



BA

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Salvation and Service



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2023: Come and See



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Saved to Serve

Have you ever wondered what we are saved *for*? Usually we focus on what we are saved *from*: sin (Matthew 1:21), wrath (Romans 5:9), and death (James 5:20). Jesus gave His life to “deliver us from this present evil age” and “from the power of darkness” (Galatians 1:4; Colossians 1:13). Praise the Lord!

So what are we saved *for*? Israel’s Exodus story gives a clue. At the Red Sea the language of salvation bursts on the Bible scene. As Pharaoh’s chariots chase Israel, Moses tells the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD” (Exodus 14:13). Later, when Pharaoh’s chariots sink into the sea, Moses sings, “The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation” (15:2).

Exodus establishes the pattern of salvation. God saves Israel *from* bondage. But the story shows what God’s people are saved *for* as well. Seven times Moses tells Pharaoh, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me” (4:23; 8:1, 20; 7:16; 9:1, 13; 10:3). *Salvation* means that Israel is freed from slavery to serve the Lord!

So it is in Christ. As Paul wrote to the Romans, “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin . . . But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life” (6:17, 22, KJV). That’s what we are saved *for*, and Jesus is our model of service (Mark 10:45). If the Savior served, the saved serve as well (Luke 22:27).

We are saved *for* many things, but chief among these is God. And serving Him means serving all. “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). I saw this in action at the GC Convention in July. God be praised!

What a joy to see the saved serving together. See convention pictures on pages 27-30.

— Jason Overman





Salvation and Service

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Come and see your
new life in Christ.

by Jody McCoy

The wisdom of this world values utility. We acquire resources that benefit us, while ridding ourselves of those we no longer find useful. This wisdom drives the business world to the extent of seeing employees as human resources. Businesses retain staff members they find profitable and purge themselves of those they consider liabilities. They can't afford not to if they want to survive.

Like businesses, the sports world judges an individual's worth to the team based on performance. In this highly

competitive environment, players who fall behind are progressively eliminated at each level. For example, most high school athletes aren't invited to play at the university level. And the vast majority of those who make it that far won't be selected by a professional team. It's survival of the fittest in this relentless pursuit of only the best.

Given the realities of our performance-driven world, it's not surprising to find this way of thinking extended to religious beliefs. After all, didn't Jesus say, "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14) and "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (7:14, KJV)? Wasn't Jesus saying that God evaluates our performance to select the best and discard the rest?

No, He wasn't. Other than Christianity, the world's religions believe, in essence, that God sifts through the mass of humanity to select the elite few who prove themselves useful for His coming kingdom. Those who perform well enough to make the cut are justified before God, as in the business and sports worlds.

But this way overlooks a critical point. Businesses and sports value an individual's ability to fulfill their unique needs. They don't assess the individual's entire worth as a person. But that's what religions do when they speak of a person justifying their continued existence. When a religion places greater worth on a person's performance than on the person, it sends a clear message: People are nothing more than disposable tools to God, and He keeps only those who

prove themselves useful to Him. But that's a gross misrepresentation of God.

One and only way

Christianity alone teaches that God's standard of performance is perfection (Genesis 17:1). God doesn't sort through imperfect humans to find the ones with the fewest flaws. Under God's standard, you're either perfect or you're out. Therefore, based on our performance, all of sinful humanity is condemned, falling short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). "There is none righteous, no, not one" (v. 10).

On our own merit, none of us can enter God's eternal kingdom. Our mere presence would contaminate its glorious perfection. Jesus' disciples were so astonished at His teaching about this that they asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus replied, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible" (Mark 10: 26, 27).

Jesus told Nicodemus, a leader of the Pharisees, that no one can enter God's kingdom unless they are born again (John 3:3), meaning only those born with the perfect nature of Christ. Like Jesus' disciples, Nicodemus was amazed. No one can do this. It's impossible. And that's exactly what Jesus wanted Nicodemus to understand, that only God can make people perfect.

Our self-sufficiency and self-righteousness can never measure up to God's standard of perfection. Once we sin (miss the mark), all hope is lost. Even if we never sin again, we still must pay for what we've done. And the penalty for sin is death. God's

law is righteous and good, but its power is the power to condemn, not save. Thus, we can never sanctify ourselves through our own performance to be justified before God.

This would be the end of the story if our Creator valued performance above people. But God is as good as He is holy. In His great love for us, God values us as individuals despite our repeated failures to perform. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

In our utter inability to live up to God's standard, God didn't discard us. Nor did He discard His standard. Instead, He sent

Son. When Jesus said many are called but few are chosen, He was talking about one's heart, not one's performance. Few are willing to open their hearts, to stand guilty before a holy God without excuse, trusting only in His goodness to forgive through the Way He provided. Those who do, discover a glorious new life in Christ.

Serving others

Religions other than Christianity believe that we sanctify ourselves, and, in return, God justifies us. It's an exchange of value, a transaction: "I'll do this for you if you'll do that for me." In other words, sanctification precedes justification, and both are the re-

“ As both fully human and fully God, Jesus is the gateway between man and God. ”

His Son to live a sinless life as a perfect human. Jesus paid the price for our sins with His perfect sacrifice, satisfying God's standard. As both fully human and fully God, Jesus is the gateway between man and God — the one and only Way to the eternal life God wants to give us.

To trust in our own merit is futile. Instead, we're to trust in God's goodness and in His power to redeem through His

sult of my own righteous actions.

The Bible tells us the opposite is true. Justification precedes sanctification. God does both for us with our consent.

Since we can't justify ourselves, God justifies us with the perfect righteousness of Jesus when we place our faith in Him. This isn't a this-for-that business transaction. It's a sacrificial gift from our Creator who wants us to become His friends. Our job is

simply to accept His gift through faith.

We accept God's offer of friendship when we give our lives to the One who gave His life for us. We die to ourselves and are resurrected (born again) as new creatures with His Spirit in us. In God's eyes, He sees the perfect righteousness of Christ in us, for we are alive in Him. We're justified, declared righteous through our faith in Jesus, just as Abraham was declared righteous through his faith in God (Genesis 15:6). James writes, "'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend" (2:23, NIV).

Think about it. A friendship isn't based on "this for that." Instead, friends naturally want to do things for each other, the opposite of business transactions. In friendships, we're focused on what we can give, on how we can serve someone else.

Before we accept Christ, our self-worth comes from how others treat us. We feel good about ourselves when we're praised for our accomplishments, and we think less of ourselves when we're mistreated. When someone violates our God-given rights, we use these rights to defend our self-worth. We must get it back.

However, when we give our lives to Jesus, our self-worth no longer comes from how others treat us but from the price Jesus paid for us. We're worth the life of God's only Son because His life is the price He paid for us. This gives us the power to go beyond the issue of justice to serving others, just as Jesus did.

Salvation means that Jesus has

given His life for us, if we will accept Him. And *service* means that His life has made our life new; we now live in and by Him for others. As His friends, we are responsible to grow in the grace He provides so that He can use us to help others become His friends too. We learn to do this over time; sanctification is a life-long journey. Praise God that,

thanks to the presence of Jesus' grace in us, it's a journey we don't take alone. **BA**

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



Can You Help?

The BA has become a trusted friend for 160 years, born in 1863 — in the middle of the American Civil War. It remains among the oldest Christian publications in the United States that is still in print. We praise God for taking care of this ministry all these years.

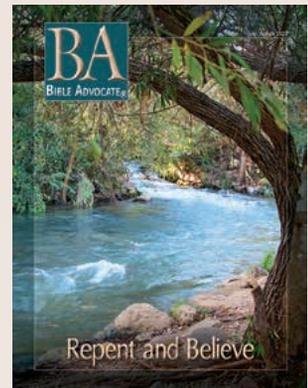
As our readers probably know, for over 50 of those years, the BA has been a free publication. We are supported by the gifts of our readers and by the offerings of the Church of God (Seventh Day). As stewards of this ministry, we make it our goal to be as accountable and transparent as possible in all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

After two hard years weathering COVID, we ended the fiscal year in the black, thanks to a generous anonymous gift and many smaller offerings. We continue to face climbing inflation in printing and mailing costs.

While the *Bible Advocate* goes around the world (to 180 nations last year) for free in both physical 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. Are you blessed by this ministry of the Word to the nations? If so, you can cover the costs of paper and postage for six issues with a commitment of \$25 a year. Fifty dollars a year will cover the cost for you and a friend, and \$100 will cover four subscriptions.

As always, 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





Learning to Follow

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by **Cindy Arora**

Now on the day that the tabernacle was raised up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the Testimony; from evening until morning it was above the tabernacle like the appearance of fire (Numbers 9:15).

While I read Numbers 9 recently, the pillar of cloud captured my attention. I noticed that the text repeated the same information about the cloud seven more times through verse 22. Every verse!

From the seven-day creation account in Genesis 1 and 2, the number seven has come to symbolize completeness, or perfection, in the Bible. Clearly, this divine repetition about the cloud’s movement was important to the Lord. So what should I be learning from this?

Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, after that the children of Israel would journey; and in the place where the cloud settled, there the children of Israel would pitch their tents (v. 17).

This cloud by day and fire by night was the very presence of God in the midst of Israel. Since God did not speak to the people directly at that time, the cloud’s movement was “the command of the LORD.” They were to watch the cloud continually for instruction or direction. They were to be ready to follow its movement, day or night. Obedience is the key point here. And the fact that it’s reiterated seven times emphasizes *continual* obedience, *complete* obedience. Seven days a week.

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God (Romans 8:14).

The Israelites following the cloud in the wilderness is a foreshadowing of us following the Holy Spirit. In the life of the New Testament believer, the Holy Spirit is that cloud of God’s presence, and His direction is “the command of the LORD.” Just as the Israelites were to be continually aware of the cloud’s movement, so we are to be continually aware of the Spirit’s movement — ready to follow Him daily. God wants our *complete* obedience.

The text in Numbers 9 also says that the Israelites would “pitch their tents,” or camp, when the cloud lingered. Likewise, unless the Holy Spirit is leading us, we are not to act; we are to stay put!

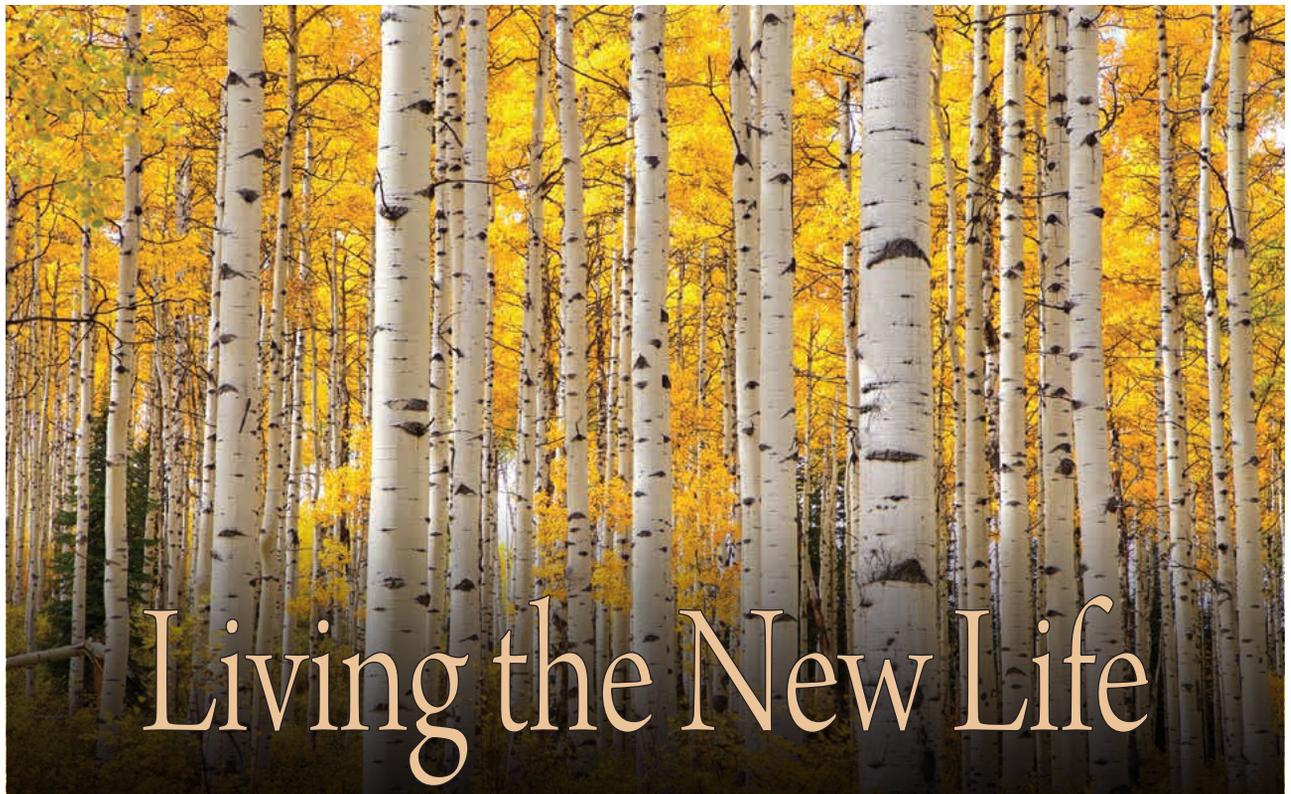
Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit . . . (1 Peter 1:22).

Finally, I notice that the Israelites never had to wonder what God’s command was; they simply looked to the cloud over the tabernacle. Even in the dark, they could see the cloud because it looked like fire. In the same way, we never have to wonder what God’s command is. We need only look to the cloud of His presence in our lives — the Holy Spirit — and follow obediently.

I pray that I am faithful to follow the Holy Spirit’s every leading — His every command every day! **BA**

Cindy Arora writes from Redmond, WA.





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Understanding the purpose of good works.

by Noelle Chow

My friends and I sang along to a popular song on the car radio, giggling and swaying back and forth in the backseat. Catherine's left hip pressed against my right, and my left shoulder hit the side of the car on each downbeat.

As we pulled off the freeway toward church, my gaze caught a man in a baggy sweatshirt and frayed jeans. He held a sign that read *Hungry. Anything helps.*

The light turned red, and the car eased to a stop. *Should I give him some cash?* I had several bills in my wallet. And I wasn't hurting for funds.

As the song continued, Catherine elbowed me and grinned. I smiled back, but I was no longer in the mood for fun.

I turned to the window — not to look at the man but to look away from my friends. I had always thought of myself as generous. So why was it so hard to roll down the window and give this guy a few dollars?

The light turned green. We pulled away from the intersection — and away from my opportunity to practice generosity.

My friends continued to sing as we pulled into the parking lot. When we piled out of the car into the church, I could already hear the guitar and keyboard. But I still wasn't ready to sing. I didn't feel like a child of God. I didn't feel that I was serving Him. And if I wasn't serving Him, I probably wasn't obeying Him or loving Him or abiding in Him.

But I guessed I should swallow the pit in my stomach and raise my voice and my hands to Him anyway.

What else could I do?

Paul declares that anyone in Christ is a new creation, that the old is gone and the new is here (2 Corinthians 5:17). We are not who we once were. Because of Christ, we are fundamentally changed. His Spirit is at work, transforming us and enabling us to love Him and serve Him in ways we couldn't before. But that doesn't mean the change is finished. It doesn't mean we're perfect.

We're just not there yet.

Sanctification

Theologians toss around terms like *sanctification*, which is a fancy word for spiritual maturity. There are two types of sanctification: positional and progressive.

Positional sanctification means that Christ died once on the cross, and this sacrifice was enough for all who believe in Him (Hebrews 10). He doesn't have to die again, and we don't receive the punishment of God's wrath for our (many) sins. The atonement is complete. We are new creations, and the process is one-way: We won't become the old creations again.

Progressive sanctification means that as we live on this earth and grow in Christ, He is continually making us more like Him (2 Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 3:10). This is a process, not a status. Yes, we are new creations, but we are not finished. Or rather, *He's* not finished with *us*. Each day, we can become more like Jesus in how we love Him and others.

Yet we won't ever be completely like Christ. He won't be finished with us until He returns, judges the world, and gathers believers to Himself in eternal glory.

Good works

Eternal glory. That sounds pretty good, doesn't it? But it's not ours quite yet. For now, for reasons unknown to us mortals, God wants us on earth. He has prepared good works for us to do (Ephesians 2:10), and these good works are an outpouring of our faith (James 2:26). His Word instructs us not to neglect them (Hebrews 13:16).

Reading about all these good works God has for me creates enormous pressure. What if I miss them or don't do them? What if someone drops a sandwich, and a little kid picks it up before I can get there? What if

I was supposed to help an old lady cross the street, but the car turning right cut her off? What if I was meant to donate to the homeless, but my friends distracted me with their singing?

Or, worse yet, what if I didn't donate because my heart was hard?

As someone with a sensitive moral conscience who struggles with guilt and shame, little things weigh heavily on me. No, I probably wouldn't have saved that man from starvation. But it's not just about helping him; it's also about doing God's will. He uses circumstances to soften my heart, unclench my fingers, and open my eyes.

And yet when my heart is hard, my fingers are white-knuckled, and my eyes are screwed stubbornly shut, He still loves me.

Good deeds gone undone aren't the end of the world. God alone has the authority to declare the end of the world. When I mess up, maybe I missed an opportunity. But that doesn't mean I've ruined everything. God is way too powerful for my mistakes to put a dent in His cosmic agenda.

Choosing well

I'm not saying, "Don't donate to the homeless, because God's taking care of them" or "Good works are optional" or "Someone else will do it." Given the choice between guilt and a good work, I hope I'll choose the good work next time, for Paul says, "Let us not become weary in doing good" (Galatians 6:9, NIV). But I don't have to wallow in that guilt. Christ already died for all of the sins I *have* committed and *will* commit. Yes, I am guilty, but that's why He was condemned. My new identity in Christ is one of forgiveness, innocence, and even purity.

Next time, I'll give that man

“ Each day, we can become more like Jesus in how we love Him and others. ”

a ten or a twenty — or maybe a taco. But it will be because I want to show him Christ's love, not because I fear the alternative. I've been adopted into God's family (Ephesians 1:5). Though I'm not finished, I'm not losing my status as His child anytime soon. ^{BA}

Noelle Chow writes from Irvine, CA.





by **Diana C. Derringer**

But Moses' hands became heavy . . . And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun (Exodus 17:12).

I grew up on a farm where hard work was the norm. The summer sun drew sweat, and the sweat drew bees. Muscles cramped, and chores seemed endless. When we needed a break, we often leaned against the closest fence. It propped us up while we drank cold water, wiped our faces, and wondered how much longer until quitting time. We didn't always have a fence for propping, but it surely helped when we did.

Just like those fences, good friends support us during trying times. We can depend on them to always be there — firm, steadfast, secure.

That's what Aaron and Hur did for Moses. When Moses grew weary, they held up his hands, so "his hands were steady until the going down of the sun." They stayed with Moses, never wavering, until he completed his task of making sure the Israelites were victorious.

Examples like these and other men and women of the Bible prompt me to ask, "Do I allow others to lean on me when they're weak?" As God's family, we can ask ourselves, "Do we offer a place for people to catch their breath before they move on? Do we provide a moment of respite when they think their task will never end?" We can resolve to prop one another up when life gets tough.

As Aaron and Hur did for Moses, and as the Holy Spirit does for all who place their faith in Jesus, let's be there to prop one another up when life gets tough. Paul puts it this way: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

May God help us be the vessels of His strength as we extend our hands in support for one another. **BA**



Diana Derringer writes from Campbellsville, KY.

Who is Going?

If you don't know where to go and how to share about Jesus, start with the "Come and See" evangelistic initiative that establishes your personal journey to fulfill the Great Commission.

- Learn the importance of nurturing relationships among friends, neighbors, and co-workers.
- Understand how to write and share your personal testimony.
- Practice sharing who Jesus Christ is.

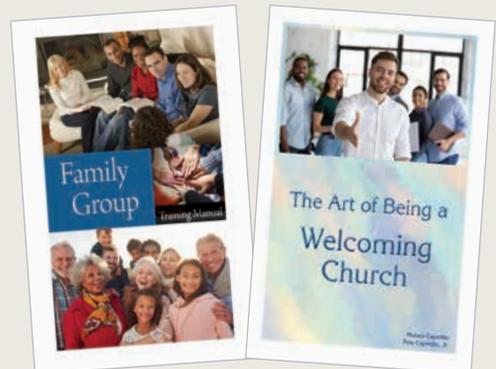
If you want to go and make disciples, plan this workshop in your area or church. Contact your superintendent and join the many churches that have started the process.

Personal evangelism: the first journey of your calling. For more information, visit <https://cog7.org/evangelism>.

Want to continue your evangelism journey? Schedule more workshops:

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Questions & Answers



What does Peter mean when he writes about the “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father”?

This question may address the omniscience of God in knowing who will respond to the gospel, or it may address predestination, God’s choosing of specific ones from creation. Or perhaps the question refers to the threefold work of God in saving people, covered in the remainder of this passage: the foreknowledge of God the Father, the sanctification of the Spirit, and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:2).

Each of these explanations is relevant to Peter’s statement about the “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” But writing an informed answer to any one of them, much less all three, requires more space than we have here. So let’s examine the key words of the phrase in question: *elect*, *foreknowledge*, and *God*.

The apostle Peter wrote this statement to a group of believers scattered across Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). The words appear in the epistle’s greeting, and it acknowledges the expressed faith of those Peter was writing to (vv. 3-9). Further, it states a truth commonly known and accepted by the apostle and others. In other words, Peter was not expressing a topic in the greeting to cause controversy.

God cannot lie (Titus 1:2; 2 Timothy 2:13). Therefore, He is not the author of sin. Neither did God capriciously create man incapable of not sinning. Yet He knew before creating humanity that sin would enter creation.

In the Old Testament, *the elect* refers not to individuals as such but to Israel as God’s chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:6). They were highly favored, gathered from other nations. They received

the very oracles of God through the law and the prophets and through means that others did not have (Romans 3:1-31). Peter uses this very Old Testament language of divine election and applies it to the New Testament church. Of these believers it is said, echoing Deuteronomy 7:6 and Exodus 19:5, 6, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Peter 2:9, KJV). Like Israel of old, the church is the elect of God by faith (1:5-9; Genesis 15:6).

Foreknowledge, in human terms, requires time for a reference. It is applied here to the eternal God, who created time but is not bound by it. With humans, we think of knowing what was or is or will be. With God, those references do not apply, since time is specifically a component of His creation, not of Himself.

On foreknowledge and the passage in question from 1 Peter 1, John Wesley offers helpful comments:

Strictly speaking, there is no foreknowledge, no more than after knowledge, with God: but all things are known to him as present from eternity to eternity. This is therefore no other than an instance of the divine condescension to our low capacities. Elect - By the free love and almighty power of God taken out of, separated from, the world. Election, in the scripture sense, is God’s doing anything that our merit or power have no part in. The true predestination, or fore-appointment of God is, 1. He that believeth shall be saved from the guilt and power of sin. 2. He that endureth to the end shall be saved eternally. 3. They who receive the precious gift of faith, thereby become the sons of God; and, being sons, they shall receive the Spirit of holiness to walk as Christ also walked.

— Elder Chip Hinds



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Finding the true
liberated life.
by **Christopher L. Scott**

Alexander Supertramp was the name he gave himself. His real name was Chris McCandless. He grew up in a high-achieving family. His father worked for NASA, and his mother worked for Hughes Aircraft. That kind of family created pressure on Alexander to go to college, get good grades, and find a respectable, upper-class job as his parents did.

But after graduating from Emory University in Georgia, Alexander surprised everyone. He sold all his belongings, donated all the money in his savings account to a charity, and hitchhiked across America. He canoed down the Colorado River,

then he hitchhiked to Fairbanks, Alaska. He was done with the pressure from the world — from his parents and professors to get good grades, and from his friends who were getting good jobs out of college. Alexander wanted freedom. And he found it, or so he thought.

New creation

Many of us can relate to the external pressure from the world that Alexander Supertramp felt. It comes from our parents who want to be proud of us, so they push us to get an education and land a good job. It comes from school when every teacher insists that success in life requires that you do well in their specific class. It comes from our jobs where no matter how good our work is, someone always points out how we could have done better.

We, too, search for freedom, but we need a deeper kind. In

the last words of Paul in Galatians, he summarizes for us the freedom we experience because of our faith in Christ.

For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus (Galatians 6:15-17).

Verse 15 is the apex of the final chapter of Galatians. When we are liberated by Christ, we are a new creation by God's transformative grace: "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The new creation has taken the place of the world.

Changed lives

An encouraging part of church ministry is seeing this kind of transformation in people's lives.

A woman named Mona used to attend a class I taught for new believers. Throughout that class I learned how God liberated Mona from twenty years of drug addiction and dysfunctional relationships. Was it because of something she did? Not really. She would tell you that God was the source of her change. God miraculously removed her addiction and provided a way out of her abusive relationships.

Now Mona works a full-time job, takes care of her mom, and lives a peaceful life. Stories like this are encouraging because you see how God changes people when they become a new creation.

When we are liberated by Christ, we experience peace because we are free from the world's pressures on us. No one is telling us what we have to do to gain others' favor. We don't have to put pressure on others to perform at work because of the pressure put on us. We don't have to climb the ladder of success, only to realize it's leaning on the wrong wall.

We have peace because we know where we are going and that God's Spirit walks with us along the way. The path might be difficult and painful, but we know it ends with spending eternity with God.

Persecution

When we are liberated by Christ, we will experience persecution as well as peace. The Greek word Paul uses for *brandmarks* (Galatians 6:17) comes

from a verb that means "to prick, to sting, or to stick." In the first century, slaves and some military soldiers had the name stamp of their owners placed on their bodies. Paul uses this Greek word to describe physical scars that he had on his body (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:4-6; 11:23ff).

Paul saw his scars as proof that he was a true believer. This provides a reminder to believers today that we, too, experience persecution for our faith. The brand marks for us might be co-workers who mock us because of our faith, not getting a promotion because we refuse to cut corners on our job, or a family that ridicules us because of our walk with Christ.

True Liberator

Alexander Supertramp was looking for freedom from the pressures of the world. He thought he found it. While living

alone in the Alaskan wilderness, he ate some bad seeds that prevented his digestive system from absorbing nutrients. He eventually died from starvation. Alexander was looking for that freedom but never truly found it.

As believers, we experience freedom from the world, but that freedom doesn't come because we sell everything, abandon our family, and go live in Alaska (even though that might be appealing at times). It comes from our liberator, Jesus Christ, who died on a cross for us and freed us from the sins that enslaved us. Liberated by the Liberator, we enjoy peace. **BA**

Christopher L. Scott writes from Moses Lake, WA. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.



Vibrant Church Available in Spanish!

The book *Vibrant Church* was written to capture the General Conference's ten-point vision in simple, practical terms. Since its publication in 2019, the book has been warmly received, with one complaint: It isn't available in Spanish!

The Artios Center for Vibrant Leadership is therefore thrilled to announce that the translation into Spanish is now available! Get your copy here: <https://amzn.to/447whKm>.





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by Virginia A. Johnson

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion . . . (Colossians 3:12).

Paul urges the believers in Colossae to clothe themselves with five characteristics of Christ. Compassion heads the list, followed by kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Each one is important for Christians to possess, because that is how the world sees Christ's love in action.

I pray Christ manifests these five characteristics in me, especially active compassion. However, now in my late 70s, it is more difficult to carry out works of compassion. If it's not the aching

body, time constraints or other demands, it's the continuous battle with self-doubts about what, when, where, and how much to give in coming alongside others.

Women in crisis

I found myself in such a position during the COVID pandemic.

Two women, long-term acquaintances of mine, were diagnosed with late-stage cancer. When told this news, I felt not only shock and grief but also distress. I rarely saw or communicated with either woman. How could I show love and concern without overstepping boundaries or causing offense? My husband's precarious health, my physical limitations, plus COVID restrictions shrunk the possibilities of what I could do.

I did the best thing first. I prayed and asked the Lord for

wisdom. Soon a simple idea pushed its way to the front of the fears lined up in my mind: *Send a greeting card to each one.* I did just that.

I wrote a long message in each card and shared how much those women meant to me. I promised to pray for them and their families regularly. As an afterthought, I included my cell phone number. I expected no response because these women were fighting for their lives.

To my surprise, both responded. They made the effort to thank me despite the physical trauma of their rigorous cancer treatments. Encouraged, I sent more cards and brief text messages, always mindful of their physical, emotional, and mental fragility. During the weeks and months that followed, I slowly rebuilt a relationship with each one.

The younger woman's cancer

continued on page 26

David Discovers the Joy of Serving Others



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by **Marcia Sanders**

"Come on, Skippy!" David yelled as he raced across the field. "Let's see if Papa wants to go fishing." David found Papa loading tools into his truck.

"Hey, Papa!" he called. "Let's go catch some of those goggle-eyes in the creek."

"I can't right now," Papa answered. "I'm getting ready to fix Mr. Jack's back porch."

"But he can't pay you for helping. And besides, he's a real grouch — always yelling and complaining about everything!"

"I'm not doing it for money or because he's a close friend," Papa said. "Mr. Jack needs help, so I'm helping him. Do you remember the verse about doing good that pastor used in his sermon last week?"

"I think so," David replied. "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Galatians 6:9, NIV).

Papa smiled. "That's it, and that's what I'm doing — serving God by serving others."

David's shoulders slumped. "But what do you get out of it? And besides, I really wanted you to go fishing with me this afternoon."

"Well, you have a choice then," Papa replied. "Fishing by yourself or helping me work on Mr. Jack's porch. If I finish quickly, maybe we'll have time to fish."

"But I don't know anything about building stuff," David whined.

"Then there's no better time to learn than now."

Papa grabbed some boards, and the two of them took off. He showed David how to pull up the

old, rotted boards and replace them with the new boards he had already cut. Soon Mr. Jack had a solid back porch. He showed his thanks by bringing Papa and David ice-cold lemonade and fresh molasses cookies.

"Wow!" David exclaimed. "These cookies are great!"

Mr. Jack beamed. "I made them myself. Say, I didn't know you were such a good carpenter."

"I'm not," David confessed. "Papa had to show me how."

"No shame in that," Papa said. "We all have to learn sometime. So, Jack, can we help with anything else?"

"No," Mr. Jack answered. "But I'm so thankful that you and David fixed this porch for me. My little granddaughter almost fell through last month, and I've been afraid to let her come over ever since. She's been so disappointed, and my days are lonely without her. But now she can visit and play safely."

"Well, David and I have some serious fishing to do, so we'll say goodbye and head out," Papa said.

David looked at Papa. "Fixing that porch for Mr. Jack made me feel good. I like that the work we did made his home safer for him and his granddaughter. Now I see what God meant about us reaping a reward for what we do for others. It isn't money; it isn't hearing others say thank you. It's knowing that we're being more like Jesus, who was constantly doing things for others."

"You're so right, David."

Marcia Sanders writes from Fort Smith, AR, where she attends the Church of God (Seventh Day) with her husband, Randy.



The Wonderful

Few words in the Christian lexicon evoke a reaction as strong as *works* does, and for good reason. While *work* usually signifies ordinary or skilled labor in the Bible, the plural *works* carries moral and theological overtones, with positive and negative connotations in a variety of usages. Let's examine the range of this important word.

Thy works

Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints (Revelation 15:3, KJV throughout).

The word *works* refers to both human and divine acts, or deeds. We begin our review with the works that matter most: God's! With God as Creator, Redeemer, and Judge, the book of Psalms, for instance, celebrates His great acts repeatedly: "Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done" (40:5; cf. 26:7; 9:1; 26:7; 71:17; 104:24; 143:5).

Wicked works

Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men that work iniquity (Psalm 141:4).

On the other hand, human works are a mixed bag. Sin has corrupted human action. While God's works are praised, the psalmist laments, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works" (14:1; cf. 106:39). Sadly, sin not only defiles human works but also causes us to forget God's works (106:13).

Works of the flesh

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness (Galatians 5:19).

The New Testament shares the Old Testament verdict on human works. Capable of doing good and accountable to God for good, fallen humans are still in bondage to sin, so their works are lawless. Psalms, Proverbs, and Jesus condemn "workers of iniquity" (Psalms 5:5; 6:8; 36:12; Proverbs 10:29; 21:15; Luke 13:27). Paul calls these transgressions "works of darkness," "wicked works," and "works of the flesh" (Romans 13:12; Ephesians 5:11; Colossians 1:21; Galatians 5:19). Hebrews fittingly calls them all "dead works" because they separate us from God and lead to death (6:1; 9:14).

According to his works

For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works (Matthew 16:27).

Created in God's image, we were made to work creatively, like our Creator, and He promised to bless "all the works of thy hands" (Deuteronomy 2:7). Instead, in their freedom, human beings became idolatrous and "worshipped the works of their own hands" (Jeremiah 1:16; cf. 25:6, 7). Because we are free moral agents, God holds us responsible for our actions. This is the basis of His just judgment: "and they were judged every man according to their works" (Revelation 20:13; cf. 2:23; 20:12; Proverbs 24:12; 2 Corinthians 11:15).

World of Works

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Works of the law

Even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified (Galatians 2:16).

Given the human predicament, it is impossible for humans to save themselves. We have no means of justification, righteousness, or life in ourselves. No good works in general, or old covenant works of the law, in particular, can save us (Romans 3:20; 4:2; 9:32; 11:6). Only God can save, and He has in Jesus Christ! “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

Mighty works

Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? (Matthew 13:54).

The Gospels focus on divine rather than human works by celebrating the mighty works of Jesus (Matthew 11:2, 20-23; 14:2; Mark 6:2; Luke 19:37). The works of Christ are not only His marvelous miracles but also “the works which the Father hath given me to finish” (John 5:36; cf. 9:4; 10:25; 14:11). Being divine, Jesus did what only God could do. Being human, He did what no other had done: live in perfect obedience to the Father. His mightiest work of all was to give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). In Christ, the “wonderful works of God” celebrated in the Psalms are revealed as His gift of salvation for creation (Acts 2:11; Matthew 7:22).

Good works

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10).

What of the good works that God always desired for His children? Limited in the flesh apart from God, the believer is now empowered for good works in Christ, through faith and by the Holy Spirit. James says that faith works; Paul says that faith works by love (James 2:14-26; Galatians 5:6). The Lord Jesus says, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father” (Matthew 5:16). The New Testament calls us to be “zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14; 3:8) — not for our salvation but because of it.

The good news about works is that God has and will work and that He is in us, through His Son and by His Spirit, to accomplish His good will.

And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it (Psalm 90:17).

Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily (Colossians 1:29).

— Jason Overman



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Rescued,

by Whaid Rose

In that epic encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3 about what it means to be born again, Jesus explained, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (v. 6).

Every person on the planet has been born of the flesh, but the life of the flesh only produces death and destruction. The only true hope of humanity is new life in Christ, the spiritual life that produces a whole new nature.

Just as children inherit the nature of their parents, so those born of the Spirit inherit a spiritual nature. Just as our human nature determines our appetites and actions, our spiritual nature evokes new tastes and desires manifested in new behaviors.

Peter describes this as becoming “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4) and further states that we have been given everything we need to live out this new life (vv. 2-4). Yet as Nicodemus’ life underscores, being deeply religious doesn’t guarantee our understanding of the spiritual life. Thus the invitation to come and see our new life in Christ.

Spiritual realities

So let’s begin by considering some of the spiritual realities that become true of us the moment we are saved through the profession of faith in Christ.

According to Scripture, we are

- redeemed and forgiven of our sins (Ephesians 1:7);
- brought into spiritual union with Christ (Romans 6:3; Colossians 3:3);
- given a new nature (2 Peter 1:4) and new identity (2 Corinthians 5:17);
- free to live above sin (Romans 6:5-11);
- loved with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3; John 3:16);
- God’s workmanship, created to do good works (Ephesians 2:8-10);
- justified by faith and have peace with God (Romans 5:1);
- given a hope that goes beyond this life (1 Corinthians 15:19);
- gifted to serve as members of Christ’s body (Ephesians 4:7, 8).

And that’s just for starters!

Wise minds have therefore crafted succinct language with which to capture it all. One is rescued, redeemed, and restored, based on Colossians 1:13, 14. Through Christ’s

deliverance, we’ve been rescued “from the power of darkness.” Through His blood, we are redeemed (bought back by the blood of Jesus). Through the forgiveness of sins (set free from guilt and shame), we’re restored to a personal relationship with God through Christ.

Personal responsibilities

But our new life in Christ comes with personal responsibilities. Paul turns the corner in Colossians 3 from talking about putting off the old nature and putting on the new.

For instance, we are free to live above sin, but we don’t always exercise that freedom. The hymn writer therefore reminds us that Jesus “breaks the power of canceled sin,/He sets the prisoner free.” What are canceled sins? Those we’ve been freed from but are still dominating our lives.

So Paul tells the Colossians to exercise their freedom in Christ by putting off the old nature, marked by anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filthy language (v. 8).

As Calvin Miller notes in his book *Into the Depths of God*, “Christians are not to be so much *quitters* as *starters*. They do not endear themselves to God

Redeemed, Restored

because of all they lay aside at conversion. Rather, it is what they take up that catches heaven's esteem."

So Paul quickly moves on to instructions about putting on the new man, which he describes in verses 12-14:

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

As various ones have noted, this is more than an old guy getting a new wardrobe. This passage has in mind a total makeover, experiencing a whole new quality of life.

New life

This affirms the construction of the text in the original Greek. The Greeks had two words for *new*: *neos*, concerning time (young, recent, the latest), and *kainos*, concerning quality (initial, brand new, fresh).

In his command to put on the new man in Colossians 3, Paul

uses *kainos*, suggesting a new way of life. He further describes it in verses 15-17:

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Through supernatural rebirth, we're given a new nature along with everything we need to live out the Christian life. This includes the freedom to cooperate with the sanctifying work of the Spirit in putting off the old nature and putting on the new.

The result is a vibrant, winsome, abundant life that triumphs over the brokenness of this world (2 Corinthians 4:7-9). And it explains the indomitable spirit of first century Christians. Rome had a vested interest in putting Christianity out of business and applied the cruelest forms of persecution possible, but that only served as fuel for

the fire of the gospel. For the forces of darkness cannot prevail against the evidence of a changed life.

This also explains why, long after Jesus died, His disciples willingly accepted martyrdom for the sake of the gospel. The explanation is simple, yet profound: They were compelled and richly supplied by the spiritual realities of their new life in Christ! **BA**

Whaid Rose is dean of the Artios Center for Vibrant Leadership and pastors the Newton, NC CoG7. He and his wife, Marjolene, live in Denver, NC.



Read this issue's
Online Extra . . .

**"Just What I Always
Didn't Want"**

by **Joyce K. Ellis**

Visit **baonline.org**.



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Finding God's purpose for you.

by Shirley Brosius

It didn't happen overnight. Simon Peter took many missteps along the way, but God changed him from an ordinary fisherman into a dynamic preacher. His story inspires us to discern God's purpose for our lives. We can step out in faith, even though we, too, may stumble along the way.

Simon's story

Simon's brother, Andrew, introduced him to Jesus, who immediately dubbed Simon as Cephas, translated "Peter" and meaning "stone" (John 1:42). The brothers were fishermen, and

when Jesus invited them to fish for people, they left everything and followed Him (Luke 5:11).

Peter experienced failures on the road to finding his purpose. Before obeying, he balked when Jesus told him to row out farther and let down his net (v. 5). Then when Jesus invited Peter and two other disciples to join him in Gethsemane as He prayed, they fell sound asleep (Matthew 26:40). And Peter flatly denied any association with Jesus when he was questioned before the Crucifixion (Luke 22:57).

Even so, Peter was the first to profess Christ as the Son of God. And Jesus indicated that "on this rock" — Peter's revelation from God and his confession of Christ — the church would be built (Matthew 16:16-18). After the Holy Spirit fell at Pentecost, this man preached such a powerful sermon that three thousand

people joined the community of believers (Acts 2:14-41).

Peter later wrote to persecuted believers, urging them to keep the faith and use their spiritual gifts: "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10). This apostle had discovered his spiritual gift and his purpose, and he wanted all believers to find their niche in building the kingdom.

My story

The journey to finding purpose takes trial and error and time. My journey began as a young woman teaching an after-school Bible club in my home. Twenty-some neighborhood kids trudged into my living room each Wednesday. After cookies and drinks, the children settled down to sing songs, hear Bible

and missionary stories, and play a game.

In time, I recruited a neighbor to host our meetings, and another woman joined us to tell the missionary story. I treasure the well-rounded Bible education I received in teaching curriculum that led through the Bible over five years. But as a high school teacher, I did not feel I related best to children other than my own.

Then my pastor suggested I earn a master's degree in Christian education and join our church staff. As a director of Christian education, I began teaching adults and doing administrative work to keep a growing congregation learning. There I found my purpose, and I especially enjoyed helping others find theirs.

After ten years, I left that position to devote myself to writing, and after publishing a book, I enjoyed a speaking ministry. Like Peter, my audience, role, and purpose changed through the years.

Spiritual gifts and talents

We find listings of spiritual gifts in Scripture:

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness (Romans 12:6-8).

Online inventories abound

where Christians can discover their spiritual gifts. We may have personal preferences that point to them, or friends might tell us the gifts they see in us. We may discover our gifts through activities we enjoy. For instance, someone who enjoys sharing the gospel may have the gift of evangelism.

Not all spiritual gifts put you in the limelight or even in front of a class of wiggly youngsters. Many devoted Christians serve behind the scenes. Think of the man whose name was Josès but

advisors. Even our workplace training might be utilized for the Lord. Perhaps we've developed computer or technology skills. Christian organizations need people in those fields.

Your purpose may lie in raising godly children or touching your family for God. Christiana Tsai of China led fifty-five relatives to find new life in Christ after she chose to live at her family's apartment complex rather than accept positions in the workplace.

“The journey to finding purpose takes trial and error and time.”

was dubbed by the disciples as Barnabas, meaning “Son of Encouragement.”

We first meet Barnabas in Acts 4:36, 37 when he sold a parcel of land and gave the money to the apostles. He later traveled with Saul to Antioch: “When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord” (Acts 11:23). Barnabas' spiritual gift and purpose was to encourage others.

Then there are our talents. Musical skills and aptitudes can be used within congregations, and people who are good with numbers might serve as financial

Satisfaction

“Pay careful attention to your own work, for then you will get the satisfaction of a job well done, and you won't need to compare yourself to anyone else” (Galatians 6:4, NLT).

Every Christian has a spiritual gift or a talent to offer the Lord that defines our purpose in life. Step out in faith and find it. And in exchange, the Lord will fill your heart with peace, joy, and a deep feeling of satisfaction. **BA**

Shirley Brosius
writes from Millersburg, PA.





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How to be remembered as a
Christian leader.
by **Bob Hostetler**

I picked up the hotel room movie guide and was struck by the tag line for a program titled *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*: “We will be known forever by the tracks we leave behind.”

We don’t often think in such terms. We live our lives from day to day with little or no thought about the tracks we are leaving behind. It’s not a question of whether we leave a legacy or not; the only question is whether it’s a legacy we want to leave behind.

Many people naturally aspire to leadership, to influence, to making a difference in as many lives as possible. But leadership seldom happens naturally. Such a legacy is the product of a leadership perspective, leadership character, and leadership development. All three are on display

in an early Christian letter in the Bible.

Servant perspective

Paul, the great church planter of the first century, wrote the following to his protégé Titus:

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness — in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior (Titus 1:1-3).

Notice Paul’s perspective,

how he identified himself in this letter. He called himself “a servant of God” and “an apostle of Jesus Christ.” To Paul, those two terms were virtually interchangeable.

To be a Christian leader means being a servant. Paul isn’t the only one who serves as our model in this. Other leaders in the early church signed their letters:

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ (James 1:1).

Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:1).

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ (Jude 1:1).

They were all servants first, foremost, and fully. After all, that’s the way Jesus said it should be:

“You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all” (Mark 10:42-44).

This is our perspective. If you would leave a legacy of leadership, be a servant. Swallow your pride. Wash people’s feet. Stoop as low as you can because the most effective leaders are the willingest workers, the ones who show up early and stay late because there’s garbage to take out and coffee to brew.

Strong character

Paul also wrote to Titus:

An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer manages God’s household, he must be blameless — not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so

- Am I teaching and training my young children well?
- Am I pushy and overbearing?
- Is my temper under control?
- Are my appetites under control?
- Am I belligerent?
- Am I honest in my business practices?
- Do I show hospitality to others?
- Am I drawn to good things and positive people?
- Am I self-controlled?
- Am I upright and fair-minded?
- Is my way of life holy and pure?
- Am I disciplined?
- Do I have a grasp of what is biblical, sound doctrine?

“Be a servant. Swallow your pride. Wash people’s feet. Stoop as low as you can.”

that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it (1:6-9).

Paul’s counsel to Titus makes it clear that anyone who wants to leave a legacy of leadership should focus not on building a following but on building strong character and a sturdy reputation. In fact, anyone who would lead others might use Paul’s words as a sort of checklist from time to time:

- Is my conduct blameless?
- Am I faithful to my spouse?

That may seem like an unrealistic standard to some, but it’s not a call to legalistic perfection. It’s a depiction of what a leader looks like so that Titus would be sure to know one when he saw one. And though Paul used male language when he wrote to Titus, it doesn’t mean only men may lead. In other letters, he unabashedly referred to women in leadership, even to one who was “outstanding among the apostles” (Romans 16:7).

If you would leave a legacy

of leadership to those you love — those who come after you, those you may not even know yet — focus on building the kind of character Paul describes to Titus. If you read the checklist above and a few weak areas pop out at you, start focusing your prayers, seek help, and become accountable to someone in those areas, because true leadership is a product of character.

Character development

Paul introduced himself as a servant, described the character of a leader, and then explained

This saying is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth. To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good (Titus 1:10-16).

be a struggle against wonderful, well-intentioned people. It may be a struggle against folks who are “detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good,” or with people who are smarter than we but don’t have all the information we have. It may be a struggle against “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12) or against our own thickheadedness or immaturity. Or it may just be a struggle to develop the skills and training we need.

If you would leave a legacy of leadership, be prepared to struggle with yourself, with others, with God, with circumstances, with your spouse, with your superiors or subordinates, with your need to learn more skills. Be prepared, even, to struggle with the very calling and aspiration to be a leader when it would be easier to just lay low, sit back, and let your legacy be — whatever it’s going to be. This is the way to spiritual development.

But if you are determined to leave a legacy of leadership, begin now — or continue — to cultivate a leader’s perspective, character, and development. This way, years from now — even generations from now — you will be remembered by the tracks you leave behind. **BA**

“ Anyone who aspires to lead should be prepared for a struggle. That’s how we develop.”

why the development of such character is so important in the church:

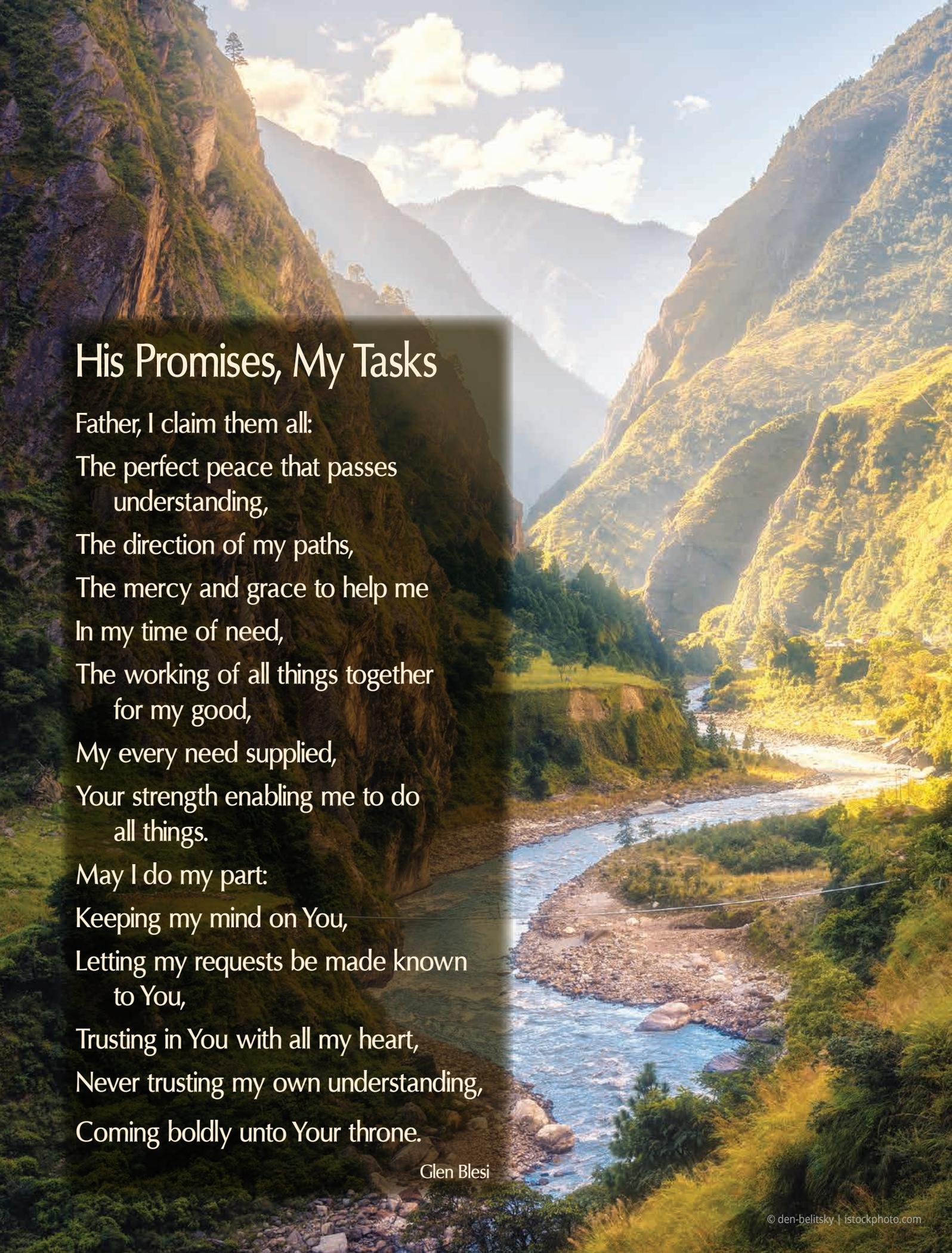
For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach — and that for the sake of dishonest gain. One of Crete’s own prophets has said it: “Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.”

At the time Titus lived and ministered there, Crete was an excessively materialistic, greedy, belligerent, dishonest society. That may not resemble your country, city, or neighborhood. But when it comes to leaving a legacy, it won’t do for us to whitewash ourselves or our situations. Paul’s words suggest that anyone who aspires to lead should be prepared for a struggle. That’s how we develop.

It may be a struggle like Titus faced, against “liars, evil brutes, and lazy gluttons,” or it may

Bob Hostetler writes from Las Vegas, NV. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.





His Promises, My Tasks

Father, I claim them all:

The perfect peace that passes
understanding,

The direction of my paths,

The mercy and grace to help me

In my time of need,

The working of all things together
for my good,

My every need supplied,

Your strength enabling me to do
all things.

May I do my part:

Keeping my mind on You,

Letting my requests be made known
to You,

Trusting in You with all my heart,

Never trusting my own understanding,

Coming boldly unto Your throne.

Glen Blesi

Clothed With Compassion

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moved into a temporary period of stabilization. When she felt able, my daughter and I participated in a FaceTime session with her. We talked about this and that, but we also talked about Christ.

Too soon, my bright, caring, and talented friend elected to go on hospice. She passed away a brief time later.

The second friend has a different story. When they diagnosed her with cancer, the doctors gave her only a few months to live. Early in her struggle, both physical and spiritual, my friend shared with me a turning point in her life.

“One night,” she recalled, “I finally told God, ‘You are God, and I am *not*.’”

She outlived all medical predictions and is still alive more than three years later. After COVID restrictions were lifted, we visited her and her elderly husband in their home. As we drove away, I prayed our presence gave them godly joy, strength, and courage. I continue to keep in contact with this friend.

Two women, two different lives. But through my prayers and trust in His guidance, the Lord gave me a way to show His compassion to each one.

Expanding your cloak

At first, I could not fully grasp the meaning of Paul’s exhortation in Colossians 3:12. It helped

me to mentally visualize “clothe” as being wrapped in a big cloak, spacious and warm. Each of us is to clothe, to cloak, ourselves in these five characteristics at all times — especially, for people like me, compassion. I confess at times I have not abided in His cloak. The result? I take on too much, offend someone, or overlook a work He wants me to do.

Our Lord is gracious. He knows our limits and that it takes a lifetime to grow in wisdom and willingness for Him to use us in reaching out to others. Because of this, I have gleaned four pieces of wisdom from God’s Word, His people, and my life experiences. May they help you.

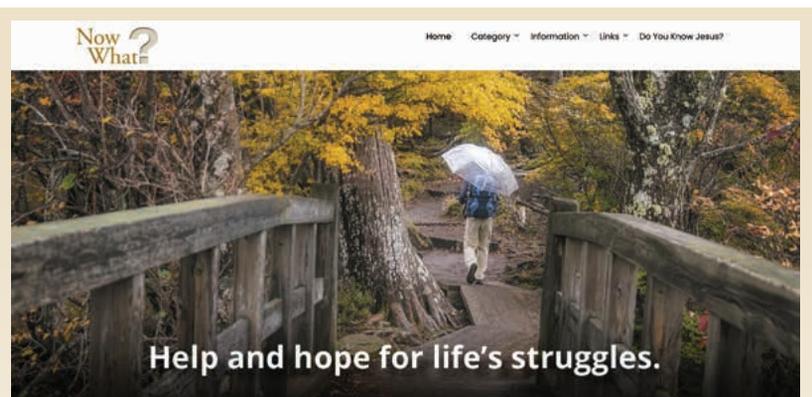
- Ask the Lord to expand your cloak, to have greater compassion (as well as kindness, humility, gentleness, patience) for those hurting or in need.
- When a need is set before

you, bathe it in prayer. Test it against God’s Word so you know what to do and what not to do. Then obey Him.

- Be mindful of personal commitments, your spiritual health, family needs, and personal health limitations.
- Carry thankfulness in your heart, whether He opens big doors, little ones, or none.

When we actively honor our Savior’s command by putting Colossians 3:12 into practice, the Lord does something wonderful. He gives us opportunities to open wide our cloaks and draw hurting people close to our hearts. **BA**

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



Now What? is a collection of personal experience stories, aimed at the unchurched, that address the everyday needs of people. Stories show individuals’ struggles that either led them to faith in Christ or deepened their walk with God. The extensive archive features such topics as homosexuality, grief, depression, mental illness, infertility, eating disorders, and caregiving.

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Looking Back on Our Time in Covington, Kentucky

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How Should We Then Live?

How *Should We Then Live?* is a book written by Christian theologian Francis A. Schaeffer. The *Then* in the title refers to the sad state of Western thought and culture after almost two thousand years of its steady movement away from biblical truth and a Christian worldview. In light of that decline, asked Dr. Schaeffer in 1976, “How should we then live” as twentieth century Christians?

While none of the New Testament epistles have Schaeffer’s title, most of them could. In that case, the *Then* would refer to the new life enjoyed by regenerate believers, once spiritually dead in their sins and trespasses but now, by God’s grace through faith, spiritually alive in Christ. In light of that, asked the New Testament writers, “How should we then live” as children of God in Christ?

The answers to this question, given by God through these writers, are many and varied. Here are just a few examples:

From James: “Everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves” (1:19-22, NASB throughout).

From Peter: “Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former

lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:13-16).

From John: “By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked” (1 John 2:3-6).

From Paul: “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith” (Romans 12:1-3).

How should we then live as individuals saved by God’s grace through faith in Jesus? We should live as Jesus lived: obedient and fully devoted to God and His kingdom.

— Loren Stacy



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