



At the Cross



Inside

2026: The Story of Jesus



ARTICLES

- 4

 Grace and Faith: The Gospel Truth - Part 1 | Loren Stacy
- 7

 A Fitting Memorial | Bob Hostetler
- 8

 Sweat Like Blood | Kelsey Gjesdal
- 10

 The Grit and the Glory | Kathryn E. Darden
- 12

 The Bitter Cup | Ruhama Tewodros Assefa
- 15

 He Wouldn't Come Down | Moises Capetillo
- 16

 The Disciple at the Cross | R. Herbert
- 18

 Weak Flesh, Willing Spirit | Kurt Lang
- 20

 Is Christian Nationalism Biblical? | Tez Brooks
- 30

 Focusing on People | Emily Acker

DEPARTMENTS

- 3 First Word — Love Gave
- 11 Questions & Answers
- 23 David Discovers Sacrifice
- 24 My Favorite Verse
- 25 Poetry — Jewell Johnson
- 27 GC Ministries News
- 28 On Mission — The Pressure of Persecution
- 31 Last Word — His Cross

Scripture quotations

Unless otherwise noted, scripture quotations are taken from the *New King James Version*. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked ESV are from the *ESV® Bible* (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations taken from the (NASB®) *New American Standard Bible®*, Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved. www.lockman.org

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are from the Holy Bible, *New International Version®*, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

King James Version (KJV) Public Domain

Photos

Unless otherwise noted, photos in this issue are from Pixabay.com.

Cover photos: © Thai Noipho | [istockphoto.com](https://www.istockphoto.com)



Find us at baonline.org



"Like" us on Facebook!



publications.cog7.org



A publication of the

Church of God (Seventh Day)

This magazine is published to advocate the Bible, represent the Church, and glorify the God of grace and truth.

Volume 160 • Number 5

© Copyright 2026 by the Church of God (Seventh Day)

All material in this issue is subject to U.S. and international copyright laws and may not be reproduced without prior written approval. Permission may be obtained by writing the editor.

The BIBLE ADVOCATE (ISSN 0746-0104) is published bimonthly by Bible Advocate Press, 330 W. 152nd Ave., Broomfield, CO 80023. Periodicals postage is paid at Broomfield, CO, and at additional offices. Subscription is free to any who ask. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Bible Advocate Press, Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233-0677.

Bible Advocate Press

Jason Overman: Editor, Co-Director

Sherri Langton: Associate Editor

Keith Michalak: Co-Director, graphics

Martha Muffley: Translation

Hope Dais-Clark and Dorothy Nimchuk: Proofing

Subscriptions and Orders

Bible Advocate Press
P.O. Box 33677
Denver, CO 80233-0677
phone: 303/452-7973
fax: 303/452-0657
email: bap.orders@cog7.org

Notice: Send all address changes and other correspondence to the address above.

Publications Agreement No. 40042428

The Bible Advocate Online appears at baonline.org.

Love Gave

Even before I could read, I knew the story of Jesus on the cross. As a child, I sat next to Mom as she sang from her red *Worship In Song* each Sabbath. Old hymns told me the story: what Jesus did and why. “The Old Rugged Cross,” “At Calvary,” “At the Cross,” “Power in the Blood,” “Nothing But the Blood.” . . . They taught and formed me. They still do. In this BA we return to the cross and the climax of the story of Jesus, and one hymn in particular is on my mind.

Tell me the old, old story / Of unseen things above, / Of Jesus and His glory / Of Jesus and His love. Written by Katherine Hankey in 1866, “Tell Me the Old, Old Story” explains the *why* of the cross. Why did the Son suffer it? Why did the Father? In a word — *love*!

Once I was old enough to read it, the Bible confirmed what all the old hymns celebrated: the story of Jesus and His love. A love originating in the Father’s own: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son . . . But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (John 3:16; Romans 5:8).

Tell me the story slowly / That I may take it in — / That wonderful redemption, / God’s remedy for sin. No word is more abused today than *love*, but if the cross is love demonstrated, then real love is sacrificial. It gives all of itself. *Love* and *gave* are inseparable: Jesus “loved me and gave Himself for me. . . . Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her” (Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:25). God gave His Son; Jesus gave Himself. Why? For love. For us. Love’s most costly gift was God’s own life to remedy and redeem us from sin and death.

Tell me the story softly / With earnest tones and grave; / Remember I’m the sinner / Whom Jesus came to save. To save, love gave! That is the old, old story and is as new as ever. And it’s ours to tell.

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

— Jason Overman



Grace and Faith: The Gospel Truth

Part 1

© RomoloTavani | istockphoto.com

Examining the only plan
of salvation.

by Loren Stacy

At some point, we will find ourselves face to face with God. What will we answer if God asks us, “Why should I let you into My kingdom?”

Most people respond, “I’m a good person, certainly better than many people I know.” Religious people tend to add, “I pray to God and go to church [or synagogue, mosque, or temple].” Christians might add, “I invited Jesus into my heart and was baptized!”

The list of reasons goes on and on. Unfortunately, all these answers are wrong and will exclude us from God’s kingdom. Why? Because they indicate that we are trusting in our own efforts, rather than only in the fully sufficient work of Jesus Christ.

Consider what Jesus says in Matthew 7:22, 23:

“On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

Thankfully, there is an answer that will open wide the gates of God’s kingdom to every person who can state it truthfully. It is expressed in Ephesians 2:8, 9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Saved by grace

Let's begin with a close examination of the first sentence in Ephesians 2:8: "For by grace you have been saved through faith."

In this important sentence, the subject is *you*, and the verb phrase is *have been saved*. This is the essence of the sentence: "You have been saved." And notice that the verb phrase is in the passive voice. If it were written in the active voice, it would indicate that the subject has acted: "You have saved yourself." But the passive voice indicates that something or someone has acted upon the subject. In other words, something or someone other than you has saved you.

This raises questions: How have I been saved? If I am not saved by something I did or am doing, what or who saved me?

Two prepositional phrases answer these questions. *By grace* and *through faith* tell us that grace is the cause of our salvation and that faith is the means by which we received our salvation. The full sentence clearly tells us that we have not saved ourselves.

Let's dig deeper. *Grace* means something good we've received from God that we do not deserve. Unmerited favor. The apostle Paul labors the point that anything we have earned, anything we do deserve, cannot be grace: "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace" (Romans 11:6).

So our sentence should be understood as "By God's unmerited, unearned, undeserved favor you have been saved."

Believers, we are not the cause of our salvation. God is!

Through faith

The means through which a true believer receives God's grace is faith. In the New Testament, *faith* is usually translated from the Greek word *pistis*, which means a firm persuasion, an unshakable conviction, regarding God or related spiritual matters. New Testament synonyms are *belief* and *trust*. The faith through which true believers have been saved is absolute trust — trust in God's Word and promises and trust in Jesus Christ and in what He has done.

So God's Word tells us, "For by grace you have been saved through faith." The rest of Ephesians 2:8, 9 tells us even more! "And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

“If I am not saved by something I did or am doing, what or who saved me?”

The first sentence tells us that true believers are not saved because we have earned it or because we deserve it. Our salvation is the result of God's good work, not our good works. But now in this second sentence, Paul hammers that point home with three crushing blows. 1) "And this is not your own doing." 2) "It is the gift of God." 3) "Not a result of works." Why? "So that no one may boast."

God desires and deserves complete credit for our salvation. Why? Because if we have been saved, God and God alone has saved us. No wonder Christ will turn away the many who will call Him "Lord, Lord" and then list their own accomplishments as if they deserve God's kingdom. When we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, we must not do that!

"Well," many people ask, "don't I get credit for my faith, for believing in Christ? I chose Jesus and invited Him into my heart. Lots of people never do that, but I did! Don't I get credit at least for that?"

Actually, no. Look at the two pronouns, *this* and *it*, near the end of verse 8: "this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." What do *this* and *it* refer

to? Grammatically, they refer not only to *grace*, not only to *faith*, but to the whole process of being saved by God's grace through faith. Our salvation isn't something we've done but is God's gift.

Before *for*

There is one final word in Ephesians 2:8, 9 that we need to discuss — the very first word in verse 8: *for*. The verse begins,

“For by grace you have been saved. . . .” Grammatically, *for* serves as a conjunction connecting verses 8-10 to verses 1-7. So let’s look at Ephesians 2:1-7 beginning with verses 1-3:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience — among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

This was our condition before God saved us. We were not spiritually ill; we were spiritually dead! We were incapable of

together with Christ — by grace you have been saved — and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (vv. 4-7).

This is what God did to save us. He raised us up from spiritual death to spiritual life in Christ. Ephesians 2:8, 9 again:

For by grace [God’s grace] you have been saved through faith [a complete trust in Christ that God created within you]. And this [your salvation by God’s grace through a God-given faith] is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Jesus asks Martha, “Do you believe this?” (v. 26).

That is a question we all must answer regarding Ephesians 2:8, 9. Do we believe that our salvation is the gift of God, not the result of our own good works? Or do we trust in good works *in addition* to Christ — in what we do or don’t do, in what we believe or don’t believe?

If we believe we are saved by faith in Christ *and* our good works, we don’t believe Ephesians 2:8, 9. If that is true, we may secretly fear that we may not be saved, that we may not have done enough, that we may not be obedient enough, that we are being weighed in the balances of God’s righteousness and found wanting.

But if we trust in Christ alone and truly believe Ephesians 2:8, 9, our doubts and fears concerning our eternal salvation will be replaced by confidence and joy in Christ.

If God should ask us why He should let us into His eternal kingdom, the correct answer is this: “Only because Jesus has paid the penalty for my sins. I have been saved by Your grace through a complete trust that You have given me in Jesus Christ my Lord.” **BA**

“Do we believe that our salvation is the gift of God, not the result of our own good works?”

changing ourselves, incapable and uninterested in choosing God, following the Evil One and our fallen natures. We were “by nature” children of wrath like the rest of fallen humanity.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive

In these verses, we have the entire gospel message. God has saved us! God has saved us from Himself, by Himself, for Himself. God gets all the glory.

Correct answer

In John 11, we find a conversation between Jesus and Martha. After stating the gospel,

Loren Stacy is the former president of the General Conference. He writes from Lodi, CA, where he lives with his wife, Karen. Scripture quotations are taken from the *English Standard Version*. Part 2 of this article will appear in the November-December issue.





© RomoloTavani | istockphoto.com

by **Bob Hostetler**

At 6:55 on a cold March evening, twelve-year-old Valerie Webb, who lost her father in the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on New York's World Trade Center towers, threw a switch that sent twin towers of light into the sky. The bright beacons, a tribute to the nearly 3,000 lives lost at that site, seemed a fitting memorial for the horrible acts that left a gaping hole in New York's skyline . . . and in America's heart.

When something of that magnitude happens, it's only natural — and right — to want to mark it, to remember it. On the site of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, a moving memorial was erected, with a dramatic arch bearing the precise time (9:01) when the bomb went off and life — for many, young and old — came to a stop. The memorial also includes nine rows of bronze-and-stone chairs representing the 168 people killed that day.

A different kind of memorial has been a sacred spot to Jews for over 2,000 years now, since the Romans invaded Jerusalem in AD 70 and destroyed the temple that had been the center of Jewish life for generations. It's called the Western Wall, a section of foundation stones that supported the temple. And now, since Jerusalem came under Israel's control in 1967, Jews gather every day to pray at that unique place — a memorial of sorts, a place for remembering.

Those memorials are fitting. But Christians all over the world — under thatched roofs in the

Philippine islands, in the shadows of the ancient idols of India, in the cities and villages of Africa, and in the great cathedrals of Europe — observe another, quite different memorial.

Have you ever paused to consider that when Jesus was on earth in a physical body, walking the streets of Galilee and Judea — healing, teaching, laughing, crying — He could have taken His closest followers to Bethlehem and told them, "Make this stable, where I was born, a memorial to Me." He could have said, "Build a shrine to Me here, on the shore of the Jordan, where I was baptized." He could have told them to make Calvary or the empty tomb a memorial.

But He chose none of those things. Instead, on the night of His betrayal and arrest, Jesus celebrated the Passover with His closest friends.

And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God." After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:15-20).

Jesus Christ's sacrificial death, which He endured to satisfy the holiness and justice of God and to

continued on page 9



© DariaZu | istockphoto.com

by Kelsey Gjesdal

And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground (Luke 22:41-44).

I sat in the college study room, desperately trying to focus on the homework I needed to finish that evening while trying to ignore my racing heart. The spiral of what-ifs and never-enoughs pulled my mind far away from the assignments before me.

I was in the middle of my college career during the height of the pandemic, and the stress of that on top of my own personal struggles had reached a boiling point. Anxiety crippled me, and I had just started seeing a counselor to help me work through my struggle. But even though I knew in my head that I could find freedom from the anxiety, at that moment I felt as though I were drowning.

I'm not sure how I came

across the video, but I found myself taking a break to watch a video on Christ's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. What I learned about it changed my understanding of my anxiety forever.

Luke describes Jesus' suffering in Gethsemane with a specific descriptor unique to his Gospel. He says that while Christ prayed, "His sweat became like drops of blood." This is known as hematomatosis, a rare medical condition in which a person sweats blood from the skin without having a cut or injury. According to WebMD, while this condition can be a symptom of bleeding disorders, it can also be caused by extreme fear or anxiety.

Learning this stopped me in

my tracks. Jesus, the holy Son of God, knew what anxiety felt like? Then I read in Hebrews:

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 (4:15).

It blew my mind to realize that my High Priest could sympathize with my weakness, with my anxiety. Yes, Jesus was fully God, but He was also fully man. Jesus experienced physical pain, fatigue, hunger, and thirst. He was hurt by other people, felt emotional pain and mental distress. Jesus humbled Himself to fully embrace our humanity and walk in our shoes because He loves us.

Not only could Jesus relate to my anxiety, but He was also perfect. He did not respond to His anxiety sinfully as I am so prone to do. He did not respond with worrying or grumbling or doubting the Father's goodness. Instead, He prayed. Jesus took His cares to the Father, where He found strength for the trials before Him.

My anxieties are small compared to those Christ experienced anticipating the agonies of the cross before Him. Yet the Lord cares about the burdens on our hearts and minds. He understands our weakness: "For He Himself knows our form; He is mindful that we are nothing but dust" (Psalm 103:14). Jesus has grace for our weaknesses because of His great love for us.

The love of Christ for the Father and for us took Him to the cross. And at the cross, grace poured out to meet our every need. The grace of Christ saves us from our sins, and His grace

sees our tears and binds up our broken hearts and minds. His grace teaches us how to respond to our anxiety rightly.

My healing journey has been a long process, and I am still being sanctified in learning to take my anxieties to the throne of grace instead of letting them spin in my mind. But when anxiety comes knocking, I know I can be unashamed in crying out to my Lord for help, because

He's been there. He knows. And He cares for me. **BA**

Kelsey Gjesdal

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



A Fitting Memorial

continued from page 7

pay the price our sins deserved, and so make it possible for us to obtain forgiveness, cleansing, peace with God, and eternal life — that heroic, selfless, loving act is memorialized not in bronze or stone, not in a painting, not in a statue, but in an act. It is an act Jesus invites every one of His followers to take part in. It is an act that symbolizes His body, broken for you, and His blood, which was poured out for you.

It's a fitting memorial. Jesus,

who came to die so that we might live, asked us to remember Him in a living, active way, not by erecting a stone monument or shrine . . . but by what we do when we gather for worship. "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). **BA**

Bob Hostetler

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



Online Extras

If you're enjoying the content of the September-October issue, be sure to read our Online Extras. The stories tell

of God's faithfulness amid tragedy and a woman's faithfulness to God that set an example for her young granddaughter.



Visit baonline.org.



by Kathryn E. Darden

I have recently found myself captivated by the story of Jesus in Gethsemane: the arrest of our Savior and the strange, desperate predicament of His followers. When I think of the garden and the tomb, I don't see a fable, nor do I envision stained glass images. I see grit in the stone and exhaustion and fear in the eyes of the disciples and of the women who followed Jesus. It isn't hard for me to put myself in their sandals — to feel the confusion, the bewilderment, and the biting fear that defined the hours between His arrest and His resurrection.

I can easily visualize the transition from triumph to terror. The disciples and women had followed a Man they believed would break the chains of Rome. They had eaten the bread and fish He handed to a massive crowd from a small boy's basket. They had seen His miracles and heard His teachings, but suddenly, the momentum comes to a shrieking halt. The impossible happens: Jesus is arrested and taken to a sham trial in the middle of the night, in direct violation of Jewish law.

Suddenly, the world turns. People are pointing. "Weren't you one of them?"

I can easily imagine that frantic feeling of wanting to put distance between myself and the escalating danger — the desire to get out of Jerusalem and go home. The Scriptures tell us that in that moment of crisis, the human instinct to survive takes over: "Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled" (Matthew 26:56).

I understand that desire to run while recognizing that flight might only make me look more guilty. I can feel the struggle of trying to blend in with the surroundings, hoping to become invisible as the situation becomes life-threatening. I think specifically

of Peter, who had so boldly claimed he would never deny the Lord, only to be caught in that same paralyzing fear.

Peter follows Jesus "afar off" (v. 58), then sits in the courtyard of the high priest, trying to stay close enough to see the end but far enough to stay safe. I know that "afar off" space. It is the gray area where my love for the Lord clashes with my genuine human fear of the world's hatred.

When the servant points and asks, "Weren't you with Him?" wouldn't I, in that moment of raw panic, say, "I don't know Him"?

The turning point for me isn't the denial itself but the moment that follows: "And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter" (Luke 22:61). In my mind's eye, I see that gaze — not one of condemnation but of a heartbreaking, knowing love. I believe in that moment, had I been standing there, my own heart would have broken just as Peter's does. Like him, I would have been driven out into the night to weep bitterly.

And aren't there times when my own heart does break over some hurt I have caused or some kindness I neglected when remembered through the gaze of my Savior?

It is easy to skip ahead to the joy of the Resurrection, but we must first sit in the grit, humiliation, and fear of those three days and three nights. I have to acknowledge that my faith is carried in "earthen vessels" — fragile, prone to fear, and desperately in need of the Man who didn't run when we did. **BA**

Kathryn E. Darden writes from Nashville, TN. Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version.



Questions & Answers



I know Jesus died for my sins, but why did He have to die? Couldn't God have just forgiven sinful humanity?

The song "In Christ Alone," by Keith and Kristyn Getty, contains one stanza that speaks to your question. It says that Jesus' death on the cross for our sins satisfied the wrath of God.

Sometimes we forget about that wrath.

The simplest answer as to why Jesus had to die for our sins is that the only sovereign God (Psalm 115:3; Isaiah 46:9, 10; Ephesians 1:11) decreed it in His Word. The early believers understood this divine plan. In Acts 4, Peter and John quote Psalm 2 and interpret it as referring to Jesus (vv. 25-28). They see that God uses even the wicked who are against Him to accomplish His will. We cannot stop God from completing His plan.

While God's ways are not our ways and are often mysterious (Isaiah 55:8, 9), God has clearly revealed in Scripture *why* Jesus' death was necessary for forgiveness and salvation. The New Testament emphasizes two main concepts when addressing the meaning of the cross of Christ: satisfying a legal penalty for sin and achieving a cosmic victory over evil (1 Corinthians 15:54-57; Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14, 15; 1 John 3:8). While both truths require the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ in doing for us what we could not do for ourselves (overcome sin and death), we focus here on the first, called *penal substitutionary atonement*.

Humanity often fails to understand the negative impact of even one sin on God's creation.

God, His creation, and His law that governs it are perfect, aside from sin (Romans 8:20-23). To restore God's creation requires payment of a penalty and a new creation. The penalty is death (Romans 6:23; James 1:14, 15; Ezekiel 18:20; Romans 5:12-21). All creation must die and be recreated to enter eternity (Matthew 24:35; Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1). Jesus, as the divine Son and representative Human, accomplished both in His death and resurrection: "Jesus our Lord . . . was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:24, 25).

Jesus Christ paid the penalty as a substitute sacrifice for humanity to satisfy God's just wrath on sin (Romans 3:25; cf. 1 John 2:2; 4:10). In His body, sin was punished (Romans 8:3; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17). Isaiah 53 already prophesied God's atoning plan in detail.

My nine-year-old granddaughter once asked, "Why is there so much bloodshed in the Bible?" Her mother read her Hebrews 9:22: "And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission." Later, my daughter and I talked about the mystery of salvation through Christ's atonement. Humanity's problem is that sin cannot abide before a holy God. The cross was God's loving plan to satisfy His own mercy *and* holiness and to resolve the problem of sin once and for all. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22).

The cross shows the depth of God's love and the weighty cost of forgiveness — the only cure for sinful humanity.

— Elder Chip Hinds



The Bitter Cup

© Thai Noipho | istockphoto.com

The drink and the
taste that stay.

by **Ruhama Tewodros Assefa**

Some tastes stay with a person long after they are swallowed.

I was the kind of daughter who always refused to drink homemade remedies. In our country, before running to the pharmacy, parents — and especially grandmothers — often prepare remedies for stomachaches, common colds, headaches, and many other illnesses. But for me, even the smell of homemade remedies was enough to make me irritated. I refused to drink them whenever I could.

Bitter remedies have long been part of traditional healing in many homes across Ethiopia and other parts of Africa. Most children resist them as I did. Faces tighten after the first swallow; the body naturally rejects bitterness. Yet as we grow older, many of us learn to drink them with the hope of being healed.

Sometimes my grandmother would stand patiently beside me until I finally gave in. She knew the bitterness would last only a moment, but the healing would remain much longer. If someone had asked little Ruhama whether she wanted her grandmother to drink the bitter medicine instead so she could still be healed, there would have been no happier child than I. No bitter taste. No suffering. Just healing.

Those moments with my

grandmother always make me think about how bitter the cup must have been that Jesus had to drink for my healing. He endured the unimaginable bitterness, while the healing was handed freely to me.

And perhaps that is what moves me so deeply about the cross. Before the cross stood on Golgotha, before nails pierced flesh and crowds shouted in mockery, there was a garden and there was a cup.

Jesus called it “this cup.”

“O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39).

He did not walk toward suffering carelessly; He felt the weight of what was coming. Yet He still chose obedience out of love.

The cup passed

The night began quietly around a table. Bread was broken. Wine was shared. Jesus lifted the cup and spoke of a covenant in His blood, though His blood had not yet fallen to the ground.

Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (vv. 27, 28).

The disciples drank the symbol. Christ would soon drink the reality.

Even at that sacred table, betrayal sat close enough to eat beside Him. "Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me" (Psalm 41:9).

Judas received bread from the hands of Christ while already walking toward silver pieces and darkness. Some betrayals begin long before the kiss.

What amazes me most is that Jesus already knew everything that would happen. He knew Judas would betray Him. He knew Peter would deny Him. Yet He still washed their feet and loved them until the very end.

That kind of love is difficult for human hearts to understand.

The "yes" of love

Gethsemane may be one of the most painful places in Scripture because it reveals the full humanity of Christ. We often imagine Him moving toward the cross untouched by fear, but the garden tells another story. He was sorrowful. Troubled. Sweating beneath the crushing weight approaching Him.

"My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death" (Matthew 26:38).

This was not weakness; this was love counting the cost: "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me" (Luke 22:42). The words are painfully human. Every instinct within the body pulls away from suffering. We resist bitterness naturally. The soul trembles before pain.

Yet in the silence of that garden, Jesus reached for the cup willingly. "Nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done" (v. 42).

Before nails pierced His hands, surrender pierced His heart.

The cross did not begin at Golgotha. It began in Gethsemane, where love said yes before the soldiers ever arrived.

“The cross did not begin at Golgotha.
It began in Gethsemane.”

Jesus would not only endure physical suffering but also carry the burden of sin, judgment, and separation.

And still He stayed; He did not run from us.

Drinking the whole cup

Then came the public suffering. The Son of God was mocked by people He himself had formed from dust. What hurts me most is knowing He suffered for

the very ones who rejected Him and chose the cross for Him.

A crown of thorns pressed into His head while soldiers laughed at the idea of a suffering King.

But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:5).

Humanity watched salvation bleed but did not recognize Him. The crowds saw a criminal hanging between criminals. Heaven saw the Lamb of God carrying the sin of the world (John 1:29).

The suffering was physical, yes, but it was also deeper than human language can express: rejection, abandonment, the

weight of sin, and the silence of heaven.

The bitter cup was not sipped partially; Christ drained it fully.

While reading about Jewish traditions, I came across the "Dayenu" song, which means "It would have been enough." That phrase stayed with me because it echoed the depth of Christ's suffering. Thinking about the bitter cup He carried, I found myself reflecting:

If betrayal had been the only wound, it would have been enough.

If the scourging had been the final pain, it would have been enough.

If the nails had been the last suffering, it would have been enough.

Yet He drank deeper still, to the point of feeling forsaken by His own Father (Matthew 27:46). The One who had always known perfect fellowship with the Father entered darkness for our sake.

Redemption unfolded

As the hours passed, Roman soldiers prepared to hasten death by breaking the legs of those

Then a spear pierced His side, and another prophecy came alive before human eyes: "They shall look on Me whom they pierced" (Zechariah 12:10).

What looked like defeat was actually redemption unfolding exactly as God promised.

Silence

Then came the silence.

The body of Jesus was wrapped carefully and carried into the tomb. Stone sealed the entrance. The disciples sat, crushed beneath grief and confusion.

The bitter cup had been emptied. Or so it seemed.

There is something heavy about the burial story because it

surface of despair. Sometimes healing begins in places that look like endings.

From cup to crown

The bitterness of the Passion was not meaningless pain. It became healing for the world.

Humanity could not drink the cup of judgment and survive. So Christ lifted it Himself. And from that bitter cup came forgiveness, reconciliation, and life. "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

By His wounds we are healed.

Years later, the risen Christ spoke to the suffering church in Smyrna, a city whose name carried the idea of myrrh, a fragrance released when crushed: "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

The One who once accepted the bitter cup now offers a crown instead. The bitterness was never the end of the story. Neither was the tomb: "He is not here; for He is risen, as He said" (Matthew 28:6).

At the cross, suffering and love met together. Justice and mercy touched. The darkest hour of human history became the doorway of redemption.

And every time we remember the cross, we remember this truth: The bitter cup He drank became the life we now receive.

BA

“The bitterness of the Passion was not meaningless pain. It became healing for the world.”

hanging on crosses. But when they came to Jesus, they found that He had already died. Not one of His bones was broken (John 19:36).

This was not accidental. Long before Golgotha, it had been commanded that the Passover lamb remain unbroken (Exodus 12:46). Christ, our Passover Lamb, had been sacrificed (1 Corinthians 5:7).

feels familiar to human sorrow. We know what it means to sit beside what appears lost. We know the silence that follows heartbreak.

Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb . . . (John 19:41).

The disciples did not yet know that resurrection was already moving quietly beneath the

Ruhama Tewodros Assefa
writes from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.



He Wouldn't Come Down

© artplus | istockphoto.com

by Moises Capetillo

"You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matthew 27:40).

The people yelled and mocked our Savior. Their words were meant to cut. They came from people passing by Calvary, shaking their heads and taunting the suffering Savior. The chief priests, scribes, and elders joined in: "He saved others; Himself He cannot save" (v. 42).

To them, the proof of Jesus' identity would have been escape. If He really was the Son of God, He could come down. He could silence His enemies. He could turn shame into glory in a moment. He could save Himself.

But they did not understand the cross.

Jesus did not stay on the cross because He was powerless. He stayed because He was obedient. He stayed because He loved us. He stayed because the salvation of the world did not require a Savior who would come down but a Savior who would endure until the work was finished. Furthermore, He stayed on the cross because love is the strongest demonstration of power.

The great wonder of Calvary is not that Jesus could have come down from the cross. The wonder is that He did not.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus made it clear that His death would not be an accident or a defeat. It would not be the tragic ending of a good teacher's life. He said, "I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself" (John 10:17, 18).

This means the cross was not the place where Jesus lost control. It was the place where His obedience was fully revealed. The cross was where Jesus became the obedient Son, obeying the Father above all others.

Before the nails pierced His hands, Jesus had already surrendered His will. In Gethsemane He prayed, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39). The agony was real. The sorrow was deep. The cup was bitter. Still, the Son gave Himself completely to the will of the Father.

By the time Jesus stood before His accusers, the decision had already been made. He would not defend Himself to avoid the cross. He would not call legions of angels to rescue Him. He would not answer hatred with hatred. He would obey.

That is why the mockery at the cross is so painful and so revealing: "He saved others; Himself He cannot save." The people meant it as an insult. But without knowing it, they were speaking a deep truth. If Jesus had saved Himself, He could not have saved us.

He could have come down. But love held Him there.

The nails were real. The pain was real. The cruelty was real. But nails alone did not keep the Son of God on the cross. Love did. Obedience did. Mercy did. The joy set before Him did. Hebrews 12:2 says that Jesus, "for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame."

What joy could be found in such suffering? The joy that Jesus saw beyond the cross. He saw sinners reconciled to God. He saw enemies made into friends. He saw death defeated. He saw the

continued on page 26

Exploring John's unique testimony.

by R. Herbert

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus, and each gives its own details regarding these events. But the Gospel of John provides many unique insights into what occurred leading up to the death of Christ, with its whole second half (chapters 13-21) focusing on these things. This is because John was evidently the only disciple present at portions of Jesus' trial (18:15-40) and was actually present at the foot of the cross (19:35).

Arrest

One of the most distinctive aspects of John's Gospel is the long, detailed account of Jesus' farewell discourse and prayer on the evening of His arrest. But John also gives us a distinctive fact regarding the arrest itself.

John alone tells us that when those sent to arrest Jesus found Him with His disciples in Gethsemane, they asked which one was Jesus. Most English translations say that when He answered, "I am he," the soldiers and Jewish leaders fell backward in shock (18:6). But the English word *he* is added, and the words *I am* (*ego eimi* in Greek) directly echo the name of God that was revealed to Moses (Exodus 3:14).

These words Jesus spoke are the culmination of seven instances (John 4:26; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5, 8) in which

Jesus used that exact phrase *I am*. (These are in addition to the seven statements John records in which Jesus affirmed such things as "I am the Bread of life," etc.). *I am* is central to the primary theme of John's Gospel regarding the divine nature of Jesus.

Trial

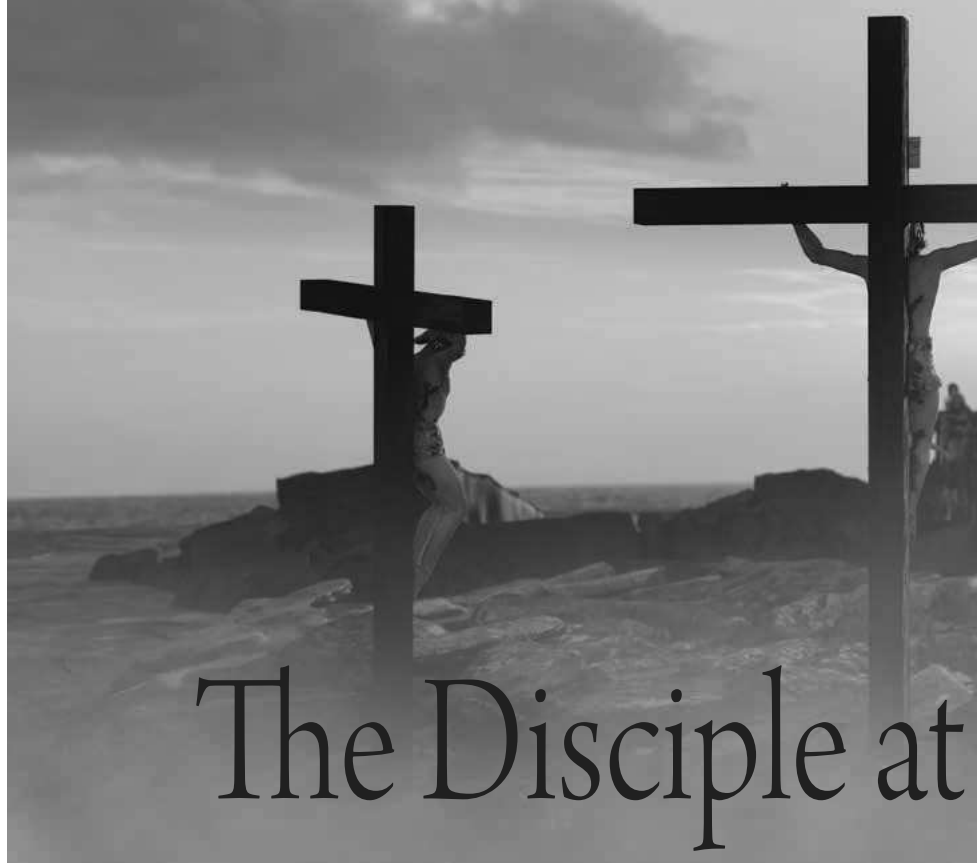
Because John's family apparently had connections with the high priest, John could enter the high priest's home (18:15) and apparently witnessed parts of Jesus' trial. John exhibits a particular interest in recording Jesus' important conversations with individuals (Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, and others), rather than His public teaching of the crowds. So the apostle uniquely records Jesus' discussions with the high priest and with the Roman governor, Pilate.

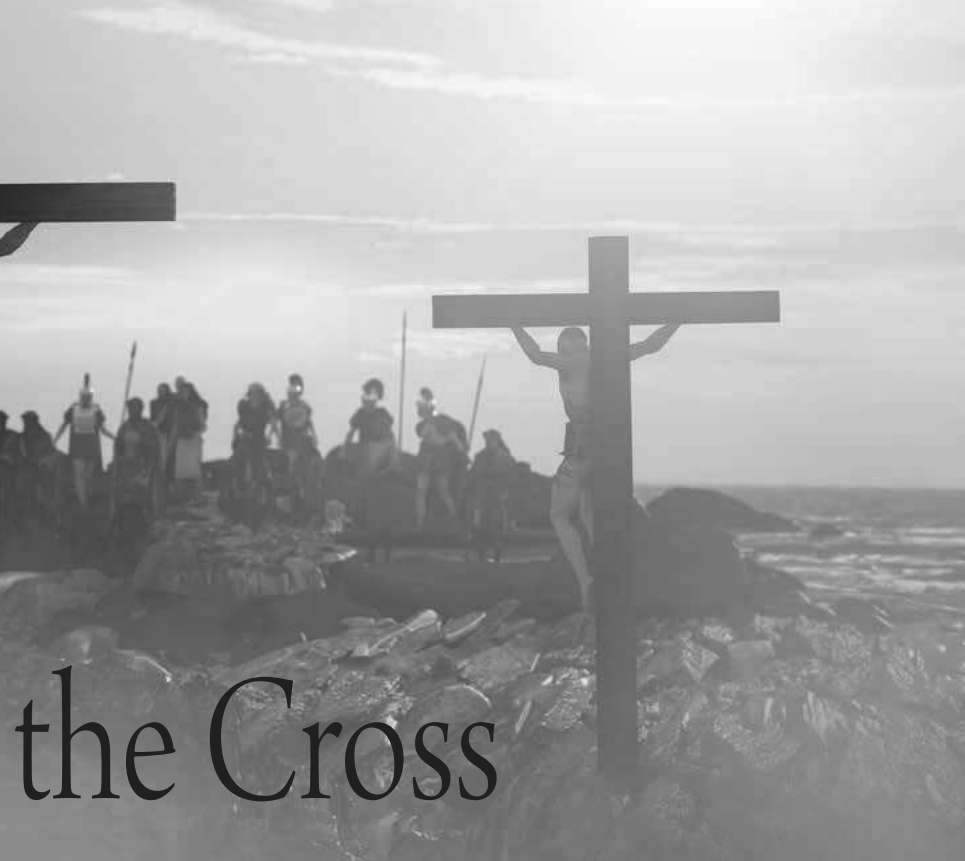
John also shows us an interesting and easily missed aspect of Jesus' trial. The Synoptic Gospels

tell us that Jesus was accused of many things (Matthew 27:13, 14; Mark 15:3, 4; Luke 23:14). But John tells us (18:29, 30) that when Pilate asked what charges were being brought against Jesus, the chief priests answered that He was a malefactor (KJV), an evil doer (ESV), or criminal (NIV). In legal charges, the Greek word used by John (*kakopoios*) frequently had the specific meaning of "magician" or "sorcerer." Both the Jews and Romans had laws with severe penalties for doing works of magic or sorcery, and the religious authorities apparently used this as their initial accusation regarding Jesus' miracles. When Pilate seemed to have pushed this initial charge aside, Jesus was then accused of something the Roman governor could not ignore.

King of the Jews

That one charge was treason — that Jesus was a leader in





© Denis-Art | istockphoto.com

the Cross

opposition to the authority of the emperor. John tells us more regarding this accusation than any other Gospel writer. He shows that when Pilate asked Jesus about His kingship, Jesus replied, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36), to which Pilate responded, “You are a king, then!” (v. 37).

Perhaps trying to placate the Jews’ anger, Pilate then allowed his soldiers to beat Jesus, to crown Him with thorns and cover Him in a purple robe symbolizing royalty (19:2, 3).

But although Pilate was evidently satisfied that Jesus posed no real threat to Rome (18:38), the Jewish leaders insisted “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar” (19:12). This, John tells us, was the pivotal point that led Pilate to allow Jesus to be crucified.

All the Gospels mention the sign Pilate affixed to Jesus’ cross, but John gives us the fullest

wording of the sign (“Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews”). Only he tells us that the sign was written in Hebrew (Aramaic), Latin, and Greek and that the Jews urged Pilate to change the wording, but he refused (vv. 20-22).

The cross

John’s presence at Jesus’ trial and condemnation meant that he was the only Gospel writer to record that Jesus bore His cross Himself at the beginning of the journey to Golgotha (19:17). It was only later that Simon of Cyrene was pressed into carrying the cross the final part of the way. And John’s presence at the foot of the cross also allowed him to be aware of a number of things that took place there.

One of them, John comments, is that, of all the disciples (in addition to him), only four women stood there: “Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his

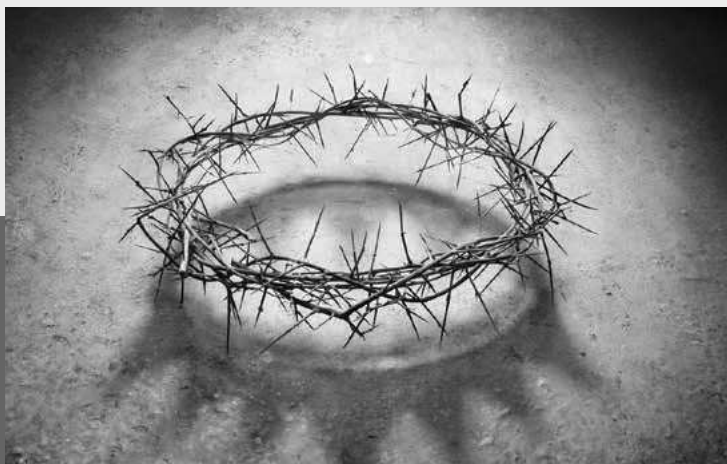
mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene” (19:25). John also records the incredible love Jesus showed — despite the agony of His crucifixion — by instructing John to take His mother into his home to look after her (vv. 26, 27). In addition to some of the last words of Jesus not found in the other Gospels, John alone preserves Jesus’ great final cry of victory: “It is finished!” (v. 30).

John apparently stayed at the cross for some time after the death of Jesus, because he is the only one who tells us that the soldiers later broke the legs of the other two men crucified with Him, but not those of Jesus. Instead, John tells us “one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear” (v. 34) so that the scriptures would be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken” and “They will look on the one they have pierced” (vv. 36, 37).

Human and Divine

John fills his Gospel with unique details like those we have seen in this article. Nowhere is this clearer than in his extended narrative of the arrest, trial, and death of Jesus. Were it not for John, we would not have an actual eyewitness account of much of what occurred leading up to and at the cross. And we would see far less of both the humanity and divinity of Jesus’ supreme sacrifice. **BA**

R. Herbert (a pen name) holds a doctorate in biblical studies and ancient Near Eastern languages and archaeology. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise noted.



© RomoloTavani | istockphoto.com

■ [Leadership]

Weak Flesh,

by Kurt Lang

One need not look far through Scripture to discover perhaps the greatest truth regarding humanity: A war rages within our souls. The spirit within battles the flesh without, and a truce is not in the cards. “Wretched man that I am!” Paul writes. “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24). Victory can be achieved, yet not in the way we would ever imagine.

Enter Jesus. He is about to go to the cross for a crime He did not commit. The choice before Him will seal the victory over our raging internal war. It all comes down to this: The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak (Mark 14:38).

Though Jesus was fully God, He was also fully human, experiencing all the emotion and physical aspects every human succumbs to. Jesus was tempted just as we all are, yet He never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). Sin, as described here, is giving in to the temptation produced by our physical bodies to serve and prioritize self over God.

Sin is also about protecting ourselves from physical pain, rejection, fear, and failure. We run from pain and promote pleasure. This is the desire of the flesh: self-preservation.

Our example

Christ’s journey leading up to the cross encapsulates this harsh reality, even for the perfect One. Was the Christ supposed to give us an example of how to be led by the Spirit, completely obedient to the Father? Certainly. Yet to do so, He also had to give us a picture of the battle we face in our greatest temptation: the leading of the flesh.

“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39). Self-preservation and protecting the flesh from pain and death were certainly on His mind. He even understood the possibility of calling upon legions of angels who would have gladly come to rescue Him (v. 53).

And all the while this battle was working itself out in our Messiah. He had to bear utter pain and disappointment as His follower and close friend, Peter,

failed miserably in the same struggle. Three times. In Jesus’ presence (Mark 14:66-72).

Both Peter and Jesus faced physical pain, fear, and rejection. Peter had a willing spirit, even proclaiming he would die for Jesus (v. 31). But the weakness of his temporary flesh was stronger than his desire to rise above it. Jesus, on the other hand, realized the need to “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (v. 38).

Life in the Spirit

Jesus won the spirit vs. flesh battle, finding life over death. Ironical, isn’t it, that the desire to live in the flesh is opposite of the death it actually brings? Life is in the Spirit — literally. Jesus promised to send to us the Holy Spirit, the very Spirit that raised Christ from the dead, who can easily do the same thing in you and me (Romans 8:9-11). So lest we think it unfair that Jesus was not merely human but God in the flesh, let us remind ourselves that the power of God lives in us as well through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Willing Spirit

The cross tells the story. Christ died in the flesh, yet was raised to life eternal in the Spirit. Because of the cross, this is the reality for us as well. Is the Spirit stronger than the weakness of our flesh? He can be, but we must choose Him.

Paul spoke of disciplining his body and keeping it under control because if he failed to do so, he would be disqualified to receive the grace he so eloquently preached to others (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). His flesh was weak, but the willingness of his spirit was stronger.

Missionary Jim Elliott made famous this quote: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." We cannot keep our flesh, but in Christ, we cannot lose our spirit. The fool is the one who seeks to preserve the flesh at the cost of giving up the spirit.

Conquering the flesh

How might you rank on the foolishness scale? Is your ability to overcome the flesh weak? What vices and bad habits currently characterize your life? Why does it seem you continue to fail at separating them from

your life? Would you be like Peter, who kept going back to the denial to preserve the flesh, only to find out he wasn't preserving anything at all? Or would you be like Jesus, as described by the writer of Hebrews:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted (12:1-3).

There is joy in conquering the flesh by the power of the Spirit! But this joy can happen only as you kneel at the cross.

Thank You, Jesus, for enduring the cross and all its shame. Your reward is the kingdom. You don't need to remind me that in this world and in the flesh, I will have trouble. But please give me

the strength of the cross, and empower me every day to walk in it — the power that is mine because You have overcome the world (John 16:33).

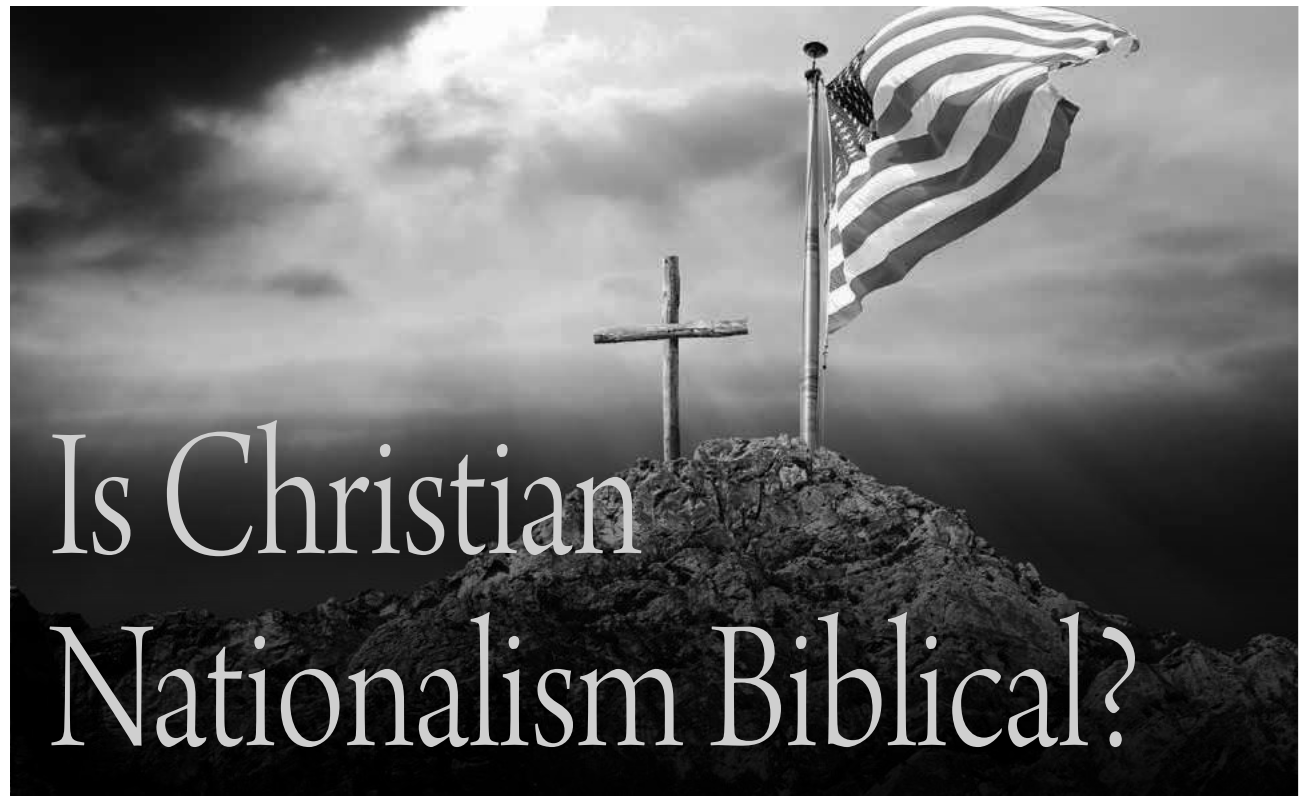
Jesus set the example for us. Now we can go and do likewise.

BA

Kurt Lang pastors the Eugene, OR, congregation and is the English assistant dean of Academic Affairs at Artios Christian College. Scripture quotations are taken from the *English Standard Version*.



Want to read more articles like this one from Artios writers? Go to the Leadership archive (under Partners) at baonline.org.



© jokerpro | istockphoto.com

Finding the right balance as citizens of two kingdoms.

by Tez Brooks

Christians often champion two causes: following the Carpenter with a cross and cheering the candidate with a crown. But what if building God's kingdom through politics becomes the thing that keeps us from it?

The phrase *Christian nationalist* is thrown around a lot. Do we understand it? Living in a Christian nation sounds ideal, but is it? Perhaps the bold belief for God's kingdom isn't fought at the polls but in the human heart.

Lately I have pondered that if Jesus left His throne to become a fragile, ordinary man, then humility isn't just something He asks of us; He modeled it.

Consider this: The Creator of galaxies wrapped Himself in skin, walked dusty roads, and ate meals with fishermen. That means our calling isn't to climb higher but to bow lower. Our hope is Jesus, nothing else.

Am I suggesting that embracing adversity means we should cower and tolerate mistreatment? No, we should stand for what's right, even in the face of persecution. What outspoken Christians do is inspiring to me and millions of others. But there is a big difference between a nationalist and a Christian nationalist.

What does it mean?

Nationalism is an ideology centered on patriotism and loyalty, but Christian nationalism is a specific form of religious dominance that advocates fusing

Christian and national identities. A key difference is the role of religion: While a nationalist merely loves his country, a Christian nationalist believes the nation should be defined by and be governed according to religious principles, much like many Islamic leaders.

While this might sound nice for us believers, we must understand that Christ's kingdom doesn't come through voting or military victories. It doesn't grow by legislating morality or seizing political office. In fact, Jesus told His disciples the opposite: The greatest in His kingdom will be the servant of all. He flipped the script. The first will be last, the last will be first.

So we should pause when we hear teachings about Christian dominionism — to establish God's rule on earth. It may sound bold, even patriotic. But

Scripture instructs being salt and light to influence. The Bible consistently shows us that Jesus initiated His kingdom and said it's like a mustard seed that grows. Christ will complete His kingdom at His second coming.

Until then, we are living in the *now* and the *not yet*, meaning the kingdom is already here in our hearts (Luke 17:20, 21), not a physical territory. But it can't be finalized until Christ comes to reign. Until then, we are to serve, not dominate.

Can we vote against ungodly laws? Of course, and we should. We are not meant to passively embrace every pagan legislation in the name of love and acceptance. But we also don't want to create a nation that fines or imprisons those who don't obey God — that's what some Middle Eastern nations do. It's about a heart change (being born again), not Christian nationalism.

Without the gospel and salvation, we are merely asking the nation to mimic the children of God rather than become children of God. When we replace heart transformation with demands for morality, we undermine the gospel. It's a foreign gospel. No one is getting saved; they are just forced to comply.

Not of this world

Pilate once asked Jesus if He was a king. If there was ever a moment for Jesus to rally His followers and declare an earthly revolution, this was it. Instead, He answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight . . . but now My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36).

When the Pharisees asked Him when this kingdom would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20, 21).

These verses dismantle the domineering dream of ushering in God's reign on earth through policies or political systems that point to us rather than to Christ. If Jesus wanted His followers to seize control, He would have said so then. Instead, He pointed away from earthly kingdoms and toward a spiritual one. You can't map it on a globe. You can't point to a Capitol building and say, "There it is." The kingdom is

authority except from God" (Romans 13:1).

Keep in mind Paul wrote this under Nero, a violent persecutor of Christians. Yet he never told believers to overthrow the empire. His counsel was to respect leaders unless they directly opposed God's commands. That's when we can stand up and refuse to comply. That's an individual act we are to do, to show our devotion to God's precepts.

We are to fear God more than human authorities, and if this leads to a quiet and peaceful disobedience, so be it. But be prepared to accept the consequences of your disobedience and suffer in the name of Christ. Yes, we do need to get godly



© Denisfilm | istockphoto.com

spiritual; it begins in the hearts of believers.

In the Old Testament, Israel was a theocracy ruled directly by God. But when Jesus came, everything shifted. Under the new covenant, believers live under earthly governments. Paul told the church in Rome, "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no

leaders into places of high authority, not to create a bubble of moral uprightness but to be a light to the world that points to Jesus as the answer.

What Jesus commanded

Before ascending to heaven, Jesus made His mission clear: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing

them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19, 20).

In full-time ministry for the past twenty-four years, I'm reminded daily that our mission is disciple-making, not empire-building. Paul echoed this when he urged Timothy, "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:2). Notice the verbs: *preach, teach, baptize, love, serve*.

You won't find *seize power*



anywhere in Jesus' commands. When asked about paying taxes, Jesus answered, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17). This was a dividing line. Governments belong to this world, but God's kingdom is eternal.

I try to live this out well by paying my taxes and respecting the law, but my hope isn't in Washington DC, nor is it in my

ministry efforts. It's in Christ. I'm a citizen of two kingdoms, but I know which one is more important and eternal.

Dangers to avoid

Christian nationalism is seductive because it promises security, power, and influence. But it reduces the gospel to a political ideology. While it is a noble cause, it implies that faith is only real if it dominates. It is salvation by another means than Christ.

A fellow believer once confessed to me that he felt hopeless because his candidate lost an election. He said, "I just don't see how Christianity can sur-

vive now." That concerned me because the gospel has thrived under emperors, dictators, monarchies, democracies — every government system imaginable. But Christians are still around today — even after several attempts of mass genocide. That's because Jesus doesn't need a president or a king to validate His kingdom. He already reigns.

The early church had no voting rights, no lobbyists, no political parties. Yet their influence

transformed the Roman Empire with radical love. The Old Testament also records kindness from God's people when cruelty was the norm. Love your neighbor. Pray with a co-worker. Forgive those who wrong you. Your quiet faithfulness speaks louder than any political rally.

Citizens of two worlds

Paul says, "Our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20). We still vote, pay taxes, and pray for leaders, but our ultimate allegiance is to Christ.

I think of some of the school teachers I know. They don't always agree with district policies, but they view the classroom as their mission field. They pray over the students' desks before they arrive. These teachers offer encouragement and model Christ's love. Their influence doesn't come from power — it comes from God's presence in their lives.

Christian dominion isn't biblical. The gospel doesn't need government endorsement or power to thrive. The teachings of Jesus point us to humility, servanthood, and spiritual transformation. So if your ministry is in the limelight, use it! Count the cost, but don't stop, don't cower (even if it means certain death). People desperately need a Savior, and you know the only solution. Proclaim it boldly!

My prayer is "Lord, help us remember Your kingdom is not of this world. Forgive us if we have placed too much hope in human leaders, trying to create heaven on earth. Teach us to trust that Your return will set all things right. We humans cannot."

continued on page 26

David Discovers Sacrifice



© Ranta Images | istockphoto.com

by Marcia Sanders

Sunshine . . . blue skies. David smiled. Could a day get any better? Lost in thought about the upcoming camping trip with his friends from church and all the fun they would have, he didn't notice the worried expression on his mother's face as she called to him.

"What?" David answered. "I finished my chores, and I've started packing for the trip."

"Nothing about that," Mom answered, with a pained look on her face. "It's Papa. He fell and broke his hip, so he's in surgery. You won't be able to go on the camping trip because Nana will need you to help her with chores while Papa's recovering. I'm so sorry. I know you were really looking forward to the trip."

"Sorry? It's more than sorry!" David responded, a bit louder than he had intended. "I've been looking forward to this trip for months. I worked odd jobs to pay my way. All of my friends will be swimming, riding horses, doing zip lines. Surely someone else can stay with Nana."

Mom looked at David with such disappointment in her eyes. "Do you have any idea how hard this is for Papa and Nana? There is no other way."

Mom went back into the house, leaving David outside. David couldn't remember when he had been so disappointed — to give up something that meant so much to him.

Just then, Dad walked up. "Hey, David! How's it going?"

"Fine," David muttered.

"That's about the least fine I've ever heard *fine* sound." Dad smiled. "Care to tell me what makes this day so 'fine' for you?"

"I just found out that I can't go on the annual camping trip because I have to stay and take care of Nana," David complained.

"Missing the trip, that's tough. But what a great opportunity for you."

"What? An opportunity to be miserable?" David grouched.

"No . . . to experience sacrifice," Dad answered. "In this country, we aren't expected to make a real sacrifice. Not like being threatened with death or injury just for serving the Lord. Of course, this is nothing compared to their sacrifices — and especially nothing like what Christ gave — but a sacrifice nonetheless."

"I didn't think about it like that," David mused. "I still don't like it, though."

"Well," Dad laughed, "it wouldn't exactly be a sacrifice if you did. Do you remember Jesus' response when the time for His death was near?"

David thought for a bit. "Not really."

"Jesus prayed so fervently that His sweat was like drops of blood, and three times He asked God to spare Him from that death. But His final words were, 'Not My will but Yours be done.' See, Jesus didn't want to suffer, but He did want to obey. Sometimes we must do the really hard things — even when we don't want to."

"I do love Nana and Papa," David replied, "and I like to be with them. I guess, maybe, it's not as bad a sacrifice as I first thought." **BA**

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



My Favorite Verse

Galatians 2:20



© Sakorn Sukkasemsakorn | istockphoto.com

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me (KJV).

by Jason Overman

While I love every word of God, some verses communicate more than others. That is why my favorite verse is Galatians 2:20. I can't think of another that says more in one sentence (in seven clauses) than this one. When I ponder what it means to be a Christian, or if I'm asked that question by the curious, this verse comes first to my lips. Seven wonderful thoughts capture the essence of Galatians 2:20.

I am. Paul's use of seven first person singular pronouns makes this one of the most personal verses in the Bible, and in all antiquity. In this letter to the churches of Galatia, I am reminded that, while Christianity is a community, each of us is in an intimate, personal relationship.

...

With Christ. The personal pronoun *I* does not make my faith self-centered. Each use of it is conditioned by *Christ*, the life-altering, inescapable subject of the verse. Who He is and what He's done changes everything, including *me*. And this personal relationship is nothing less than union with Christ. . . .

Crucified. Being a Christian means I'm not only united with Christ but also uniquely identified with the central event of His life: the cross. This instrument of torture and death He divinely converts to atoning salvation. It is not just a gift received but one participated in. *Crucified with Christ* means total surrender to Him, as I die to self.

The life. At the center of this verse and relationship is a new way to live. United with Christ, I identify with His crucifixion and

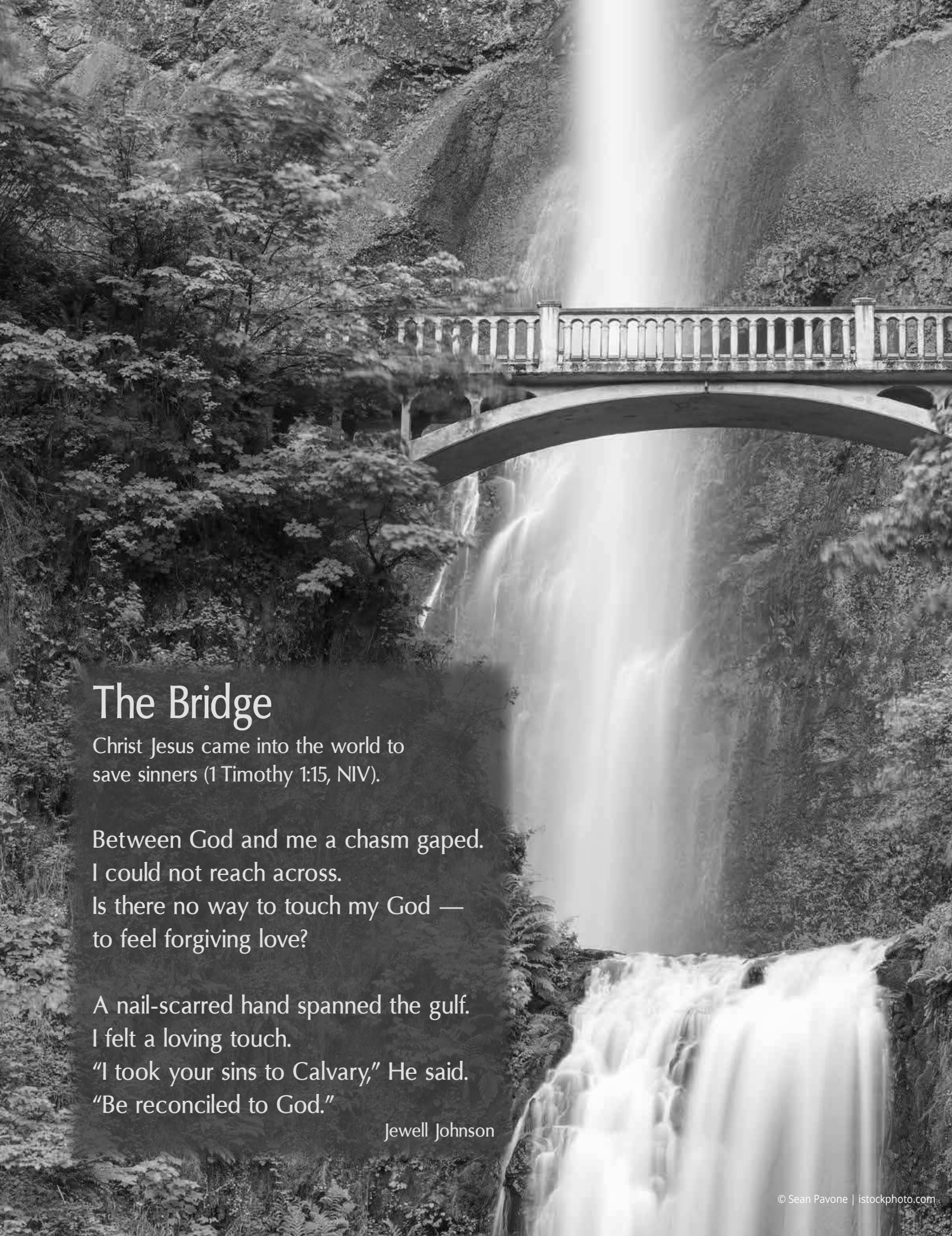
His resurrection. I am also raised with Him to newness of life.

Jesus is life. Now I live by Him in abundant, transformed life.

By faith. I lay hold of this life in union with Christ by trusting the One who has been faithful to me. Like Abraham, only as I believe that God can do for, and in, me what I cannot do for myself does the life of Christ adhere to mine.

Who loved me. This two-part ending sets all that has come before in context. Before me, before faith, before Crucifixion and Resurrection, is God's love. His Son's love. That is the motivation, and the action, that makes all the rest possible. Yes, God so loved the world, but in all that, He saw *me* and loved *me*. . . .

And gave Himself for me. Because Jesus loved, He gave. This is sacrificial love. This is the cross, the weight of sin. He bore it. For all. And for me. That double *me* that ends the sentence is startling in its personal claim. I'm not worthy of that love, His gift, but I cling to it and Him. And so I'm learning to love and give as He did.



The Bridge

Christ Jesus came into the world to
save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15, NIV).

Between God and me a chasm gaped.
I could not reach across.
Is there no way to touch my God —
to feel forgiving love?

A nail-scarred hand spanned the gulf.
I felt a loving touch.
"I took your sins to Calvary," He said.
"Be reconciled to God."

Jewell Johnson

He Wouldn't Come Down

continued from page 15

coming resurrection. He saw the redeemed gathered into the kingdom of God. He saw a church full of imperfect people united in worship and unending gratitude because of the sacrifice on that cross.

This is what Calvary means for the world: God has made a way for sinners to be reconciled to Himself through Jesus Christ. The cross is not just an example of courage, though it is courageous; it is not just a picture of injustice, though it exposes injustice; it is not just the death of an innocent man, though Jesus was innocent. The cross is the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God.

At the cross, guilt meets grace. Judgment meets mercy. The holiness of God and the love of God are seen together in the crucified Christ.

Then came the cry: "It is finished!" (John 19:30).

Not "I am finished," as though death had defeated Him. Not "I tried," as though redemption had failed. But "It is finished!" The sacrifice was complete. The debt had been paid. The work the Father gave Jesus to do had been accomplished.

The crowd yelled, "Come down!" but Jesus stayed. He stayed until sin was answered and mercy was opened. He stayed until the veil was torn and the price was paid. He stayed until He could say, "It is finished!"

That is why we do not rush past the cross. Before we celebrate the empty tomb, we stop to appreciate Calvary. We

remember the Lamb who was slain. We remember the Savior who stayed. We remember that our hope was not purchased with silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ.

The world told Him, "Save Yourself." But Jesus chose to save us. **BA**

Moises Capetillo

serves as assistant director of GC Missions and senior pastor of the congregation in Albuquerque, NM, alongside his wife, Victoria, and six children.



Is Christian Nationalism Biblical?

continued from page 22

Ballots, presidents, or armies will not bring the kingdom of God. It will come when Christ returns in glory. Our calling is clear: Live humbly, love deeply, and share the good news boldly while crying, "Come, Lord Jesus. Our only hope!" **BA**

Tez Brooks writes from Colorado Springs, CO.



Preserving the Past

The BAP's long-anticipated archiving project is underway! Thanks to the investment of the board of directors, meaningful first steps have been taken toward preserving the historic publications of the General Conference for the benefit of future generations.

Special thanks to Isaac Overman (pictured), who spent four weeks (May 18 - June 12) at the GC offices to launch the project. The scope of Isaac's work included scanning fragile historical publications, organizing files, and creating preservation-quality and access-oriented digital copies. In total, Isaac scanned over 30,000 pages spanning the first seventy years of *The Hope of Israel/Bible Advocate* from 1863 to 1932.

The project has just begun, but we are pleased with this excellent start.



Seasoned with Grace

To be published in late 2026, *Seasoned with Grace* is a unique women's devotional.

It features 52 uplifting devotions drawn from the lives of women in the Bible.

The book also includes 25 delicious recipes that complement its message of nourishment for both body and soul.

Whether for personal growth, Bible study, or as a thoughtful gift, *Seasoned with Grace* is a meaningful resource for women of all ages. Watch for its release, and share the blessing with someone who could use encouragement, hope, and inspiration.

The devotional will also be available in Spanish.



Missionary Support

GC Missions invests in sending missionary pastors

and evangelists who share the gospel and equip others to do the same. Financial support enables them to teach and preach the good news and establish active congregations in new regions.



Continue supporting the work of GC Missions by sending your donations in one of the following ways:

- Zelle, to give@cog7.org;
- check, mailed to P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233 (make sure you write "GC Missions" on the memo line);
- online, at <https://secure.cog7.org/giving/>.

Quarterly Videos

Engaging students in adult Bible study



Bible Advocate Press

remains a priority of the Bible Advocate Press. Short introductory videos for each lesson (on YouTube) are designed to guide students and teachers toward the author's purpose for the quarterly.

We encourage you to watch each video before the lesson and use it to enrich and edify one another during your local Sabbath Bible study.

Check our YouTube channel and connect today: https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZt1RwqAGRk_zkUeHGkk_TOR5ohOoJrl7&si=H7Ha2N8T8KIXvRa3.



The Pressure of Persecution



© Jacob Wackerhausen | istockphoto.com

Serving and suffering
with Christ.

by **Ronald Rousseau**

There was a time when being labeled a Christian could land you in jail. It started off that way following the resurrection of Christ, when Christianity was an illegal religion. Those who followed the Way were persecuted and had to congregate in secret. Their meeting places were marked in ways that only those who knew could identify.

Lost heritage

But the pressure of persecution can have dire consequences.

This truth is illustrated in an intriguing story from northern Mexico about an anthropologist

who was studying the people of the region. One day he noticed a particular behavior. A woman was making corn tortillas, and she grabbed a handful of the masa and burned it. He thought it was odd, but moved on. As he kept studying, he saw other women repeat the same behavior, grabbing a handful of the masa and burning it.

After seeing this several times, the anthropologist finally approached one of these women and asked why she burned a handful of masa. She replied, "I don't know. My mother did it this way, so I do it this way. That's the way she taught me."

The anthropologist was intrigued. After studying the genealogies of these women in depth, he determined that all of them had Jewish ancestry. He traced their heritage to World War II Jews who fled to Mexico

and hid their identity by adopting the prevalent religion of the time. They baptized their children in the Catholic Church while participating in Jewish rites at home, such as burnt offerings. They gave their children Christian names and blended into the society of the time.

Some families never recovered their true identity, as the fear of coming out as a Jew smothered them. Their children behaved in peculiar ways, not knowing why. They lost their connection to their ancestry and their religion.

The anthropologist attempted to reconnect some of those families with their ancestry. Of course, some embraced it; most did not.

Lost faith?

This is not the first time such a thing has happened. The Bible

presents a similar set of events with the same results.

And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of 110 years. And they buried him within the boundaries of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel (Judges 2:8-10).

When Elder Loren Stacy shared this passage with us in a core executive meeting, it blew my mind. It crushed me. Do you realize that, despite all the effort that we put toward doing church, future members of our family may not know the Lord? I am perplexed how this can happen. I can't imagine that my grandchildren and great-grandchildren may not know God and His Son Jesus.

Let me give you one clue from the point of a missionary on how we can slip and fall down that road of losing our identity as Christians. When we speak of GC Missions, we speak about widows and orphans, evangelistic missions, church planting, and other ministries. At its essence, it's truly about spiritual warfare. Those who are called to mission are called to Ephesians 6:12:

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Facing criticism

One way that we can fail this calling is to worry about criticism of the work we have been called to do. No one is called to leadership who is not criticized. This is not permission to dismiss all criticism but to know that it is part of the calling. Criticism cannot control or dictate how we operate.

Imagine that you are called to lead forty missionaries to a mission site they have been to before and that you are responsible for all aspects of the mission. The leader is susceptible to criticism as is the follower, as were the early Christians.

When we succumb to the fear of being criticized, when we lead

same thing if they are following in His footsteps.

If you are called to missions, you will be criticized, just as Christ was. And just like Paul, we must confess with confidence.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Romans 1:16).

All missionaries must endure all that Christ endured. If we do not, we can easily lose our legacy, lose our identity, lose our faith, our pedigree as followers of Christ. Our ultimate goal is to be co-workers with Christ, suffering in the same ways as He did,

“One way that we can fail this calling is to worry about criticism of the work we have been called to do.”

by fear of what others will say, we risk compromising our true identity in Christ. Eventually, we participate in rites that have no foundation in a true relationship with Christ. It is the first step in losing our religion.

Not ashamed

Christ in His time was constantly being criticized. This aspect of His ministry indicates that His followers would suffer the

and to make disciples all over the world.

Go, GC Missions! **BA**

Ronald Rousseau

is the director of GC Missions and superintendent of the Central District. He writes from Chicago, IL.

Scripture quotations are taken from the *English Standard Version*.





by Emily Acker

And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things (Mark 6:34).

While living on earth, Jesus knew what was coming for Him. He knew that He would eventually be arrested, disrespected, abused, and hung on a cross. He knew the pain He would have to endure while serving as an innocent sacrifice. He also knew who would destroy His life.

If any of us knew we had all of that in our future, wouldn't we be focused on it every day? Wouldn't we feel down about it and believe that we had to make the most of the days leading up to death so that we'd have some enjoyment in our lives? Our focus would be on us, on what was to come for us, and on the pain we would endure. If we knew that death was coming soon — and an excruciating death, at that — we would likely close our eyes to those around us.

Jesus knew He was going to die, yet the life He lived while on earth wasn't about Him. It wasn't about finding as much enjoyment as He could before the pain started, or sitting around feeling miserable as He considered His future. It wasn't about focusing on Himself and feeling sorry for Himself regarding what was to come and the unfairness of it all. The life Jesus lived was all about being there for others and meeting their needs. It was about focusing on others and being a servant.

When Jesus encountered crowds, which He did often because people were always trying to be near Him, He had compassion on those who were hurting or looking to Him for help. Jesus healed those who were sick. He talked with the people and encouraged them. He helped the people know about His Father. He showed love to people. He never sent anyone away or told the crowds to find someone else to follow. He didn't turn His back on them and go off to do something fun. Jesus wanted His life on earth to make an impact. He knew that would happen when He welcomed the crowds and gave them the love and attention that they sought.

When Jesus walked among us, lives were changed because He was willing to show compassion despite knowing what He was about to go through. He reached out even to those who were about to deny Him (think Peter in Matthew 26), those who doubted Him (think Thomas in John 20), and to those who chose not to follow Him. He showed kindness even to those who were part of the world that was about to take His life.

Jesus didn't let worry for the future overcome Him. Instead, He showed mercy and love throughout His life. What a loving Savior! What a God to worship! What an example for us to follow! May we be more like Him. **BA**

Emily Acker writes from Plover, WI. Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version.





His Cross

It pleased the LORD to. . . make His soul an offering for sin (Isaiah 53:10).

For millennia, Western culture has enjoyed the heritage and backdrop of a Judeo-Christian ethic that firmly embraced the concepts of right, wrong, and sin. From this foundation — with the Creator as rightful lawgiver and holy judge — the cross of Christ was readily understood as the refuge sinners could flee to and where believers could be reconciled to a holy God.

But that was then; this is now. It's 2026! We find ourselves in a culture that holds the very idea of sin in contempt. In fact, for many today, *the sin* is thinking there is sin. And if that is not crisis enough, many professing believers all too often overlook, and even excuse, their sin.

Undoubtedly, the apostle Paul encountered similar challenges as he ministered in the city of Corinth, which knew little, if any, of the true God or of His righteous judgment against sin and sinner. In response, Paul determined to preach Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2). We must learn from this. For only as we preach Christ and Him crucified do both the awfulness of sin and the holiness of God come into focus — and with them, one's need for salvation.

Consider that Christ — the Lord of glory, the Lord from heaven, the Son of God, and the innocent One (1 Corinthians 2:8; 15:47; John 3:16; 1:29) — came to bear the wrath of God in His body on a cruel cross and to die a shameful death for an undeserving and rebellious people. Indeed, the just One suffered for the unjust (1 Peter 3:18) to pay the terrible debt of sin.

The witness of the cross is clear: The holiness of God demands that sin be dealt with (Mark 15:37, 38) and the wrath and judgment of God against it be satisfied (1 John 2:2). Only in Christ's cross is such remedy found (Romans 6:23; John 3:36). While we find ourselves in a moment in which sin is scoffed at and its cost rejected, the reality of Christ's cross speaks clearly to our generation. And to the praise of His grace, it also reveals the incredible gift of love by which sin is atoned for and sinners are reconciled to a holy God.

The church must recapture the power, necessity, and infinite cost of Christ's cross. In this moment, the church must do the theological math: Preaching the cross of Christ stands as both a reality check and a holy standard by which the moral, practical, and theological nonsense of diminishing sin's cost is weighed and found wanting. With renewed revelation and power, we must understand the times (1 Chronicles 12:32) and preach Christ's cross — in all its severity and in all its glory.

Sin and salvation are no antiquated matters. And we can be certain that as the holiness of God and the cost of sin are revealed through the cross, sinners will once again flee to lay hold of Christ. As Jesus said, "If I am lifted up from the earth, [I] will draw all peoples to Myself" (John 12:32).

So lift high His cross, Church!
Preach it in all its agony and in all
its grace. May it be so.

— Greg Lincoln



Bible Advocate
(USPS 054-160)
P.O. Box 33677
Denver, CO 80233-0677
USA

Periodicals
Postage Paid
at Broomfield,
Colorado and
additional offices

IN HIS PRESENCE



2027 GC CONVENTION
GREENSBORO, NC

Join us June 28 – July 3, 2027, for a
life-changing time of worship,
fellowship, and learning.

Come ready to meet with God.

**In His presence
... everything changes.**



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

*Find convention updates at
cog7.org/convention.*