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Kingdom Faithfulness





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2025: Kingdom People



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Your Faithfulness!

I can't believe we are already on the last issue of our Kingdom People series. It has been rewarding this year to reflect with you on what it means to be like King Jesus in humility, mercy, service, patience, and wisdom.

Speaking of the King, the 2026 *Bible Advocate* theme is "The Story of Jesus." Aided by the four Gospels, we will cover the background prophecies of Jesus; His birth and childhood; His miraculous ministry of healing and deliverance; His kingdom teaching and call to discipleship; and especially, His death and resurrection. I'm excited to share that with you!

This final issue of 2025 on Kingdom Faithfulness is a good segue into next year's focus on the story of Jesus. It is also a fitting conclusion to this series. Faithfulness is something we can see only from the end, looking back. Faith is that daily virtue that carries us forward, but faithfulness is recognized and celebrated in retrospect.

The title of the insightful book by Eugene Peterson captures this truth well. *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* is about that winding road of faith and a steadfast commitment to discipleship. The words "The journey is long, there are no shortcuts, and the only way to get there is to follow Jesus" is a good summary of the book and of our calling. Faithfulness is declared at the end, in our Father's final verdict: "Well done!" I want that!

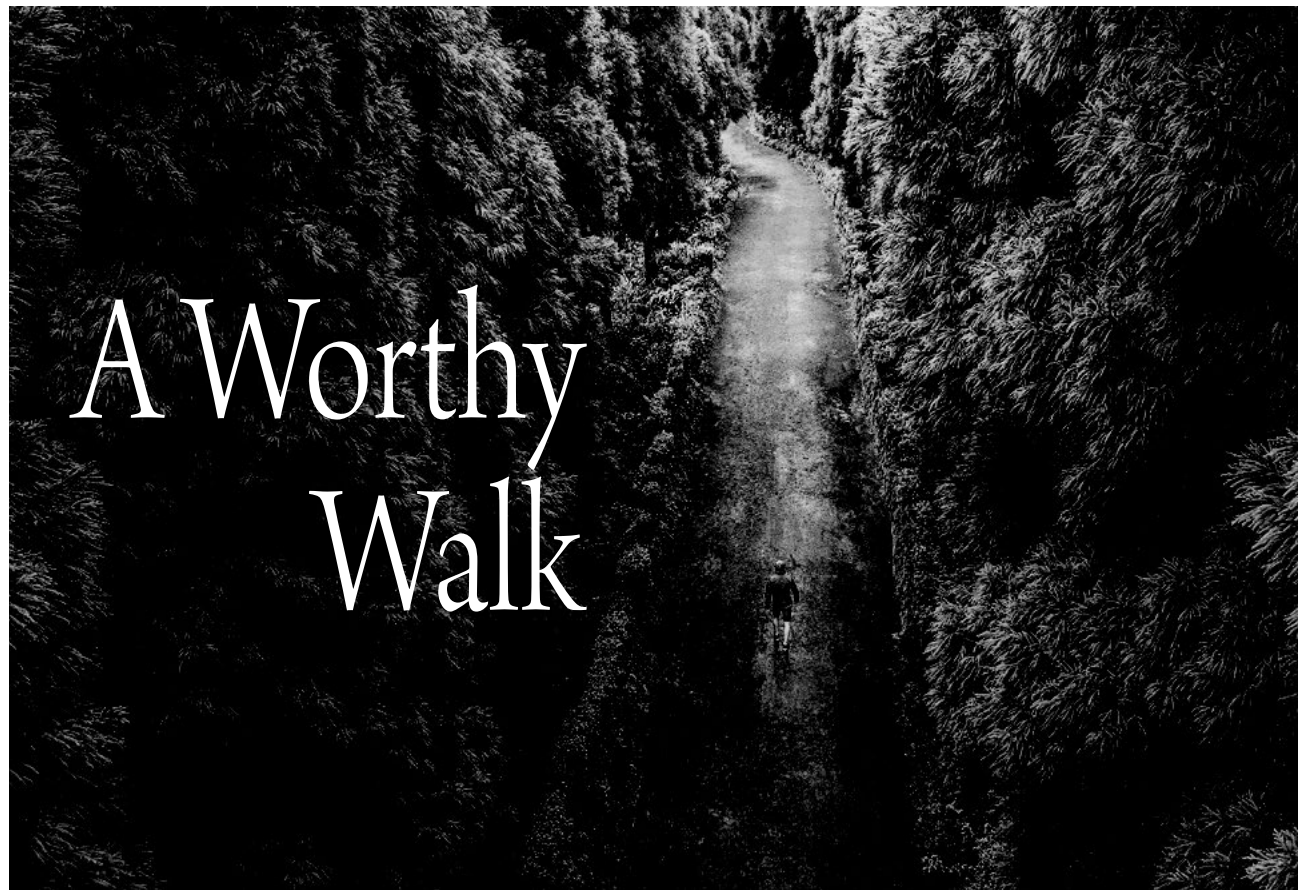
This issue is full of excellent articles that encourage and challenge us to walk this long road of kingdom faithfulness with the King, following His supreme example. And it is our Sovereign King that I'm thinking about most as I write now. Here at the end of this series, at the end of this year, it is *His faithfulness* that I find myself reflecting on. It is not just our own faithfulness but His that is measured from the end. Like the psalmist's recalling His many wonderful works across the ages, I find myself singing along:

I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever; with my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations (89:1).

Amen! Read and enjoy.

— Jason Overman





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Obedience and its reward.

by Dr. David R. Downey

If there is a concept that rises above all others in Scripture, it may be that of obedience. God constantly points to this characteristic in the people He can bless, for obedience is nothing more than observing, first, that God is sovereign and then trusting Him to lead.

Stated simply, our disobedience got us into this mess, Jesus' total obedience got us out of it, and our challenge is to pursue obedience the rest of our lives. When we are obedient, Scripture says that we are worthy in our walk.

First John 2:6 states the case simply: "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked." Jesus is our example. We know from

Scripture that He was tempted in the same manner as we are, yet always obedient. To follow Jesus in obedience is a high bar, but it is nonetheless our goal.

Scripture tells us how we can be worthy of the One who has called us.

Unworthy

First, we must realize that we are unworthy. In response to God's provision for his family, Jacob said, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies" (Genesis 32:10). Some contemporary folks have made this a joke: "I am not

worthy, I am not worthy!” But for those who follow the Lord, we start there.

In all four Gospels, John the Baptist says that he was not worthy to untie Jesus’ sandal straps (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16; John 1:27). John was a good and righteous man. He must have known that he was specially blessed by God. He suffered greatly for God’s cause, enough that any normal person would think he had something coming to him. However, John didn’t think that way. He spoke of Jesus with reverence and awe.

When the centurion told Jesus about his sick servant, Jesus said he would come to the man’s house to heal him. The centurion said, “Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed” (Matthew 8:8).

Jesus marveled at the man’s faith and said to those nearby, “I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!” (v. 10).

Other people, like eager Zacchaeus, the widow with her mite, and those in the parables, like the publican who beat his breast in contrition and the prodigal son who returned to his father declaring he was unworthy — these are the ones who attract Jesus’ attention and His mercy. We should remember that grace means unmerited favor, so we are unworthy of such grace.

We may wonder why God looks on folks who consider themselves unworthy, and graciously appears to them. Why does He tend to take people from the foot of the table to move them to the head? It is not because He is a merciless tyrant

who expects his subjects rightly to grovel. Rather, He is a gracious God and knows that the humble and thankful saints are those who really want Him and obey Him. Such people know they need Him. Therefore, He says, “The last shall be first.”

Walking worthily

Though unworthy, we are called to walk worthily. In 1 Thessalonians 2:12, Paul writes, “Walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” And in Ephesians 4:1 he says, “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk

John in Revelation 3:4 about the people of the city of Sardis: “You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.”

I was listening to the radio a few years back, and a DJ was about to play a Sonny James tune. He referred to him by his nickname, Gentleman Sonny James (James was a Baptist). The DJ informed us that James refused to perform in any place that served alcohol when he played. He also never scheduled concerts on Wednesday nights because he always attended wor-

“Obedience is nothing more than observing, first, that God is sovereign and then trusting Him to lead.”

worthy of the calling with which you were called.” We never find in Paul’s language that being the Lord’s prisoner was an unhappy occupation. He was gladly God’s obedient servant.

In Colossians 1:10, Paul says, “Walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” Paul is saying that a worthy walk goes hand in hand with knowing God.

Later, an angel speaks to

ship services wherever he was.

After this introduction, the DJ said just before playing the song, “With all those restrictions, he was still a pretty good musician.”

Sad to say that if we are going to walk obediently with unsoiled garments, some will consider us prudish. They may think we have too many restrictions, that we are uptight. Choosing to walk with Jesus is going to change the way we walk. Why should

it worry us what people think about us, when Jesus is pleased?

Worthy One

When Jesus stated at His trial that He was the Son of God, the high priest said, “You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?” And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death” (Mark 14:64).

The crowd said Jesus was worthy of death. The high priest and other chief priests declared Jesus’ worthiness in an unworthy way. What they intended for evil, God meant for good, for “Worthy is

wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!” This is borne out in Paul’s letter to the Philippians, where we are told that “every knee should bow, . . . and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (2:10, 11).

When we speak of worthiness, it is immediately obvious in Scripture that Jesus is the worthy one, obedient to God’s will. Such a statement in our gathered company would bring a chorus of “amens.” And yet, we may ask where that leaves us. We want to be more worthy, but gazing on

righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Jesus took our unworthiness on Himself. Since He was without sin and because He was Christ, the Son of the living God, our sins could not stick to Him. If we carry our sins alone, they will utterly destroy us. However, they are vaporized when they touch Jesus.

That is clear in the first part of this verse, but we should also look carefully at the second: “that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

We have this freedom, then, to be witnesses to the truth. Look at some of the verses that follow: “We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. . . . We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. . . . But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God” (6:1, 3, 4). Paul then follows with a litany of behaviors that show our witness.

We must never dismiss our need for worthiness but must realize that only in walking in obedience and devotion to the Lord will we find it. When we walk in this way, we discover the power that will be with us to effect change. His worthiness becomes our worthiness. Then we can communicate His redemption to others. **BA**

“To follow Jesus in obedience is a high bar, but it is nonetheless our goal.”

the Lamb who was slain” (Revelation 5:12).

In Revelation 5:2-9, no one is found worthy to open the scroll and break its seals at the end time. John, who recorded this message, wept because everything seemed hopeless. Then he was told that Christ is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll. The seven broken seals release the terrible judgment of the four horsemen of the apocalypse and the judgments of God on the earth.

Revelation 5:12 goes on to tell us that the Lamb is worthy “to receive power and riches and

Jesus’ purity and authority might seem to be the best way to recognize our unworthiness. I often speak to Christian people who are burdened with the weight of their frailty. They are ever aware of their inadequacies.

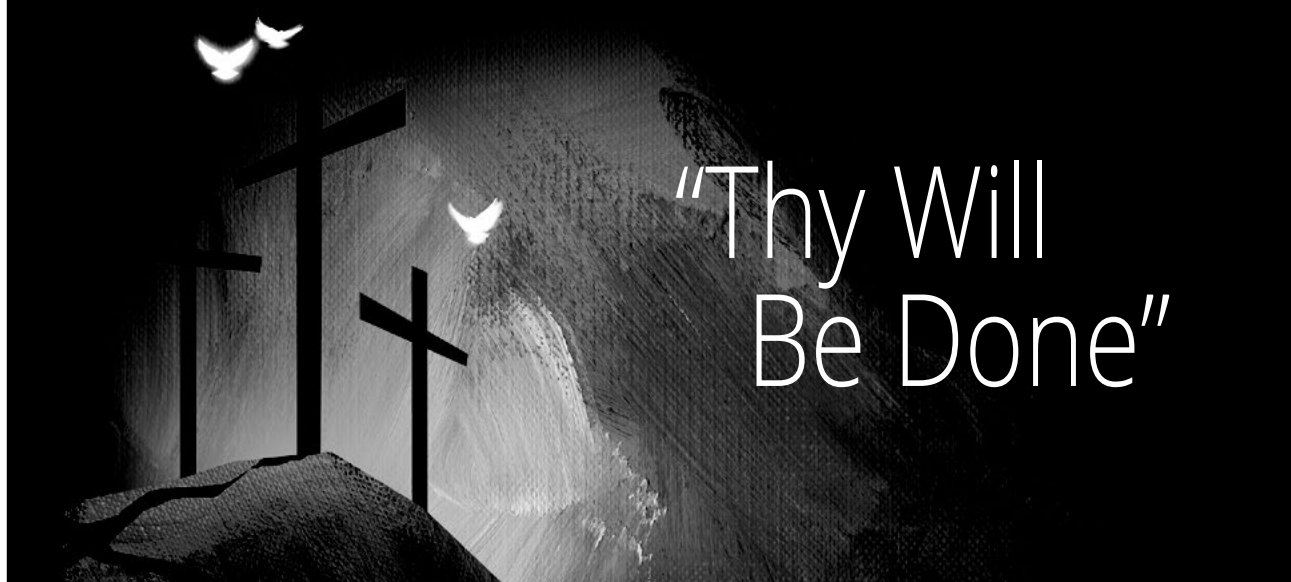
How can we walk worthily when only Christ is worthy?

Our worth

The answer is that Christ’s worth becomes our worth. We should often meditate on Paul’s words: “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the

Dr. David Downey
writes from Burleson, TX.





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by Bob Hostetler

Maybe you've said it. I know I have: "If I had *my way* . . ."

Sometimes it's prompted by dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs. At other times, it has more to do with a disappointment I've faced or a fear I have. And most of the time (maybe all of the time?) it's an arrogant endorsement of my own wisdom and righteousness.

That's why it's a good thing that I pray. And even better, that I pray daily. And still better that the Lord's Prayer is always a part of my prayers because it includes an important reminder to me in the phrase "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). It's a reminder that "my way" isn't always, or even usually, the best way. It's a prayer that, when I'm most attentive and aware, says at least three crucial things.

I belong. In *Lord, Teach Us to Pray*, Andrew Murray wrote, "Because the will of God is the glory of heaven, the doing of it is the blessedness of heaven. As the will is done, the kingdom of heaven comes into the heart. And wherever faith has accepted the Father's love, obedience accepts the Father's will." Praying "Thy will be done" is an affirmation that I belong to God's kingdom and His kingdom belongs to me — that just as His kingdom is undisputed and unimpeded in heaven, where the angelic host does His will instantly, constantly, completely, and worshipfully, so I get to play a part in bringing that heaven to earth.

I surrender. Implicit in the prayer for God's will to "be done on earth as it is in heaven" is the praying soul's submission to God's will. It makes no

sense to pray for God's will to be done everywhere but in me. Thus, "Thy will be done" means that I concede that I don't know everything . . . and that He does. It means I give up having my own way. It means I will do what He says. It is an act of surrender, willingness, and eager, obedient intention.

I choose love. If the way of Jesus is the way of love — and it is, for He emphasized the commands to "love God" and "love your neighbor" as the sum of all the commandments — then sincerely praying for His will to be done on earth means obeying His command to love all and love always. It means rejecting "all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking . . . with all malice" (Ephesians 4:31) and acting in humility, gentleness, patience, love, kindness, compassion, and forgiveness (vv. 2, 32) toward others. It may also mean personal sacrifice. After all, the words of the Lord's Prayer were tried and tested, proven and polished, in the Lord's Passion as He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, "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). Jesus not only taught "Thy will be done," He prayed it and lived it unto death "even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8)!

"Thy will be done" reminds me daily that "If I had *my way*" is an infinitely inferior way to think and live. "Thy will be done" re-orientes me to the One whose "good and acceptable and perfect will" (Romans 12:2) is the one path worth following. **BA**

Bob Hostetler writes from Las Vegas, NV.





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Learning to do what the
disciples should have done.
by Sarah Schwerin

My high school English teacher stood behind his desk, his steely gray eyes surveying the class. “All truth is relative,” he said. “There is no right or wrong.”

As usual, most of the students nodded their heads and stared in rapt attention as he spoke. Yet the Holy Spirit urged me to disagree. My palms sweated, and I felt nauseous. How could I argue with a teacher everyone loved and respected? How could I stand up for my faith to someone who didn’t believe what I believed?

Although no longer a shy teenager, I still encounter others who disagree with my beliefs. Nervousness flutters in my stomach when the Holy Spirit urges me to defend my faith.

We are surrounded by those who disagree with our faith and do not understand our beliefs and values. How are we to act in a world that is hostile to all the Bible teaches?

Fortunately, the Bible has a lot to say about how we should behave when we face opposition and trials. Before Jesus endured His greatest trial, He took the disciples to a garden. He urged the three in His inner circle to remain, watch, and pray.

Remain

In Greek, *remain* means abide and is the same word used in John 15:10: “If you keep my

commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.”

In the garden, Jesus urged His friends to remain, to abide, to keep dwelling in His word and love. As Jesus prepared to suffer and die on the cross, the disciples would need to cling to His love and teachings. It would be their only way to survive the heartache and persecution to follow.

When we study God’s Word and meditate on it daily, God transforms us and gives us what we need to face the trials and opposition in our lives. He promises to equip us to do everything He has called us to do — to even stand up to those who oppose us and His truth.

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for

teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

We will discover that God's Word provides a plan to deal with any situation or person in our lives — if we remain in it.

Watch

Next, Jesus asked His followers to keep watch, which in the Greek means to keep awake and be vigilant. In the garden, Peter, James, and John did the exact opposite. They fell asleep.

Amid trials, we also might be tempted to figuratively fall asleep. We might relax our boundaries and stop doing what we know we should be doing. God isn't watching us right now, is He? Do I *really* have to be kind to others? Do I need to follow *all* the commandments? Did God *really* say to do that?

We know Peter learned a lesson in the garden. He warns us, "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

We have an enemy who wants to destroy us and make our witness ineffective. That's why we must be watchful and hold fast to our standards. Watching is not passive but active. The next verse in 1 Peter 5 instructs us on how to do this: "Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world" (v. 9).

Pray

Even though Jesus was in agony (Luke 22:44), He encouraged His followers to pray with Him. The Greek word for *pray* means to pray to God, to supplicate, to worship. Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus stressed the importance of prayer and showed His followers how to pray. Just as Jesus needed to talk to His heavenly Father in the garden, so He knew His disciples needed to talk to God, especially when they faced opposition.

Jesus also knew that, like the disciples, we are weak. In prayer, we communicate with God, and

killed for their faith. John was exiled. All three followed Jesus' example and left a legacy of how to face opposition.

Be encouraged. You aren't the only Christian standing up for your beliefs. Keep choosing God's way, no matter what trials you are going through or how you might feel. Our feelings don't always tell the whole truth, but God and His Word always do.

As a teenager, I followed God's leading and spoke out in defense of my faith. I told the teacher I didn't agree with him. He nodded, and the class went



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He strengthens us. On our own, we cannot face opposition, but through prayer, God enables us to do amazing things, just as the disciples eventually did.

Following God's way

The disciples messed up in the garden. They didn't remain, watch, or pray. Yet Jesus still died and came back to life for them. And somewhere along the way, Peter, James, and John woke up and learned what God was teaching them.

Even though they faced persecution for their beliefs, the disciples patiently continued following God. Peter and James were

on as normal. Nothing seemed different, and no one seemed to notice what I'd said.

I don't know if my words had any effect on the teacher or on my classmates. Yet I learned that it isn't our job to change hearts. Our job is to do what Jesus asked the disciples to do: remain, watch, and pray. God is the one who changes hearts. We need only to follow. **BA**

Sarah Schwerin writes from Sorrento, FL. Scripture quotations are taken from the *English Standard Version*.



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MEMBER ORIENTATION

Questions & Answers



The New Testament often tells us to “watch.” What are we supposed to be watching for?

Watching is about living each day with a sense of urgency, eagerly anticipating the Lord’s return while actively participating in His work in the present. The instruction to watch signifies a spiritual state of vigilance, and it is used in several ways. In some occurrences, the instruction includes more than one of these areas. Hence the reference texts sometimes appear in more than one place in the list below. Let’s look briefly at each of these.

Watch because you do not know the time of the Lord’s return: Mark 13:33-37; Matthew 24:42; 25:13; Luke 12:35-48; 1 Thessalonians 5:6-11; Revelation 3:1-6.

Jesus emphasized the importance of being ready for His return at any moment. He compared it to a master returning at an unexpected hour or a thief coming in the night. Jesus also mentioned signs that would indicate the end times, urging His disciples to be attentive to their fulfillment. The parable of the ten virgins highlights the need for spiritual preparedness, ensuring that our lamp is filled with oil, representing a close relationship with God and the Holy Spirit.

Watch for physical or spiritual dangers and temptations: 1 Peter 5:8; Mark 13:9; 14:34-38; Matthew 26:38, 40-41; Luke 21:36; Acts 20:28-32.

Believers are warned to be watchful against the enemy, the devil, who “prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8, NIV). This vigilance extends to recognizing and resisting temptations, guarding against deception,

and being aware of the subtle schemes of the enemy.

Watch (or examine) our spiritual condition:

Luke 12:35-48; 21:36; Acts 20:28-32; Colossians 4:1-6; 1 Thessalonians 5:6-11; Revelation 3:1-6.

Watching includes examining our hearts and minds to identify areas susceptible to temptation or spiritual apathy. It means diligent obedience to God’s instructions, ensuring that our life aligns with His Word, not for salvation but rather because of our new nature in Christ.

Watch for opportunities to do ministry and evangelism: Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 12:35-48; 1 Corinthians 16:13-18; Colossians 4:1-6; 1 Thessalonians 5:6-11; 2 Timothy 4:5.

The believer is to always be alert to opportunities God provides to share the love of Christ and the saving message of the gospel. This involves building relationships with non-Christians that allow us to share the gospel, initiating spiritual conversations with both unsaved and other believers, and serving others in Christ’s name in the Church, in the community, and around the world.

Watching is a call to active spiritual engagement in our walk with Christ throughout our life. It requires a mindset of awareness, readiness, and deliberate action in our life choices. It’s about living each day with a sense of eagerness and readiness, anticipating His return while being actively engaged in our heavenly kingdom assignment. Every activity of the believer contributes to that assignment (Colossians 3:18-25). Let us watch that we always walk according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh.

— Elder Chip Hinds

A High-Fidelity Christian

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Becoming faithful to Christ
— and staying that way.
by Stephen R. Clark

Once upon a time, “hi-fi” was a big deal. Telling your friends, “I got a cool hi-fi for my birthday!” was an impressive boast and might have earned you a high five.

The term was a contraction of the term *high fidelity*. In the case of your birthday, it meant you got a hot new record player.

Faithful to the original

Music rendered in high fidelity simply meant that what you heard coming from your speakers was as close as possible to

how the music sounded live. It was *faithful to the original*.

The term *fidelity* also shows up in several mottos. You’ll likely hear “Semper fi!” when hanging around Marines. It’s short for the Latin phrase *semper fidelis*, meaning “always faithful.” The motto of the French Foreign Legion is *Honneur et Fidélité*, which translates to “Honor and Fidelity.”

When I was a Boy Scout, we had to memorize the Scout Law, consisting of twelve character traits: trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent. What’s interesting is the terms *fidelity* and *faithfulness* aren’t included, but all these twelve words animate the concepts of both.

If you’ve ever heard someone say, “My word is my bond!” they

mean that you can depend on them to do whatever you and they agree to. They are committing to being true to their promise, to exhibit faithfulness through integrity.

Faithfulness is multifaceted

Faithfulness is a robust and multifaceted concept.

Jon Bloom, theologian and cofounder of the Desiring God website, sums it up like this: “*True to your word*. That is a concise, clear definition of what it means to be a faithful person. There is consistency between what you say and what you *do*, between what you *believe* and how you *behave*, between what you *promise* and what you *perform*.”

When we sing (hopefully in high fidelity) “Great is thy

faithfulness, Lord unto me,” what are we actually saying? That we can trust God to do everything He says. That He is true and faithful to His Word. Period. There is perfect consistency between what God says and what God does. This is our model, the original we aspire to.

Faithful and fruity

How does this apply to us?

More relevant for us than the Scout Law is the fruit of the Spirit in its full, nine-fold expression in Galatians 5:22, 23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, *faithfulness*, gentleness, and self-control. The law is not against such things” (emphasis added).

The thing to note here is that *fruit* is singular. Faithfulness is one aspect of a Spirit-filled life, yet each of the fruity expressions support the fuller meaning of faithfulness. They are interconnected and mutually dependent. When the Holy Spirit takes root in our lives, these are the character traits that should come popping out of us in abundance.

In Matthew 7:15-20, Jesus explains that we can know who is serving whom — God or Satan — by the fruit they produce. Why? Because “A good tree can’t produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit” (Matthew 7:18). By being faithful or faithless, we show our true colors. In other words, when we are faithful and bearing good fruit, we are true to the original and operating in hi-fi faith!

Faithfulness and legalism

In Matthew 23, Jesus takes on the scribes and the Pharisees,

repeatedly calling them hypocrites. His assessment of them is devastatingly negative. While the Pharisees are extremely picky about the law in such matters as tithing on their herbs, He declares to them, “yet you have neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy, and *faithfulness*” (v. 23, emphasis added). He then sums it all up and calls them “Snakes! Brood of vipers!” (v. 33). Harsh!

The point Jesus is making is that faithfulness isn’t legalism — checking off boxes of proper and accepted behavior and adding up your points. Legalism attempts to bypass proper fruit growth. Instead of a tree properly rooted and watered that grows



fruit naturally from its branches, legalism is like a dead tree on which someone hangs plastic replicas of fruit. Or like a fig tree that looks like it should have figs but doesn’t. Mark 11 recounts how Jesus reacted to such a tree: It was cursed and later seen shriveled and dead. Faithfulness is not showiness. It’s not about just looking good.

Faithful to the end

In eternity, when we are finally face to face with Jesus, we want to hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” This phrase shows up in Matthew 25, where Jesus offers a parable describing faithfulness within the kingdom of God.

He begins the story in verse 14. A man, about to take a trip, brought together those in charge of his business and entrusted some money (talents) to the care of each one: “To one he gave five talents, to another two talents, and to another one talent, depending on each one’s ability” (v. 15). The expectation was that they would use the funds to earn a profit.

When the man returned, he checked in with each servant. The servants given the five talents and two talents both doubled his money. To them, the master said, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master’s joy!” (vv. 21, 23). So far, so good.

Then the servant who was

continued on page 24

"I Can't Taste It"



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by Allison Wilson Lee

I dropped a cube of ice from my grandparents' freezer into the cup of water and handed it to my cousin. Juliet took a sip and then looked up at me with confusion.

"I can't taste it," the cute little four-year-old said. *Taste what?* I wondered. It was only water from the faucet in the kitchen sink. What was there to taste?

But as Juliet continued to stare at me, realization dawned. It wasn't a flavor that was missing; it was the ice she couldn't "taste."

"Oh!" I answered her. "I can give you another ice cube. Will that help?"

Juliet nodded, and I plopped a piece of ice into her kid-sized cup. Now she could experience the cool temperature in her water, and she gulped it down.

I understood why she wanted cold water. On a late June afternoon in south Mississippi, tepid water just did not sound appealing.

I could relate to Juliet's preferences. In steamy, sweltering weather, a glass of icy cold water refreshes me. On chilly days, a mug of hot herbal tea warms me through and through. Lukewarm drinks, though, just do not seem to satisfy. Sometimes those get poured down the drain.

Through that imagery of hot, cold, and lukewarm, God communicates to His people. In Scripture, the Lord rebukes the church in the wealthy city of Laodicea: "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth" (Revelation 3:15, 16).

A lukewarm follower of Jesus might not commit felonies or cheat on their taxes or drive a car under

the influence of alcohol. They may not steal from their workplace or even lie about their weight on their driver's license. But the neither-hot-nor-cold Christian also does not seek to store up treasure in heaven instead of amassing riches on earth, or love sacrificially, or bless their enemies. The believer who settles for a version of tepid Christianity makes room for pet sins, comfortable with a bit of gossip or a little pornography or a hint of pride in their dealings with others.

As the Messiah, sent to give Himself for our salvation, Jesus surrendered His life and bore the penalty of sin in our place so we might possess abundant and eternal life. Mark 8:34 indicates that Jesus denied Himself — His own pleasure, His own comfort, His own rights as the Son of God — to obey the Father's plan for our redemption. He suffered rejection, betrayal, and a grueling death. Jesus calls us to imitate Himself in laying down our lives, to take up our cross and die to self as we follow Him.

Juliet did not want tepid water to drink. Likewise, God does not desire lukewarm faith from His children. As a good Father, He longs for us to experience more than a mediocre religious habit. Throughout all time, God has displayed great faithfulness to His people, and He commands us to live with faithfulness toward Him. In the power of God's Spirit at work in us, we can echo Christ's words as He cried out to the Father prior to His crucifixion: "Not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). **BA**

Allison Wilson Lee writes from Belle Isle, FL.



David Discovers Faithfulness



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by Marcia Sanders

"Mom! Mom! You won't believe what happened at school today!" David shouted as he ran into the house.

"Well, I can't even imagine!" Mom laughed.

"I guess you'll just have to tell me about it."

"You know how I've been excited about trying out for the lead in the class play and how those try-outs were today?"

"Yes, I do," Mom said. "You could hardly sit still at the table to eat breakfast this morning."

"Well," David replied breathlessly, "after school Mr. Fisher said I got the main part — the very one I'd been wanting!"

"David, that's wonderful!" Mom exclaimed.

"Yes, but that's not the best part." David grinned.

"What could be better?"

"Mr. Fisher said he chose me partly because I did well at the audition but mostly because he knew I would be faithful to learn all my lines on time and show up for every practice. He said he knew from watching me help Mrs. Taylor last year that he could depend on me to help."

Mom smiled. "Oh, David, I am so very proud of you. This reminds me of the parable in the Bible about the faithful servant. Do you remember the story in Matthew 25?"

"Do you mean the one where the servants were given talents to care for while their master was on a trip?" David asked. "The ones with ten and two talents doubled their master's investment, but the servant with one buried it and didn't even try to earn

more money for his master. He said he was scared of his master. How does that remind you of me getting the part in the play?"

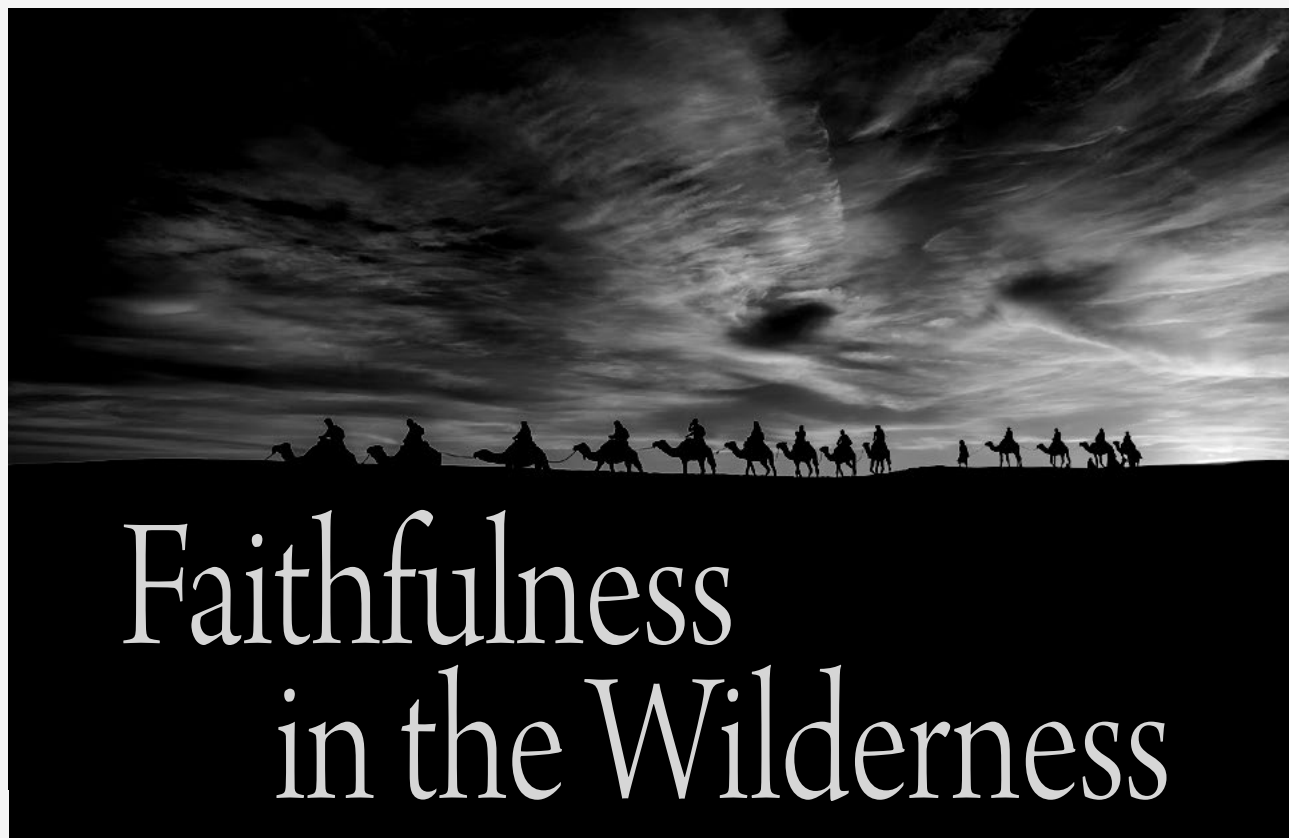
Mom nodded. "In verse 23 of that chapter, the master tells the servant with two talents, 'You were faithful with a few things. I'll put you in charge of many.' Isn't that like Mr. Fisher saying that he gave you the lead partly because of how faithful you had been to help Mrs. Taylor last year? You didn't even know he was watching, which is another good lesson. Always do your best even if you don't think anyone else is watching."

"Yes, I can see how it is a bit like that," David mused. "I didn't think anyone else even knew that I was helping her after school each day with trash and desks. Now I find out that Mr. Fisher had been paying attention too. Just think . . . what if I had skipped days or not done good work? Then Mr. Fisher would have been concerned about giving me such a big part."

"As the parable says, you were faithful in a few things, so Mr. Fisher knew he could depend on you to be faithful in this big thing. He needs to have actors he can depend on to do their parts well and without his constant supervision. You've shown you can be that actor." **BA**

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





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Learning to carry our cross.
by Ruhama Assefa

Sometimes we sit silently, unsure of how to handle life. Bills, grades, marriage, pressure. We all have our share of troubles. As Christians, we turn to our heavenly Father in prayer, but there are moments when words simply don't suffice. Instead, tears flow. Yet even then, we rest in the truth that God understands our cries more deeply than we do ourselves.

I remember receiving a life-altering phone call when I was in tenth grade. A friend who was like a sister to me had attempted suicide. I was waiting for the words "It was hard, but we saved

her." Instead, I heard the unthinkable: She had passed away. Her family never discovered the reason behind her decision, and the unanswered questions still echo in their hearts.

But amid this sorrow, God met me. He taught me to see life differently and gave me opportunities to speak into the lives of teenagers, helping many avoid similar fates. Through this, I learned that living for Christ isn't about constant happiness or chasing worldly joy. It's about carrying the cross, choosing His will over ours, and being faithful.

Tough journey

Whenever I reflect on this calling, my mind goes to the Israelites on their journey to Canaan. The road wasn't smooth. They faced hunger, enemies, doubts,

and their own complaints. God didn't remove every obstacle, but He provided solutions. He walked with them. His presence was consistent, even when their faith faltered.

I used to judge the Israelites. How could they doubt God after all He'd done? But when I looked in the mirror, I saw the same behavior in myself. I, too, have tried to figure things out on my own. I, too, have given up too quickly. Many people today do the same. Some even take their own lives. But God never promised an easy road.

This world is not our home. Abraham lived in tents, waiting for the promise God gave him. Likewise, we are pilgrims, not settlers. Our true home is the kingdom of heaven. We are called to not gratify our flesh but to nourish our souls through kingdom

faithfulness. This requires denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Jesus — daily.

Instant obedience

After His forty-day fast, Jesus called His disciples with a simple yet profound invitation: “Follow Me.” Some asked for time to settle affairs, but He challenged them to leave everything immediately. When God calls, our plates may already be full, but His priority must be ours.

Think of Abraham. After years of waiting, his son, Isaac, was finally born. Then God asked him to lay that same promise on the altar. Abraham didn’t delay; he surrendered. That is the kind of obedience God seeks.

Perseverance and surrender

Sometimes we think our problems are unbearable. But remember those in Scripture who suffered. Jacob wrestled with God through the night. Paul faced prison, persecution, and hunger. And Jesus bore the cross, our sins, our shame, and the weight of the world. So when we feel weak, we are in good company.

Our journey is not about ease but about faithfulness. We don’t live like tourists enjoying a vacation. We live like missionaries sent with purpose. We walk, not by sight but by faith. We persevere, not by strength but by grace.

Luke 22:42 shows Jesus’ heart: “Not My will, but Yours, be done.” This is kingdom faithfulness: surrendering fully to God’s will. Mark 8:34 reminds us to deny ourselves and take up our cross. And in Matthew 25:21, 23, we hear the words we all long to

hear: “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Kingdom faithfulness is not about feeling good. It’s about finishing well. So the next time life feels overwhelming, remember the cross. Remember the journey. Remember the home we’re walking toward.

And when the weight feels unbearable, remember to rest

in the truth that this world isn’t our home. We’re just passing through. **BA**

Ruhama Assefa
writes from Addis
Ababa, Ethiopia.



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Take This

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by Santiago Chavez

The polite, well-dressed woman showed us photographs on her mobile phone of a famous South Korean pop music singer, comparing her beauty to our baby daughter's. I have always thought our daughter had her mother's great looks, but I was still amused by the lady's star-struck insistence that briefly interrupted our dinner at a local noodle shop. I guess there was some resemblance between our daughter and the singer.

Our miracle baby was not supposed to be attractive enough to cause such pleasant interruptions. Shortly after her conception, a routine ultrasound detected some tissue redundancies in the back of her neck. These and other cardiac details indicated our baby may have a birth defect and possibly Down syndrome.

After the doctor explained that possibility, an amniocentesis was offered to us to confirm it. We asked about the risks of the procedure, which included possible injury to the baby and a spontaneous abortion. It did not take us more than three minutes to decline the test. "She may be

born with birth defects," the doctor politely insisted.

We replied, undaunted and bordering on rudeness, "We don't care. We're going to love her no matter how she comes."

We gained strength from our conviction about the sanctity of human life and started preparing ourselves for what could come in the next few months. Every night we prayed that God would give us the strength and wisdom to accept His will for our lives, no matter what happened.

Our daughter arrived at the right time and was a perfect little bundle of joy: ten perfect toes and ten perfect fingers.

Submitting to God's will

People face big and small decisions to honor God almost every day. It is not always easy. It certainly wasn't for us.

Although our experience does not compare to what our Lord suffered, we can gain strength from His example on that night after the Last Supper. Though He asked that the cup of suffering be taken from Him, Jesus submitted to the Father's will in the garden (Luke 22:42). The plan was determined in eternity sometime before creation (John 3:16).

We decide to align our will with God's every day, not just when difficult situations present themselves. We pray that, like soldiers in a well-rehearsed military maneuver, we will execute the action of surrender when the circumstance presents itself and that we will hear from our Father "Well done!"

Facing tough times

As followers of the risen Christ, we have personally come to understand that the rewards of submitting to God's will in tough circumstances are countless in this life and immeasurable in the coming kingdom. Thankfully, I am currently at a high point in my life. It is not always easy to see the benefits of accepting the cup of difficulties when someone is navigating in the midst of them (2 Corinthians 4:8-10).

Struggling single parents come to mind. They live by faith as they navigate from one challenge to another with a few short-lived harbors of security between financial, emotional, and health storms.

A single mother recently approached me and pleaded, "Please pray for me, brother." "What is the matter?" I asked.

Cup

Tears filled her eyes. "Just please pray for me." Her words softly escaped through a quivering lower lip. The Lord knows exactly what we prayed for with this struggling sister. We recall that He said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5), but the proximity of rescue can be hard to remember when the waves of the rough sea of life threaten to drown us.

Another mother recently shared about how God used health issues experienced by her long-awaited son to produce spiritual growth in her and in her marriage. Her boy's health challenges are ongoing, but she is faithful. She stood before the congregation as a strong warrior, smiling but tearful as she proclaimed God's faithfulness.

Yet another example. An unfortunate brother who contracted and survived breast cancer shared how he could feel our prayers as he endured awkward exams, surgery, and chemotherapy. His family has a history of the disease. He is currently free of it, but his two sisters weren't as fortunate. One lost her battle with breast cancer, and the other is barely hanging on to life.

These are all examples of courageous believers stretching

forward to grasp God's promise of eternal healing. It is a privilege to walk alongside such great warriors as they request our prayers and accept our embraces (Galatians 6:2).

Let us uplift each other in prayer and carry each other's burdens. Let us entrust others with the burdens we carry. We do not have to go at it alone. Consider it a sacred trust and privilege to pray for a fellow believer's need. Christ is with us personally and through our fellow Christians.

Rewards of obedience

Our daughter recently returned from a four-day youth trip to a beach. She and friends from church drove her tiny car across a couple of states and back, covered in our prayers. A part of me is proud and nervously reluctant to release her to our good Lord, acknowledging she is a young adult.

I am vibrating with joy as I celebrate our decision over twenty years ago to not undergo the amniocentesis that would have endangered our daughter's life. We learned a lesson that we will hold to the rest of our lives, that

it is better to accept the cup God extends to us so we can depend on Him more. **BA**

Santiago Chavez

and his wife, Lourdes, attend the Lanham, MD church. He is assistant dean of Academics in Spanish for Artios Christian College.

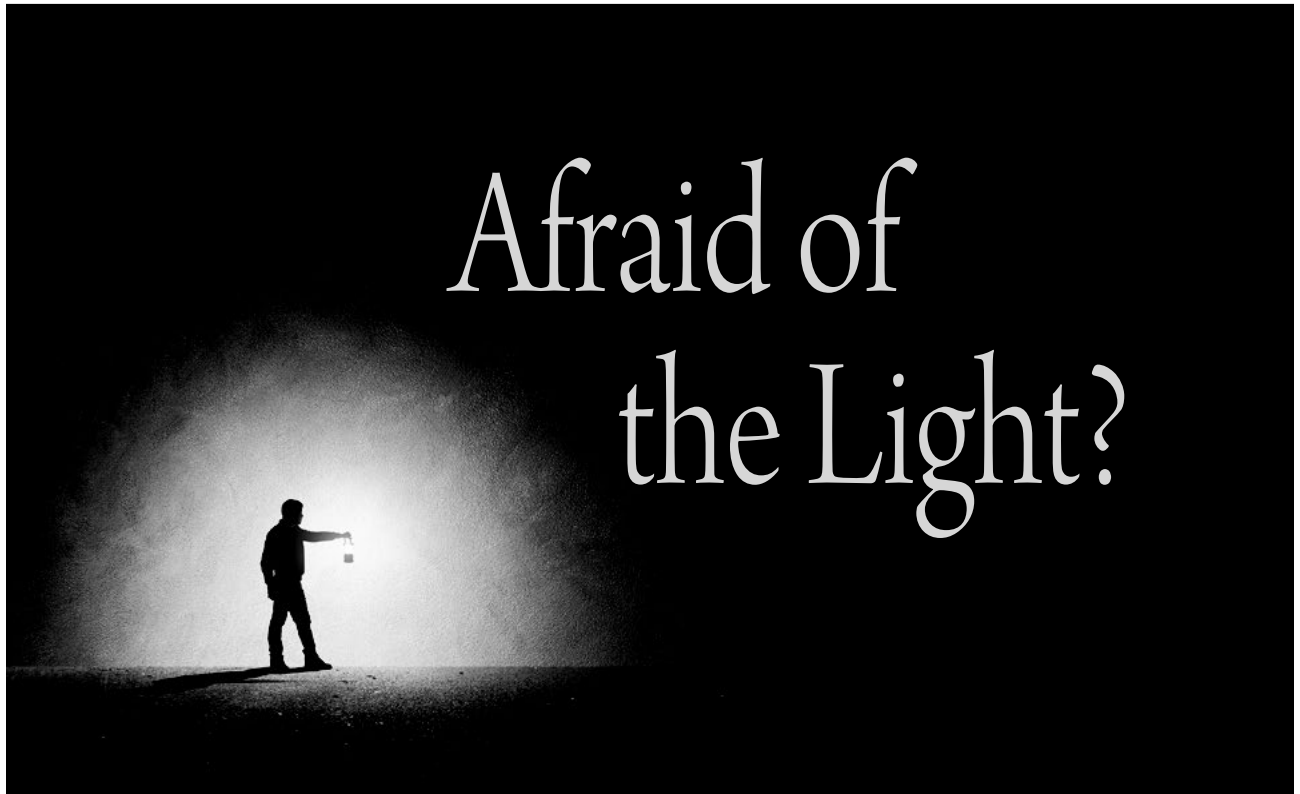


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The Artios Center for Vibrant Leadership is excited to announce a new book by Whaid Rose, *Exploring the Meaning of Worship*, coming this fall. Watch for more details in upcoming General Conference emails.



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How to do battle with the forces of darkness.

by Nathanael Reed

We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light.

— *Unknown*

“Afraid of the light”? What a puzzling accusation. In fact, it seems rather counterintuitive to think that anyone would actually fear such a life-giving entity. The above quote (attributed erroneously to Plato) of course references more than a fear of physical darkness. Jesus Christ expounded on the same analogy when speaking with the learned Pharisee, Nicodemus, explaining

that people are afraid of the light because darkness hides their evil deeds (John 3:19).

Darkness

Although it is evident to every police officer that the darkness of night covers a multitude of sins, Christ is describing a denser, more pervasive darkness, one that has engulfed the world ever since Adam and Eve turned their backs on their Creator. Indeed, today’s media and the entertainment industry bear witness to this growing fascination with darkness, while mocking Christ and Christians.

In his epic poem “Paradise Lost,” John Milton calls Satan the Prince of Darkness — the embodiment of evil. The apostle Paul goes even further, referring to Satan as the very “god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4). Satan’s ominous presence has

provided spiritual darkness with power and a living entity. Within this realm he and his demonic forces exercise an iron grip over a fallen creation and are ever active, seeking to quench any source of spiritual light that might appear within their domain.

Light

Although the future of this darkening planet may seem depressingly bleak, God’s masterplan was already in motion even before He spun the stars into space. In His timing, the ultimate dispeller of darkness would be sent to provide a source of life-giving light to the human race, providing a future filled with hope and promise.

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but

will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

The light of Jesus makes it possible to realize our present sinful condition before God, reach out to Him for salvation, and access the help of the indwelling Holy Spirit to overcome the world's darkness.

It is also clear that this heavenly Light is so powerful that every person on earth is capable of being enlightened by it (1:9). Yet even though all can perceive this Light, most are content to continue in their present state. Satan, the father of lies, has blinded them so that they might not see the truth of the gospel message.

Children of light

Not only is Christ the Light of the World, but He also shares this light with His followers, the "children of light" (1 Thessalonians 5:5). They serve as beacons of His light, who, by their demeanor, words, and actions, make it possible for others to catch a glimpse of the Savior. The closer we walk with Jesus, the stronger and more attractive His light will shine forth, and, in so doing, will draw others to Him (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Simeon's prophecy in Luke 2:32 reveals another outstanding truth about the light of Christ. Simeon said that Jesus Christ would become a light to the Gentiles, a promise repeated by Paul in Acts 26:23 and fulfilled by millions of Gentiles being drawn to the Light of the World and receiving Christ as Savior.

Scripture issues at least two warnings to those who walk as children of the light. Christ himself warned, "Walk while you have the light, lest darkness

overtake you" (John 12:35). Here we are encouraged to make every effort to follow Christ's leading so that we might grow spiritually. If our faith becomes stagnant, the darkness will close in around us. Although a redeemed person is saved for eternity, moving away from the Light will mean that they will not walk with the Lord and enjoy all of the comforts and joy He provides.

Clearer vision

Light makes vision possible, and a bright light makes our vision clearer. The same is true with our spiritual vision. Peter explains that we need to add

we do this so we can withstand the schemes of those who rule this present darkness (vv. 10-12). One way to battle these evil forces is to expose their works, making others aware of their vile strategies.

Wearing the full armor of God is critical for success, especially utilizing its most powerful item in the arsenal: prayer. We are to pray "at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication" (v. 18).

As children of God, we are not afraid of the light. In these last days, putting on the armor of light has never been more critical. The night is almost over and Day is at hand. For the Christian,

“The light of Jesus makes it possible to realize our present sinful condition before God.”

seven qualities to our faith so as not to become so spiritually nearsighted that we are virtually blind: virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love (2 Peter 1:5-9). All of these qualities describe a life fully committed to walking closely with the Good Shepherd and learning from Him.

In addition to these qualities, Paul tells us in Romans 13:12 to "cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light." In Ephesians 6, he reminds us that

Christ's return will mean we will no longer need the light of a lamp or even the sun, for the Lord God will be our light. And we will reign with Him forever and ever. **BA**

Nathanael Reed

writes from St. Thomas, Ontario. Scripture quotations are from the *English Standard Version*.





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Absence can be so loud.
But God hears.
by Bukhtawer Shabab

The silence descends upon a home when a person is absent. The kind that weighs heavily on your chest like an immovable burden, rather than just ringing in your ears.

Three weeks had passed since my daughter Emily's funeral. She was seven years old. She left this world within 48 hours of experiencing an unexpected infection and high fever. No time to bid farewell. Not enough time to get ready. Simply gone.

I tried to feel close to her by sitting on the edge of her bed every morning. Her final drawing — a happy sun with stick people

underneath — was still tacked to the wall, and her stuffed animals were still piled up by her pillow. She had scrawled "Me and Mommy" in crooked letters.

Mourning and questions

I wasn't upset with God. I felt nothing. I felt numb.

As a child, I occasionally accompanied my grandma to church. I understood the fundamentals: God exists, Jesus died for us, and we ought to be decent people. However, I never encountered religion daily. Though I prayed at times after Emily was born, when she was ill or when I was afraid, I wouldn't consider myself a believer.

People were saying things like "God has a plan" and "She's in a better place." Their comments seemed empty, but I knew they meant well. What sort of scheme involved stealing my small girl?

I could hardly get out of bed for weeks. I could see the pain written all over my husband, Mark, even though he tried to be strong. We mourned in separate ways. He immersed himself in his work while I shut down. We began to drift apart somewhere in the haze of our sorrow. We ceased discussing Emily. It hurt too much.

Back to the Bible

I sat in the kitchen one morning and gazed at my unfinished coffee. I hadn't eaten much in days. Even though I was exhausted, I couldn't fall asleep. I sensed that I was sinking into a hole I couldn't escape from.

At that moment, I recalled the Bible my grandmother had given me on my eighteenth birthday. It had been years since I'd opened it. I had no idea if I still had it.

In the back of my closet, I

discovered it in a box. Written in her meticulous handwriting, a message inside the front cover read: *Give the weight to God when life becomes too heavy. He can carry it because of His strength.*

For the first time in days, I sobbed while holding the Bible to my chest. I randomly opened it that night in the hopes that something, anything, would call to me. A passage from Psalms caught my attention: “The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (34:18, NIV).

It didn’t take the pain away, but something about those words wrapped around me like a blanket. Maybe I wasn’t completely alone.

I began to read a bit of the Bible each day. Only a few verses. Next, a chapter. After that, I started writing in a journal, mostly queries: *What caused this to occur? God, where are You? Why does this hurt so much if You’re real?*

I was thinking these thoughts one morning to Someone I wasn’t sure was listening. Still, I continued.

Meeting Linda, meeting Jesus

At that point, I met Linda.

A friend of a friend, she had lost a child a few years prior. My sister persuaded us to meet for coffee. I went, even though I didn’t want to.

Linda didn’t provide me with clichés or hasty responses. She simply listened. She then kindly shared her story with me: the days when she wanted to give up, the sadness, the rage. And how she found hope in a relationship with Jesus — not a

religion but a genuine relationship with a real Savior — in the midst of it all.

I once more discovered my mission. And even though the suffering persisted, I found calm.

We began holding weekly meetings. Linda consistently led me back to God without pressuring me. She clarified why the world is broken, why terrible things occur, and why God didn’t abandon us in our brokenness. She discussed Jesus as a person who experienced and comprehended suffering, not merely as a teacher or historical person. He was someone who overcame death.

That bit stayed with me. Emily was dead. However, death might not have been the end.



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I became a follower of Jesus a few months later. It wasn’t in a church. I prayed in a whisper while in my living room, tears streaming down my cheeks: “I think You’re real. I think You adore me. I am in need of You.”

Purpose, peace, presence

I still miss Emily every day. However, the gloom that engulfed me has changed. I’m no longer under its grip.

I’ve discovered methods to honor my daughter’s life, such as volunteering at the neighborhood children’s hospital, starting a support group for bereaved parents, and sharing my story with others who are experiencing the same sense of loss as I did.

Though my husband and I are still recovering, something changed as I allowed God into my pain. We resumed praying, reading the Bible at night, and attending church together. We now discuss Emily in an honest, open, and fearless manner. We laugh and cry at different moments. However, we work together.

Grief didn’t go away when I came to Christ, but now I have something to cling to: a hope

that death doesn’t have the last say, a peace that defies logic but is somehow real.

The silence in our home has changed as well. It’s still quiet at times, but it’s not empty. There’s a presence in the stillness. A comfort. A light. And I know I’ll see my daughter again. **BA**

Bukhtawar Shabab writes from Pakistan.

A High-Fidelity Christian

continued from page 13

given only one talent reported that he feared the master, didn't want to take any risks, and so buried what he was gifted. Now he was returning the same single talent. The master's response? "You evil, lazy servant!" (Matthew 25:26). The one talent was taken and given to the servant who had ten, and the lazy servant was banished into "outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (v. 30). Again, harsh!

Faithful to Jesus

Faithfulness to Christ means we produce good fruit that draws others into His kingdom. We take what He has given us and, even when it's risky, uncomfortable, or a little scary, we live out His command to "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you" (28:19, 29).

To be faithful, to exhibit a high-fidelity Christian walk, we must be *faithful to the original*: Jesus. He is the original who gave His life for us. He is the original who gives us our very lives, who was there at the beginning of all things and is with us "to the end of the age" (v. 20).

Jesus gave an entire Sermon on the Mount full of guidelines on how to live faithfully. He summed it up: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is

perfect" (5:48). Paul breaks this out, saying that we are to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29), have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16), and adopt the same attitude as that of Christ (Philippians 2:5). Peter adds that we are to share in the sufferings of Christ (1 Peter 4:13). By being Christlike through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we will be faithful to the original and pleasing to God (1 Thessalonians 2:4).

Faithfulness and failure

What was the real issue with the servant who was given a single talent and buried it? He simply did not exercise even a mustard seed amount of faith. His fear of failure overrode his trust in the Lord. Had he at least tried to do something with that one talent, even if he lost it in the process, it's likely his master would have been okay with that. We have examples.

When Jesus was walking on the water, Peter, in faith, got out of the boat, took a couple of steps on the water, then sank.

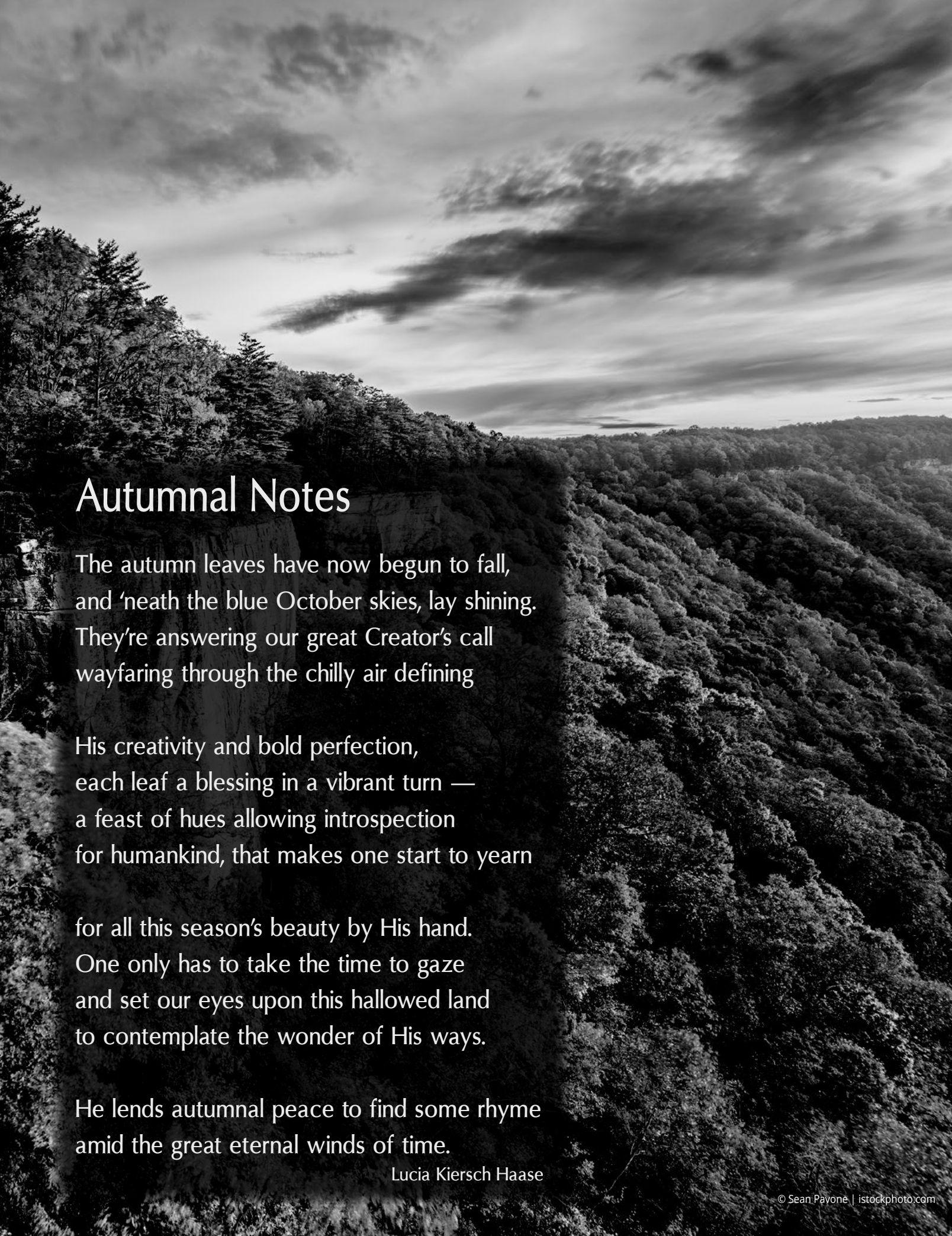
He failed. Yet Jesus lifted him up. Later, when Peter denied Jesus three times — failing Him big time — Jesus restored him. In fact, all the disciples failed and bailed on Jesus in the garden. But all, except Judas, were forgiven and lifted up into faithful service to the kingdom.

Writing to the younger Timothy, Paul explains, "If we are faithless, he [God] remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). This is the wonder of faithfulness: Our faithfulness toward God and others is possible only as we trust in His faithfulness toward us. But that's also our hope and our calling.

There is no higher-fidelity faithfulness than the Lord's toward us. *Semper fi*, indeed. **BA**

Stephen R. Clark writes from Lansdale, PA. Scripture quotations are taken from the *Christian Standard Bible*.





Autumnal Notes

The autumn leaves have now begun to fall,
and 'neath the blue October skies, lay shining.
They're answering our great Creator's call
wayfaring through the chilly air defining

His creativity and bold perfection,
each leaf a blessing in a vibrant turn —
a feast of hues allowing introspection
for humankind, that makes one start to yearn

for all this season's beauty by His hand.
One only has to take the time to gaze
and set our eyes upon this hallowed land
to contemplate the wonder of His ways.

He lends autumnal peace to find some rhyme
amid the great eternal winds of time.

Lucia Kiersch Haase



Readers Write



Blessed by the BA

Great issue! "A Homecoming to Remember" [September-October, p. 13] had me actually sobbing, thinking about [my husband's] situation, yet praising at the same time for God's marvelous intervention in the author's husband's life. I know Jesus healed many people with mental illness, and God is able to do the same for [my husband]. On the flip side, we have had many blessings as a result of this whole experience, and I trust there will be more. It's so sad to watch the deterioration taking place in his mind.

*D. N.
Alberta, Canada*

I've been reading the BA this afternoon and can't put it down. The whole issue [July-August] is outstanding! . . . Discernment, wisdom, listening to God, and living in truth. It has been a huge source of encouragement for me. God is really using all of you. You have no idea. . . . I have a deep hunger for wisdom and, man, did God bless me as I read the BA.

*S. L.
Denver, CO*

Online awakening

I am reaching out to you today to express the profound impact your website has had on my life and the lives of many in my community.

Born and raised in the Catholic faith, my family and I were devout followers of its teachings. However, a significant shift occurred when I stumbled upon your website. For several months, I immersed myself in your teachings, and they resonated with me in a way that I had never experienced before. They opened my eyes to a different perspective, one that felt more aligned with my beliefs and understanding.

This awakening led me to make a heartfelt decision — to leave the Catholic Church behind and embrace your teachings wholeheartedly. I wasn't alone in this transformation; I shared my newfound understanding with my rural community. Today, we are an assembly of 17 brethren who have all chosen this path together. Our community is flourishing as more souls join us on this journey.

In light of our growing congregation, I humbly request your assistance in providing us with scriptural booklets and teachings. These resources would be invaluable in guiding us as we nurture our congregation in the remote and humble village we call home.

*S. O.
Eldoret, Kenya*

There is more
to explore
on the BA
website.

The current
issue (English
and Spanish), an
extensive archive,
Online Extras, and
even more!
baonline.org





Learning Tools

Artios Christian College has resources to help in your ministry. Check out the different webinars that can develop your vision as a leader. Go to <https://my.artioscollege.org/en/resources>. Or find them here: <https://center.artioscollege.org/webinar-resource-list/>.



What Will You Find Online?

Lots! Here are some features you can enjoy:

Now What? One article every month explores life experiences in which our faith can fail and we ask ourselves, “Now what?” God always has the right answer to our most troubling questions.

Online Extras. Some articles don’t make it into the *Bible Advocate* because we run out of space. These “extras” will bless and edify you.

Media4U. This page lists movies, apps, shows, books, and other media with Christian values and messages that can enhance your spiritual growth.

AudioBA. No time to read? No problem! You can listen to the entire *Bible Advocate* through the Audio BA (English and Spanish). The BA also streams on the main audio online platforms.

2026 BA Theme: The Story of Jesus

In 2026, our Bible Studies for Adults series, Portraits of Jesus, will study the four Gospels. And the BA will come alongside those with the “Story of Jesus” theme to cover our six issues.

We will study what it means to follow Jesus as Savior and Lord and recommit ourselves to our high calling and the worship it releases.

Join us on this journey! Review themes for individual issues at baonline.org (About/Write For Us), then send your article submissions to bibleadvocate@cog7.org.



Cristo Viene - Missionary Support

GC Missions continues to support those who share the gospel in areas where it has not been previously shared, fulfilling the Great Commission. You can assist these missionaries by praying and supporting their work through these formats:

- 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/>.



Lord's Supper

Every year, we invite our brethren to help us create the design for the upcoming Lord’s Supper. If you have graphic design or drawing skills and want to share your talents by providing a design, please email us at cog7media@cog7.org.

We are always seeking talent. Don’t hesitate to connect!



Missions in a War Zone

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by **Ronald Rousseau**

When I was about eight years old and living in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, a friend of the family drove up to the front of our home in his Cherokee truck. Both he and the truck were covered in a thick layer of dust. He looked as though he had ridden on the truck's roof.

Once our friend climbed out, I asked him, "Big Ronald [I was little Ronald], where are you coming from?"

He said that he left Port-au-Prince that morning, drove to Les Cayes, and drove back all in the same day.

I don't know where the words came from, but I opened my mouth and called him a liar. In that society, it was not the norm

to call a person older than you a liar. I myself was surprised I'd said it, but a one-way trip to Les Cayes in those days easily took twelve hours. The road from the capital city of Port-au-Prince to Les Cayes could be a challenge, especially during the rainy season. You did not know if you could actually get there or how long it might take. Sometimes it was dangerous.

That's why for Big Ronald to tell me that he went there and back on the same day was unbelievable. He explained to me that they had built a highway from Port-au-Prince to Les Cayes. Still, I had a hard time believing that they could build a road that converted a dangerous twelve-hour trip to a four-hour safe trip.



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Paradigms of missions

We live in a world where a thirty-mile trip on our roads is not a big deal, but in other places the roads are not paved. A short trip on these difficult roads can be dangerous or take a lot of effort to travel, and they may not take you far. But many servants of the gospel do it anyway.

That kind of challenging travel is one paradigm of doing missions. There are others. When we think about sharing the gospel, our paradigm may be to introduce Jesus to a stranger at a coffee shop. But some may be intimidated to do so. “Talk to a complete stranger about Jesus and ‘out’ myself as a Christian?” That thought is so scary to some.

In another paradigm, if missionaries participate in a public assembly, mention their membership in the Church of God (Seventh Day), or speak the name of Jesus, they may land in jail. GC Missions has missionaries in politically unstable places around the world, in war zones, and in places where traveling thirty miles may take you a whole day. We have heard testimonies of individuals who were driven out of their communities for accepting the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are not talking about decades ago. We are talking about now. They travel a difficult road for the gospel. A dangerous road.

When we lift GC Missions and its missionaries in prayer, we should pray with the fervor congruent to the challenges they face. They travel on a road that is full of difficulties and deadly situations, and they face imprisonment for their beliefs.



Missionary challenges

Perhaps sharing your faith with someone in a coffee shop or with someone burdened with surviving wartime conditions are not the same thing. If your paradigm is a smooth, paved road, then travel swiftly! Share the gospel and pray for those missionaries whose road is not so well paved.

Jesus has called us to “go and make disciples.” He said to His followers, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15, NIV). The word go is so powerful — a mandate from the Son of God. Jesus is saying, “Go where I send you with the understanding that you

may face war, natural disasters, and difficulties that you cannot imagine.” It’s good for us to keep this commission in mind because the breadth of work that GC Missions performs sometimes requires our missionaries to operate in terribly difficult places and in extremely challenging situations in order to spread the gospel.

When I hear of the situations that our missionaries work under, it is hard for me to believe. When they share how they are willing and able to persevere, I understand how convicted they are of the love of Christ and how they must go and share the good news.





We lift up our missionaries in prayer for the love of the gospel, and we ask that God supply them with courage for the road they travel. It is not smooth and even, but they journey on. Sometimes, thirty-four miles can take a whole day or two or three to travel. But they've learned that when God calls us to go, we go because He is a faithful God and will provide the strength to journey on, smooth or bumpy may the road be.

Message from Myanmar

To illustrate this point, I have included a communication from one of our pastors in Myanmar who is working under such conditions. Here is what Brother Tluang says regarding the war in

his country and the status of the Church there:

[The war] is going on in most parts of the country. Sometimes, towns are captured by the revolution fighters, and sometimes they are taken again by the regime coup soldiers. It's been going [on] like this. It's been the fifth year, and I don't see it coming to its end. Half of the people in our Chin State have fled to other places where they can go and escape. Our churches in those regions are out of contact. Young men and women are in danger of conscription law. Our church members in Taung Ngu have also fled to nearby villages again this week, and our pastor, his wife, and youngest

daughter were arrested for a while, as they were unable to run. It was on Wednesday this week. But they were released the next day. We praise God for this. And we are glad that our church building, which is in the process of construction, was not burnt by the soldiers. We praise God for this also.

So it's like this. Those people living in Yangon are also in danger, and we have to be careful. One of our church members was also arrested by the militia groups last Sunday while walking on the street. But we can bribe them, and he was released in the evening. So we are rolling like this. I do not have photos. It may be searched from the Internet.

Brother Tluang's words remind us to pray for brethren in Myanmar and around the world. **BA**

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



STATEMENT

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Found Faithful

There are no human means that can measure the power of a faithful life lived in service to God. Whether it is the father who diligently sows the Word of God into his child or the grandmother who faithfully ensures her grandchild finds their place in Sabbath school — the measure of a faithful life lies outside our time and ability to quantify, for its true measure is found only in the realm of eternity.

This is why our heavenly Father is so passionate about our faithfulness and why His call to it is so pervasive throughout His Word. From Genesis, where God calls Abraham to “walk before Me and be blameless” (17:1), to Revelation’s pure bride of Christ who “has made herself ready” . . . arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright” (19:7, 8), the call to and emphasis on faithfulness is impossible to miss.

The Scriptures remind us well that a faithful life results in a life of impact and eternal significance. Remember Noah: He walked with God, found grace, built an ark, and saved humanity. And Daniel, in whom “they could find no charge or fault” (6:4), has inspired countless myriads and testifies, “God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths, . . . because I was found innocent before Him” (v. 22). And Paul, who tirelessly “labored more abundantly than they all” (1 Corinthians 15:10), delivered to us nearly half of the New Testament. Through it the gospel has been proclaimed, defended, and believed on to the salvation of countless souls and to the great glory of God in Christ. These all stand, put simply, as a testament to the power of faithfulness.

But we do well to remember that a compromised life also carries its own power. King David had times where he failed to live up to God’s

call to faithfulness. While it is difficult to reflect on these moments, we are wise to peer in and learn from them (Romans 15:4). For in the wake of David’s unfaithfulness we read of the ignominious death of his own beloved son, Absalom, and learn of the high cost and power of compromise. Absalom himself was caught up, literally and figuratively, in the relentless grasp of compromise.

God has given each of us, you and me, a clarion call to faithfulness. We read of this call in Proverbs: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (3:5, 6). In these three simple phrases — *trust in, lean not, in all your ways acknowledge* — are found the keys to the faithful life we are called to.

As we hear God’s call, may the stark contrast between faithfulness and compromise be ever present before us. May we remember that in and through faithfulness we are positioned for kingdom impact, where time and eternity are forever changed. But in compromise, the bitter fruit of weakness and loss surely awaits.

In Christ’s church today, as we reflect on the age we live in and as we remember that each one will one day give an account (Romans 14:12; Hebrews 4:13), may we clearly hear God’s call to a faithful and uncompromised life. Indeed, may passion and a holy fire within be our response. And by the grace of God, our Father through His Holy Spirit will encourage and empower us, and we will indeed be found faithful!

— Greg Lincoln



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