

After the birth of my second son, I chose love over resentment and was baptized during a church service. God gave me Deuteronomy 31:8: “And the LORD, He is the One who goes before you, He will be with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be

dismayed.” I determined that God was going to be the provider for my sons and me. I knew He would be faithful through every struggle.

The worship leader led us in a song that ended with words that spoke directly to me about God being everything, more precious than a priceless jewel. I made foolish decisions in my life, and didn’t want to be a fool any longer. I went to Bible study classes to learn more.

In my studies, I came across Isaiah 6:5-8:

“Woe to me! I cried. . . . For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.” Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your

Before Abortion, Consider Six Things

- You are not alone.
- There is a life inside you, and that life was made by God. He has entrusted you to protect and cherish it.
- Abortion is *not* the best choice; life is.
- Don’t believe the lie that the life inside you is only tissue.
- If you have had an abortion, God knows all about it and wants to forgive you. He loves you so much that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to the cross to die for you. Open your heart to Him, confess and repent, and receive His forgiveness.
- Healing is a process; it takes time. Embrace the process with God by your side.

— Priscilla Tate Gilmore

guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.” Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” (NIV).

In the last part of verse 8, Isaiah said, “Here am I. Send me!” I knew the Lord was healing and forgiving me. Cleansing tears flowed. I didn’t understand what the Lord wanted me to do, but I was willing to go, to do whatever He wanted me to do.

At age forty-six, I married for the first time. God blessed me with a man who loved me and treated me the way He intends for a man to treat a woman. Although it was a major adjustment for both of us, God has been with us through everything.

Several years later, I assisted my pastor’s wife with Bible studies for single moms, a ministry I believed God called me to. Encouraging those sweet women helped me grow in my walk with the Lord and say “yes” when God asked me to do something.

One spring morning at church, my emotions were here, there, everywhere when I shared my testimony and confessed my abortion for the first time. My pastor’s wife told me about a session on abortion that was going to be at the next women’s conference. I volunteered to help and read Bible studies addressing the heartbreak of abortion and skimmed through a workbook. The study resonated with my past experiences.

Though led to take others through the healing process, I needed to go through the course as a participant. Tears flowed at

night when I wrote in my journal and expressed anger, hurt, sadness, regret — as directed in the workbook.

Surrendering the secret to God has given me a freedom I never dreamed I could experience. I know Jesus died on the cross for me and forgave all my sins — even the sin of abortion — the day I invited Him into my heart and life.

Post-abortion trauma is real. I experienced it, and since going through the healing process, I no longer battle depression and anger that I lived with for thirty years.

Women live in fear that their deepest-held secret will be found out. It is these women God has called me to advocate for. Leading several through the process and seeing a change in their demeanor from broken to free is a blessing to treasure. **BA**

Priscilla Tate Gilmore writes from Salem, OR.

Based on a true story. Used by permission.

Compassion On-the-Go

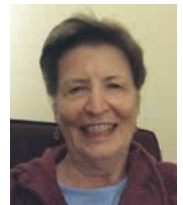
continued from page 21

Him to do. After He heard their request, Jesus made physical contact with them, and they received their sight.

Through these miraculous encounters, we see that Jesus hears the cries of desperate, suffering people and enters their need. Jesus desires we tell Him our every worry and sorrow. He answers our prayers and is concerned about our future.

As a child, I had a child’s understanding of what it meant to be compassionate. As an adult, Christ-follower, and reader of the Gospels, I better understand that to be compassionate is simply to be and act like Jesus — in the moment. **BA**

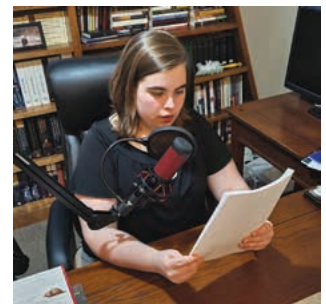
Virginia A. Johnson writes from Sublimity, OR. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



Can you hear it?

The Audio BA is in English — and Spanish is coming soon!

To tune in and listen whenever you want! Visit baonline.org



A person is standing on a sandy beach, looking out at the ocean. The scene is captured during sunset or sunrise, with a warm, golden light illuminating the sky and the water. The person is silhouetted against the bright light, and their reflection is visible in the shallow water. The ocean waves are gentle, and the overall atmosphere is peaceful and contemplative.

A Meeting

I kneel upon a sandy shore
where I have often been before,
though usually there are folks galore —
But now, there's only me
and this kindly Man of Galilee.

Over lapping waves I hear Him speak,
“Dear child, it is My might you seek
to overcome where you are weak.”
I look, and then His face I see,
this benevolent Man of Galilee.

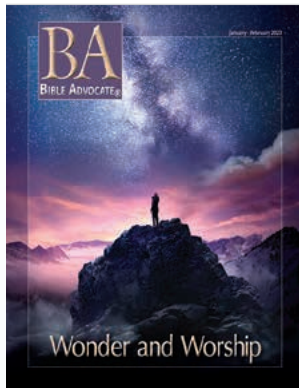
“Oh, yes. Oh, yes!” I stretch my hand,
hoping He will understand
how very much I want to stand —
How much I yearn to be
like Him, this Man of Galilee.

He reaches then His own scarred limb
to bring my heart up close to Him,
until I feel a strength within —
I rise to walk along the sea
beside this Man of Galilee.

Chris Ahlemann



Readers Write



Hitting the Bull's-eye

I just received the new BA [January-February '23] and immediately went to see what [Jason Overman] had to say. So here's my take: Your "Who is Jesus?" First Word *is* so powerful and absolutely bull's-eye. I might be imagining, but there seems to be a gaining-ground movement on the marginalizing of Jesus and the associated interest of OT Jewish traditions and so forth. It's so excellent that you've written this at this time. When I read what Isaiah and others said and how they identified Him, and later, how He fulfilled His Father's will, I am awestruck by His holy magnificence and His love for His Father and His love for us. I am a huge fan of John's words. Thank you for including them.

M. F.
Milton-Freewater, OR

Invaluable Source

I would like to firstly thank you for our wonderful quar-

terlies, which are being used across the Conference. I even have friends from other denominations studying God's Word, using the quarterlies. They have been a great source of information, instruction, and guidance. I would especially like to keep our beliefs studies (entitled *This We Believe*) to help new believers understand where our beliefs are found in Scripture. As my paper booklets have been "well used," I was wondering if you could please send me online/PDF versions. Please let me know how much they cost and the best way to send payment.

P. P.
Manchester, UK

Editor's note: Thank you for the kind words. Our quarterlies are available in print and digital formats and can be purchased at <https://cog7.org/online-store/>. The two-part This We Believe study series is now available in a convenient single-book format. It can be ordered at <https://cog7.org/online-store/this-we-believe-companion-book/>.

Are Arabs Hebrews?

May you please help us answer the following question in connection with Israelites and the Arab people who have Abraham as their common ancestor? When we talk about the Hebrew people, are Arabs included?

The reason I forward the

question is because of the claims some Arab Muslims make as we evangelize, that they are also Hebrews because they, too, have Abraham the Hebrew as their direct ancestor. Despite some resistance, we relentlessly share with the people the good news of the universal redemptive work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

N. A. A. Tembo
Malawi

Editor's reply: Thank you for writing, and God bless your faith and labor of love for the gospel's sake. As God promised, Abraham became the "father of many nations" (Genesis 17:5). Arab Muslims will trace their ancestry back to Abraham as descendants of Ishmael (v. 20), while the "Hebrew" people are the descendants of Isaac and Jacob (cf., Abraham, Joseph, and the children of Israel in Egypt are referred to as Hebrews in Genesis 14:13; 39:14; Exodus 1-2). All the way into the New Testament, Paul can speak of himself as being "of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews" (Philippians 3:5).

As interesting as these ethnic distinctions of physical descent are, of much greater importance is our spiritual descent: to be found having a justifying faith as father Abraham had. God be praised that all those who have put their trust in Christ Jesus are of the seed of Abraham and children of God (Galatians 3:26-29).



We Need Your Support

Born in 1863, in the middle of the American Civil War, the *Bible Advocate* turns 160 this year! It remains among the oldest Christian publications still in print in the United States. God is good. He has taken care of this ministry all these years!

As our readers probably know, for over 50 of those years, the BA has been a free publication. We are supported by the gifts of our readers and by the offerings of the Church of God (Seventh Day). As stewards of this ministry, we make it our goal to be as accountable and transparent as possible in all our financial responsibilities.

We have just ended the 2022 fiscal year. After two hard years during COVID, we were able to end this year in the black. Barely, thanks to a generous anonymous gift, as well as the many, many smaller offerings. As we enter a new year, we are faced with still climbing inflation in printing and mailing costs. Below, you will find BAP's year-end revenue and expense totals, as well as our budget for 2023.

Can you help a little — or a lot? While the BA goes around the world (to 180 nations last year) for free in both print and digital form, it's not free to create, print, and mail. So each year we ask for your help, if you are able and moved to do so. If you are reading today and are blessed by this ministry of the Word to the nations, please make a commitment of \$25 a year to cover the paper and postage of your six issues. Fifty dollars a year will cover the cost for you and a friend, and \$100 will cover four subscriptions.

Thank you for your faithful support and generosity over the years and in the years to come. We cannot deliver the *Bible Advocate* without you!

Grace and peace in Jesus Christ,
Jason Overman
Editor



January-December 2022

\$56,600 BA Donations

\$52,000 BAP Funds

2022 Total \$108,600 for BA Production

\$42,000 Labor

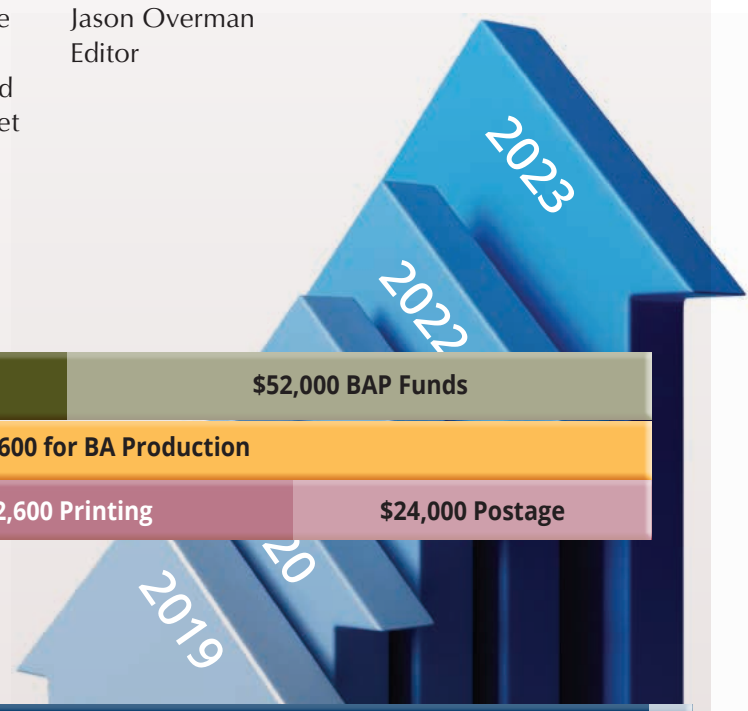
\$42,600 Printing

\$24,000 Postage



January-December 2023

\$111,860 Projected



Disciples on a Mission



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Experiencing God's peace in the midst of our mission.

by Daniel Flores

All of us have different experiences in our Christian lives — some pleasant and others, not so much. Hearing what God is doing in other people's lives encourages us. It helps us realize we are not the only ones who go through distressing situations.

Such a story is in Acts 12, where we read of a king who "stretched out his hand to harass some from the church" (v. 1). Not all, but some in the church were harmed and cruelly mistreated. Why did only these brethren suffer?

We don't know the answer to that question for sure, but among these suffering disciples

was James, one of the twelve apostles. The king actually had him killed. The Scripture does not say that he died for any specific sin, nor that the other brethren were mistreated for any sin. James' death proved what Jesus had told His disciples, that in the world they would have afflictions (John 16:33). The word used by the Lord also means tribulation, affliction, distress, anguish, and suffering.

Surely James and some of the church at that time experienced what their Teacher said to them. And he would not be the only one. James' companion in discipleship, Peter, would also go through similar experiences.

The king realized that killing James pleased the Jews, so he put the apostle Peter in jail, intending to kill him after the Passover. But the church had been called to a mission: to make disciples and preach the gospel to all nations.

Whether in the days of the early church or today, neither the afflictions nor the suffering nor even the death of a disciple can stop this mission.

Church's mission

As explained in *This We Believe*, the Church of God (Seventh Day) has a four-part mission statement:

- Proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Serve humanity and introduce people to the Lord.
- Teach them to worship Him and obey His Word.
- Nurture spiritual growth in all believers.

The chapters prior to Acts 12 tell us that those disciples were living out this mission, preaching the gospel, serving, teaching, and helping in the growth of the disciples. While doing this, they began to be called Christians for the first time (Acts 11:26). They

truly resembled their Lord and Savior, Christ.

While Peter was in prison, the church prayed fervently for him. Those prayers worked. The night before his trial, Peter slept, experiencing a profound peace. He wasn't in a Hilton hotel with a king-sized bed. He was in a jail, tied up and with a soldier on either side. Who can sleep like that?

While the church was praying for Peter, a bright light shone in the prison, and an angel of the Lord stood in front of him while he was still asleep. The angel struck him, saying, "Arise quickly!" Once the chains fell off his hands, the angel told Peter, "Put on your garment and follow me" (12:7, 8).

The angel led Peter out of prison in a miraculous way, and Peter went to Mary's house where many had gathered to pray for him. Acts says that when they opened the door, "they were astonished. But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, 'Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren.' And he departed and went to another place" (vv. 16, 17).

Persevere in your calling

Peter had the heart of a witness on a mission. He knew well what he had been called to. He knew that he had to testify about what the Lord had done. It was not about him. He was clear that neither afflictions nor prison could prevent the name of Christ from being preached. As a result, Peter experienced God's peace in the midst of his darkest days.


Are you going through difficult trials? Are you being mistreated, hurt? You can have the peace that Peter had while in prison and still fulfill your mission. Listen to what Jesus says: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

Do not focus on the problem you're encountering as you serve the Lord. Prepare your testimony so as not to lose the focus of your calling.

Peter knew that someday he was going to die, but that no longer concerned him. He knew he was not the center of the gospel and that he would face suffering because of his commitment. That is why "the word of God grew and multiplied" (Acts 12:24).

You and I go through trials, but that should never stop us from sharing the message of Christ. The church has always been persecuted and mistreated. Why shouldn't we go through the same thing? We do not deny our anguish and trials. We must pray for one another so that God will help us to keep spreading His gospel. In this way, we will be a church where the Word of the Lord multiplies. **BA**

Daniel Flores is the pastor of the McAllen, TX church and president of the North American Ministerial Council. He lives in Mission, TX, with his wife, Kerenha, and their four children.



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Report from Turkey

Editor's note: This firsthand account from Turkey is dated February 14, 2023, one week after the earthquakes that, as of this writing, claimed over 50,000 lives in Turkey and Syria. The following correspondence with Ramon Ruiz, president of the International Ministerial Congress (IMC), is published by permission on the condition of the writer's anonymity.

Dear [Brother Ruiz],

I have no words to describe what happened due to the earthquake in this beautiful country. The air of pain, fear, uncertainty, anguish, despair, etc. — it's so strong that I don't know how to describe it. Unfortunately, I cannot say that it did not shake in the city where we live . . . because of the pain of those who suffer, the cities were devastated as if a machine were passing by, tearing down everything in its path! . . .

Istanbul, my city, is very far

from where the earthquake occurred. Turkey has experienced the largest earthquake of our times, according to experts, the same day it suffered two [more earthquakes] — one at 4:00 a.m. of 7.8 [magnitude] and the other at 1:24 p.m. . . . at 7.6. Ten cities were devastated, and some other towns, roads, and the airport were destroyed as well, thus complicating the aid. Thank God aid from all over the world began to flow. The government [called in] all the helicopters to move the rescuers, doctors, etc. I signed up to cook in two groups, but thank God my presence was not necessary, since many cooks and associations mobilized.

The pain continues and will continue for a long time. There are millions of homeless families, orphans, etc., so God will show us how we can support them later. The country is going through very hard times that I will tell you about later. For now, the media is asking for

prayer for the Lord to comfort the families. Today, February 14, we buried Carolina Kap, Erhan's wife, a great friend. They both work in tourism. Carolina took a group of young tourism students, precisely that day they were in the place — a group of 44. Only three survived and are still in serious condition in the hospital. Carolina was found in the rubble on Tuesday.

Acquaintances from the karate federation have also died. What can I tell you, dear [brother], today! Spending time with my friend and his family, being with him right now — it hurts! But the love of my Jesus has been with them today. There is a word that came to me these days, to think about what is good, what is kind, what is fair, what is worthy. Think about this, he said. Every day I see His love and the purpose of our life here. . . .

We have joy in Him; we have peace in Him. Ask for it to abound in us and in your people here. With the pain of my heart, I write these lines.

— Name Withheld



Photo from the author of a field in Turkey separated by the February 6 earthquakes. The crevice on the left is 30 meters deep and 200 meters wide.



The Rest of the Story

Those of us “of a certain age” remember the radio broadcasts of Paul Harvey. He would mention a story from history or the current news, something most everyone was familiar with. Then he would tell us “the rest of the story” by sharing additional information most of us were unaware of.

I assume most readers of *Bible Advocate* are familiar with the story of Jesus Christ. However, not everything that God’s Word tells us about Jesus receives equal attention. In this “Last Word,” I want to encourage you to give some thought to “the rest of the story” of Jesus.

When it comes to Jesus’ role in God’s plan to save those who believe and receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, the greatest attention is given to His death. We correctly say that Jesus died in our place, for our sins. It makes perfect sense that the cross has become the symbol of Christianity. Without Christ’s death, in our place and for our sins, we have no biblical gospel. Here are some of the many verses from God’s Word highlighting the fact and the importance of Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice of Himself for us:

Romans 5:6-8: For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (NASB throughout).

1 Corinthians 15:3: For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received,

that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

1 Peter 2:24: And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

Here’s the rest of the story. Before Jesus could die for us, He first had to live for us. He had to qualify to be our substitutionary sacrifice, our “lamb unblemished and spotless” (1 Peter 1:19). He had to live as one of us, yet without sin. The Bible says that’s exactly what He did.

Hebrews 4:15: For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

1 Peter 2:21, 22: For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, “who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in his mouth.”

1 John 3:5: You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin.

The good news is “He [God the Father] made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Remember “the rest of the story.” Before Jesus died for us, He lived for us.

— Loren Stacy



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Are You Ready?
Convention
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almost here!

See page 13 for
details and deadlines.

