

BEYOND TODAY

Envisioning a Better World Tomorrow

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES: A TIME FOR CHOOSING



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The UN at 80: Is World Peace a Lost Cause?

In our September–October 2025 issue, as the world marked the 80th anniversary of the United Nations, we saw that true and lasting peace will only come through the return of Jesus Christ to establish the Kingdom of God.

Articles contrasting this world with Christ's coming reign

Thank you for sending me your magazine even though I cannot donate just now. I particularly liked the articles relating to the UN and Christ's government.

Subscriber in the United Kingdom

Becky Sweat, I wanted to take a moment to thank you for that remarkable and God-inspired article you recently wrote, "7 Ways Christ's Rule Will Be So Wonderfully Different." I read *Beyond Today* often, and I really liked Scott Ashley's articles of the past as well.

Subscriber in Missouri

Gratitude for previous issue's articles and our study guides

I so enjoyed Darris McNeely's work on the Council of Nicaea ["The Council of Nicaea: Unraveling the Myths and Truths" in the July-August 2025 issue]. It is so nice to have so many facts in one place. Excellent scholarship. Thank you.

From the Internet

I went to the mailbox and found your booklet *Who Is God?* To study and meditate on such things as the family of God we are to become is so needed. To dare to dream of such love and unity, of such wonder and goodness. The next day the mailbox had another, *The Church Jesus Built*. How can I say thank you!? I am in the process of surrendering my life to Christ. I'll be spending a couple of weeks on both booklets. Your article "The Spiritual Glow of Joy" [in the July-August 2025 issue] is what I'm after. To be found faithful and obedient to God. Thank you very much.

From the Internet

I've been studying your booklet *The Church Jesus Built*. It is so wonderful and refreshing to hear the truth. It blows away

confusion on such words as "church." In our world it has become the name of human organizations and buildings. Sharing such godly instruction and understanding of the Scriptures has to be God sent.

Reader in Tennessee

Other responses to our free resources

I came across your magazine mostly by accident. I am impressed by the absolute truthfulness of the articles I read in *Beyond Today*, backed up by Bible references. My neighbor gave me his magazine, and now every morning 25-30 of us meet for prayers and to praise God. This prison and many like it are not as evil and wicked as portrayed on TV. I have good neighbors—men with righteous values—who made a wrong choice once. We mostly look forward to being released—maybe this year—into your world, which we have determined is broken.

Reader in California prison

I absolutely love the Bible study and how your church explains the Bible. I don't want to miss anything. Thank you for making the Bible easier to understand. God bless.

From the Internet

I need to let the Church know how grateful I am for the lessons and booklets that I am currently receiving from the United Church of God. If not for these lessons and booklets I would never have known the true Word of God. Thank you so much.

Reader in Georgia

I am just wanting to thank you very much for the updated *Beyond Today* app. Also, the YouTube *Beyond Today* platform is amazing. They are both easy to use and navigate. I very much like the UCG website, and the layout again is extremely easy to use. I'm just thankful for everything—what God does for us as a people, what He does for

our congregations, what he does for our pastors, and so on. Thank you so very much for all you do at the home office.

From the Internet

Finding a congregation near you

My family and I are looking for a congregation and fellowship to be a part of and are wondering if you could help us. Our family are Sabbath-keepers, we keep to traditional faith values and keep to the Old and New Testaments, avoiding any New Age practices of religion. We are seeking Bible study classes to help us grow in our faith, for fellowship and for a place to learn, study and worship as soon as possible.

From the Internet

I am interested in your church. I want to learn about you more. Is there someone in your church I can get in contact with in Turkey? How can someone who lives in Turkey take baptism lessons and belong to your church? Thanks for your response.

From the Internet

I would like to find a United Church of God in Madrid, Spain. I want to be where the biblical feasts are observed.

From the Internet

Thanks for reaching out! The United Church of God, which publishes Beyond Today, has congregations around the world, and we would love to hear from you. You can find the congregation closest to you at ucg.org/congregations, or by getting in touch with the local office nearest you listed on page 31.

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Discerning the Times— and What to Do

As much of the world enters into a new calendar year, it's natural to think about where we are in the scope of history and where it's all headed. Some are surprised we have reached the year 2026, having thought apocalyptic events would have overtaken us by now. Others assume we still have all the time in the world.

Does it matter? Where are we in the march of events? And what does that mean for your own life?

When asked by His disciples about signs that would herald His second coming and the end of the present age, Jesus Christ related a sequence of worsening conditions and events that would transpire (found in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21). He said that we would not know the exact time of His coming but that we could recognize its approach: “Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!” (Matthew 24:32-33).

There is a parallel here with Jesus' *first* coming. He rebuked the religious teachers of that time who did not accept Him as the foretold Messiah—though they should have been able to see that. “He answered and said to them, ‘When it is evening you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red’; and in the morning, ‘It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening’” (Matthew 16:2). This has come down to us in the more recent form: “Red sky in morning, sailors take warning; red sky at night, sailors’ delight.”

Jesus continued: “Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times” (verses 2-3).

There were clear indicators of the Messiah's coming. Jesus' ministry met the time frame of a prophecy in Daniel 9 of there being a specific number of years until the Messiah would come. It was during the time of the Roman Empire, the fourth ruling power mentioned in Daniel 2 and 7 that would see the coming of the Messiah. He was preceded by a prophesied Elijah figure who prepared the way and announced Him—John the Baptist. Moreover, Jesus' miracles, His magnification of the law, His message and His character should all have told them what time it was—the time of the Messiah's coming.

But they refused to see it. And many still refused even after His death and resurrection.

Today, since He also gave signs that would precede His future return, it's vital that we *discern them*—and there are definite indications that we are in the end time. But the same discernment should have recognized when it was not *yet* the end time. And it should further inform us if we are in the end time but still with some significant time to go. We explore that

needed perspective in this issue of *Beyond Today*.

Of course, it is not enough to know what time it is. We must know *what to do* in that time—as did the ancient sons of Issachar in our cover story.

If we realize there is yet time ahead of us, we should be very cautious. As time wears on, there is a tendency to let down in our attitude, thinking as the unfaithful servant Jesus spoke about, “My master is delaying his coming” (Matthew 24:48)—leading to misbehavior and mistreatment of others, resulting in judgment and personal destruction (verses 49-51). It is vital to continue in the good work God has appointed us to (verses 45-46).

Put another way, it is critical that we make good use of the time we have available. Even if we think we have time, it's still limited—and any of us could die tomorrow. Scripture tells us not to fall asleep spiritually—but instead to “awake” and “walk circumspectly [carefully], not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time [reclaiming it from other pursuits], because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:14-15). Seeming to have time to worthlessly burn is very deceptive.

Jesus said of His own work that He needed to do what He had to while there was still time—for at a certain point His work of that day could no longer continue (John 9:4). And the same applies to all of us now.

Several articles in this issue concern managing our time. A lot has to do with prioritizing—choosing what we will do with that precious resource. There is so much that can occupy our time. Jesus said: “But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day [of His return] come on you unexpectedly . . . Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:34-36).

The Contemporary English Version paraphrases 1 Peter 4:7 this way: “Everything will soon come to an end. So be serious and be sensible enough to pray.”

This is not just a *one-time* choice but an *ongoing* choice. We have to take time—*make* time—to pray and study the Bible and live as God has called us to. All the distractions are a test of character. *You make time for what you value most.* If it's important to you, you will fit it in.

What's important to you? Make sure your relationship with God through Christ is at the top of the list—and stays at the top. If you've fallen short, repent and endure. Then you'll be ready for the end when it comes—to proceed into eternity with the Father and Christ without end, at last unbounded by the constraints of time!

Tom Robinson, Managing Editor

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES: A TIME FOR CHOOSING

As the world enters a new year, we should consider what's been happening and where we are in God's timeline for the nations. Most importantly, what does this mean for the choices before you?

by Darris McNeely

Over the past year history accelerated. In 2025, wars raged, peace was declared, and culture continued deteriorating. The Middle East, Europe, Asia and America continued to shape our world. While events may seem far from you, they likely contributed to anxiety in your life. As much as we want to live at peace in our neighborhood, history tells us the world is interconnected. What happens in Asia impacts Europe. What happens in Latin America impacts North America—and vice versa. We cannot hide from world events.

With 2026 before us, we should consider where we are in the march of history, as God moves the world closer to the climax—the second coming of Jesus Christ. That day will come, and we need to be watching for significant events that will precede it. Even when events seem to calm, time marches on—and we must continue to be mindful.

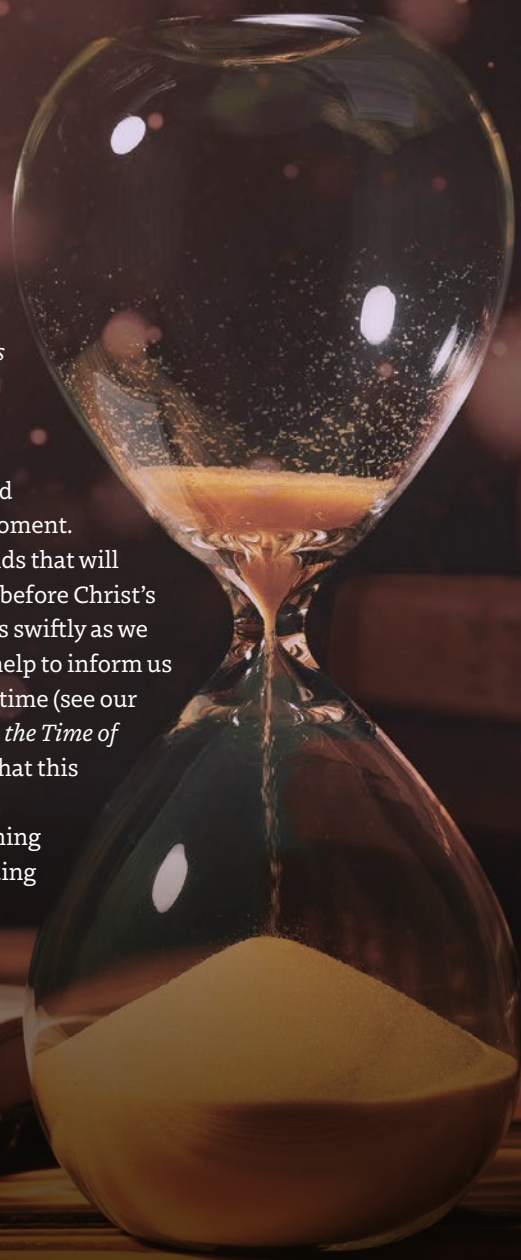
The Bible has a term for ignoring what's happening. It's called "sleep." Spiritual sleep is as lethal as carbon monoxide gas—silent and deadly.

Listen to what God inspired the apostle Paul to write: "But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren,

are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. *Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober*" (1 Thessalonians 5:1-6, emphasis added throughout).

This does not mean we should expect the end to come at any moment. There are definite signs and trends that will precede the catastrophic events before Christ's return. This end may not come as swiftly as we anticipate—and today's trends help to inform us on that. While we live in the end time (see our free study guide *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*), there are indications that this world has some time left.

Scripture encourages discerning the times we're in—and responding accordingly. Even if the wait before the onrush of final calamity is longer than we might expect, that is no reason to let down. Events could still proceed quite rapidly. And in any case, however long we have is an opportunity to make good use of the time available. The question is, what will you do in terms of the way you live your life and raise your family? This is a *time for choosing*, and it is vital you understand what you should do.



The example of the sons of Issachar for our day

There is an episode from the Bible to illustrate this time of choice. In 1 Chronicles 12 we read the story of people embracing the leadership of David, whom God had chosen to be king in place of Saul. When Saul died, David was made king over the southern tribe of Judah. But the northern tribes still followed the house of Saul, propped up by his general for several more years. As the north's leadership was fracturing, realization was dawning that the future lay with David, and we see how some were negotiating the moment with wisdom and courage.

This is especially the case with the leaders and people of the tribe of Issachar, as they pledged loyalty to the new king in the south. Notice the wording: "... of the sons of Issachar who had *understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do*, their chiefs were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their command" (verse 32).

Those described here made a hard assessment of the events of their time. Power was shifting. God was moving among His people. Yet they had to choose the national leader to follow. Their well-being depended on the choice. They made the right choice to align with David. God had chosen David. Now the nation would prosper under his rule.

We are at such a moment in terms of a great shift in the world and choosing what leader we will ultimately follow. Whom will *we* serve?

This is not about choosing a political leader from any world power. It is about choosing to serve the One whom the Father has chosen to rule the world—*Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and ruling King*. It is about rejecting the current ideologies—most of which further confuse people about God, biblical values and true spiritual principles. It certainly is not about any of the current world religions. They are bankrupt when it comes to the teaching that leads to worshiping God in spirit and truth (see John 4:24).

It involves for us today trusting

God's Kingdom is not yet here ruling the nations. When it arrives, you will know. And it's important to prepare now for the coming change in world order.

Him and God the Father in moving today's world toward the time when the Kingdom of God comes to earth—recognizing what is happening and submitting to Christ's rule even now. God's Kingdom is not yet here ruling the nations. When it arrives, you will know. And it's important to prepare now for the coming change in world order—and the calamitous times that will usher it in.

Before Christ's return— Europe's rise and America's fall

But how close is that change? Will the world be set free from the way things are tomorrow? Not right away. Scripture shows that a final revival of the Roman Empire will emerge in Europe before that to dominate the globe. It will in the end be opposed by a powerful bloc of nations to the east. (See our free study guides *The Final Superpower* and *Russia and Bible Prophecy*.)

The world's preeminent superpower of today, the United States of America, will then be greatly diminished in power—even suffering devastation at that time. We know that because we understand the identity of the United States, along with Great Britain and other related nations, in Bible prophecy.

Indeed, the modern fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham through Israel is the defining biblical truth of the modern geopolitical world. God's enduring promise to Abraham unlocks the key to understanding the message of the biblical prophets for today. These ancient prophecies are headlines of today's world events. They concern not only the Jewish people, but the present role of America among the nations. (Be sure to read our free study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.)

American leadership on the world scene was foretold in Scripture—as was the nation's fall to the end-time European power. How close are we to that outcome?

We, of course, don't know for sure—because God can bring change quickly. But for the present, U.S. power in the world remains at the forefront by far, with other nations and international power blocs, including the European Union, significantly behind.

That lets us know that, though there are warning signs, the end is not yet. The international scene must yet change dramatically before the final calamitous events of the end of the age come on the world. Yet it looks like things will continue with the United States on top for a while.

Let's take a closer look at the world scene today to see this more clearly.

Where things presently stand— U.S. resurgent despite divide

Politics and personality should be put aside as we objectively look at the current scene. With Donald Trump's return to the U.S. presidency, consequential events have transpired. The direction of America abruptly changed.

Because of the nation's prominent position in global affairs, what happens in America impacts the rest of the world in significant ways. Many in other nations may resent that, but it's a fact of geopolitics today. The American president commands vast power. It is not always handled righteously or well. But it is consequential.

Note some changes of the past year. The country's southern border was sealed, halting uncontrolled illegal entry by millions. Law enforcement agents

began the systematic process of returning people who entered unlawfully—including many drug traffickers and other criminals intent on doing harm.

This is not to disparage many desperate people desiring a better life in America. Many flee the corruption, crime and poverty in their native land. Yet human migration has evolved beyond the “huddled masses yearning to breathe free,” becoming a means to undermine the rule of law and a nation built on vital freedoms.

The pace of action taken by the current administration is unprecedented. It is also highly controversial—with resistance from the opposing party and ongoing challenges in the courts. American politics and culture have seen increased turmoil in the past quarter century, with the nation heavily split. Every major state and national election is hotly contested, and there is real fear of civil strife erupting on a scale that could do real harm to the nation.

Yet despite all the problems, much has been done to help sustain the country’s strength and to project continuing power and influence around the world. Again, this is not a political or nationalistic sentiment. It is simply an observation of fact. We are seeing a resurgence of America. As long as it lasts, it will have consequences, and it is significant in considering where we are in the flow of end-time events.

Continuing international preeminence

Let’s look further at some specific examples from the past year of unrivaled U.S. dominance on the world stage.

• **Strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities:**

On June 22 America sent bombers over Iran, striking and destroying its nuclear capacity. The Fordow uranium-enrichment facility, the Natanz nuclear facility and the Isfahan nuclear technology center in Iran were attacked. The operation

involved stealth aircraft (B-2 bombers), very large “bunker buster” bombs, and Tomahawk missiles from submarines. The stated objective was to degrade Iran’s nuclear-enrichment infrastructure and delay its capacity to acquire a nuclear weapon (or to move further toward one) by striking deeply buried facilities like Fordow. The United States sought to support Israel’s aim of stopping Iran’s march to nuclear acquisition.

This attack stunned the world. It re-

leaders, was security guarantees for Ukraine, similar to protection offered under Article 5 of the NATO treaty for its members. It was stressed how Europe needs to shoulder more of the burden for Ukraine’s long-term security, though it was also stated that America would participate.

The meeting came at a moment of transition in Europe’s view of its security posture. Some European leaders emphasized the need for Europe to

assume greater responsibility rather than rely solely on the United States. By convening this large group at the White House, the president positioned himself as a broker in the Ukraine conflict.

The point to note here is that *Europe came to America*. America is the only nation currently able to command such respect as to have Europe’s leaders gathered before its president’s desk. This fact underlines America’s dominant position astride world affairs.

Europe has a major role to play in Bible prophecy, as earlier noted. But its nations are far from being a cohesive power playing a significant military role in the world, as foretold (see Revelation 13:4). At present, America is the key player.

• **The Gaza peace agreement:** On Oct. 9, Hamas and Israel signed the initial phase of a deal under the U.S.-brokered “20-point plan” for Gaza. The agreement called for a cessation of hostilities in Gaza and an Israeli withdrawal to predefined lines in the Gaza Strip. Other points included the release of all remaining Israeli hostages by Hamas in exchange for the release of large numbers of prisoners and humanitarian and reconstruction provisions and aid to rebuild infrastructure in Gaza.

The Gaza peace agreement ends a horrendous two-year war. Israel’s reputation on the world stage has been severely damaged. A terrible cost has been paid by all sides in death and destruction.

The U.S. administration has



European leaders seated before the Oval Office desk on Aug. 18, 2025 to discuss the Ukraine war.

set strategic relationships in the region. Other Arab states feared a nuclear Iran. It showed how Israel and America were prepared to act in preventing further escalation of conflict in the region. No other world power could do what the United States did that day—its bombers flying halfway around the world for a precision strike and then returning unharmed to their base in mid-America.

• **Europe comes to Washington:** On Aug. 18 the White House hosted a group of leaders from Europe. The purpose was to address the ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia, specifically focusing on how the United States, Ukraine and European nations could coordinate their efforts. Sitting before the U.S. president in his office were the leaders of Ukraine, Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy and Finland, along with the European Commission president and the secretary-general of NATO.

One of the main agenda items, strongly emphasized by European

positioned itself as a broker of a major Middle East peace. This could reenergize American involvement and credibility in the region. Western European states, having long pushed for steps toward a two-state solution, see this as a window of opportunity to engage in reconstruction, greater stability and perhaps reduce refugee flows and humanitarian burdens. Positive economic impact may draw international investment and private sector interest and potentially open new markets and trade corridors in the region.

The book of Revelation details the end of the age revolving around a global economic boom that promises peace and prosperity. Merchants of the earth will prosper with the rise of a global power called Babylon, led ultimately by the end-time European-centered power. This system will combine politics, religion and economic prosperity to create an unprecedented world order. At the heart of the current peace movements in the Middle East we can see a path leading toward that.

For now it is American power that is driving all this. The point again being that we are not yet at the time of the collapse of America and the rise of the final European empire and the calamity that immediately precedes the return of Christ. (Also read “Could the End Come Tomorrow?” beginning on page 14.)

Awaiting the Kingdom, what will your choice be today?

While the end is not yet, we must not become complacent. Prophesied events *will* occur. Armies will one day converge on Jerusalem. World leaders will negotiate agreements and settlements involving Israel and surrounding countries.

A *New York Times* picture showed tens of thousands of Gazan refugees streaming back from exile to their ruined properties. Looking at the picture conjures scenes from the Bible of future



We should not imagine that we have plenty of time. Rather, we need to make good use of the time we have.

refugees from a great world tribulation coming into the land of Israel at God’s call to rebuild the cities under the rule of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

One day that rule will be announced to the world. Until then what should our focus and action be?

The sons of Issachar understood the time and knew not only what *Israel* should do but what *they* should do. Do you know what *you* should do? Looking at the world in 2026, just what should be your reaction?

We are not at the point of events that will trigger the final events before the second coming of Jesus Christ. But the world could change quickly, as we’ve seen. A few major natural disasters could change the standing of nations drastically. And more importantly, for each of us individually our time could be up at any moment in death. None of us knows how

much time we have.

So we should not imagine that we have plenty of time. Rather, we need to make good use of the time we have. As Jesus Himself said about the work He came to do, “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work” (John 9:4). This also applies to those carrying on in that work today, His Church in its mission to proclaim His gospel while there is time. But it further applies to all of us responding to the gospel—each carrying out our individual responsibility of seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

Now is the time to prepare your life for God’s Kingdom coming to this earth—submitting to the rule of Jesus Christ even

today. Now is the time to live righteously, repenting of sin and living as God commands, alert to the true meaning of world events. Continuing where we left off earlier in 1 Thessalonians 5, let the words of the apostle Paul be your guide:

“For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing” (verses 7-11).

God is guiding history. Keep alert and follow Him. He will guide your understanding to the light—and to receiving Him and His ways into eternity! **BT**

DIVE DEEPER



Even though there is still time before the final calamities that will usher in the return of Jesus Christ, that does not mean His return is far away. There are many indications that we are living in the last days. Request or download our helpful study guide *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* And to understand how America and other nations of British heritage fit into this, also obtain our study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. Both are available free. **Scan the code or visit ucg.org/jf26 to find them.**





Coping *in a* Rapidly Changing World

In this world of ever-increasing changes, it's easy to worry about the future and what might happen. What can you do to not crumble? The solution includes taking stock on what is really going on so you're not caught off-guard, and leaning on God, the one true source of stability.

by Becky Sweat

At the risk of sounding like an “old person,” I admit that lately I find myself telling a lot of “Back in my day” stories to the high school and college students I know. I tell them that when I was a teen, I had to go to the library to do research for class assignments, type my term papers on a typewriter, do manual layouts for the school newspaper using paper and rulers, and find a payphone to call someone if I had an emergency away from home.

What I find particularly interesting is young people will often respond by saying: “Sure, things are different from when you were a kid. But think about how much change there's been just in my lifetime!”

And it's true. Our world and our lifestyles have been radically altered in only the last 15 to 20 years.

Much of this change is a direct result of technological innovations, in particular the advent of the Internet and smartphones in the late 20th century, which revolutionized communication and allowed for an unprecedented flow of information. That paved the way for the development of text messaging, video streaming services, e-commerce websites like Amazon, and social media sites like Instagram and Facebook—all of which became an integral part of Western culture by the 2010s. Then of course the last three to five years have seen the surge in artificial intelligence (AI) systems,

further reshaping the way we live and work.

Tech companies are now working to develop more advanced AI systems, brain-computer interfaces, quantum computers (far exceeding the speed and scale of traditional computers in solving complex problems), and smart cities (managed by sensors and AI).

On top of that are seismic geopolitical, social and cultural shifts intensified by new technologies. For instance, social media and digital platforms give voice to political activists and “regular folk,” leading to polarization among peoples and driving societal change.

The mathematics behind our rapid rate of change

Obviously, for as long as human beings have been on the earth, there have been cultural changes, inventions, social movements and new ways of thinking. Consider how the development of the printing press, steam engine and automobile, along with the ideologies of Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx, transformed the world. On a more personal level, throughout history kids have probably heard stories about how their parents and grandparents lived and marveled at how different life was “back then.”

But while societies have always experienced change, since the early part of the 20th century *the rate of change* has been

rapidly speeding up. Today, we're experiencing an accelerated rate of both technological and cultural changes unlike anything past generations have witnessed.

The reason, explains Richard Swenson in his 2004 best-seller *Margin*, is that "the mathematics are different. Many of the linear lines that described the world in the past have now disappeared. Replacing them are lines that slope upward exponentially. Because there is little in our day-to-day lives that changes exponentially, we tend to think with a linear mindset. Week after week, everything seems about the same. Meanwhile, largely unnoticed by us, history has shifted to fast forward. If linear still best describes our personal lives, exponential now best describes most of historical change" (p. 40).

British AI entrepreneur Mustafa Suleyman believes the invention of the integrated circuit (later known as a *silicon chip*) in the early 1960s initiated the exponential technological change. He notes in *The Coming Wave* that "since the early 1970s the number of transistors per chip has increased ten-million-fold. Their power has increased by ten orders of magnitude—a 17-billion-fold improvement . . . This rise in computational power underpinned a flowering of devices, applications, and users. In the early 1970s there were about half a million computers. Back in 1983, only 562 computers total were connected to the primordial internet. Now the number of computers, smartphones, and connected devices is estimated at 14 billion. It took smartphones a few years to go from niche product to utterly essential item for two-thirds of the planet" (2025, pp. 33-34).

He continues: "Access to technology grows as it gets cheaper. Technology proliferates, and with every successive wave that proliferation accelerates and penetrates deeper, even as the technology gets more powerful" (p. 34). He foresees a continuing acceleration of technological innovation in the years ahead as capabilities accumulate and efficiencies increase.

Aside from tech-related changes, our world is experiencing other compounding changes. For instance, the Bible being taken out of schools and public life has led to a greater acceptance of unbiblical lifestyles. The decline of the nuclear family and increase in divorce rates have certainly led to social or mental health problems, which can in turn lead to increasing crime rates. It's no wonder *change overload* has become a popular catchphrase.

More change than we can handle

In 1970, futurist Alvin Toffler described the effects of "too much change in too short a period of time" in his contemporary classic *Future Shock*.

He predicted that people exposed to these rapid changes of modern life would suffer from "shattering stress and disorientation." They would be, in his words, "*future-shocked*." He maintained that the need to constantly adapt to changing situations could lead to feelings of helplessness, despair, depression, uncertainty, insecurity, anxiety and burnout. His description matches what we find today.

A 2024 GlobeScan opinion poll shows that nearly eight in ten people worldwide (78 percent) believe "the world is changing too quickly for me," indicating an overall sense of anxiety about the radical transformations our world is undergoing, whether they be technological changes, or social or political upheavals.

Most of us don't like change, especially when it's thrust upon us. We enjoy our routines and having some "normalcy" to our lives. We like to think we have some control over how we live. So when we hear about the latest political maneuverings,

we can't help but feel some stress about how those developments might play out. We might worry how the development of super AI could impact us, what having a brain-computer interface might lead to, or how geopolitical realignments could affect our retirement portfolios.

It's the uncertainty about what "might happen" and "fearing the worst" that has a lot of people feeling jittery. We might be overwhelmed with so much to take in all at once. It can be hard to know how to interpret what is happening: Will this new development make life better or worse? Even changes that ultimately turn out to be improvements can be

stressful if they happen too fast.

(To note some major changes of recent times, read "10 Dramatic Changes in Recent Decades" on pages 12-13.)

Thriving through uncertainty

It's all a lot to deal with! Thankfully, the Bible provides guidelines for how to face uncertain times with courage, wisdom and a positive mindset. These guidelines include:

- **Look to God for stability.** No matter how tumultuous or volatile this world gets, we can always count on God to take care of us. He is our refuge and our Rock (Psalm 46:1; 18:2). His promises and truths don't change and never will (Malachi 3:6; Isaiah 40:8). We need to make our relationship with God our top priority, setting aside time for daily prayer, Bible study and meditation, because ultimately that's what will get us through challenging times.

- **Don't be caught off-guard.** Expect continuing changes in the world as we get closer to Christ's return. The Bible tells us that in the end time knowledge would increase (Daniel 12:4), that there would be numerous wars (Matthew 24:6-8),



that societies would be immoral and violent (2 Timothy 3:2-3), and that the love of many would grow cold (Matthew 24:12)—which could certainly be a result of people giving most of their attention to their digital devices. The move towards a cashless society and digital tracking could align for what might happen in the future with the rise of the “Beast” power in Revelation. We don’t know if the changes we’re seeing now will directly lead to end-time events, but they could. At the very least we shouldn’t be alarmed when we see these things.

• **Be willing to go against the tide.** Romans 12:2 warns against conforming “to the pattern of this world” (New

International Version). In today’s terms, don’t cave in and let AI write your essay or post information on Facebook that should be kept private, just because everyone else is doing so. Think about whether things would really be benefi-

cial in the long run. We shouldn’t blindly follow the trends.

• **Stay connected with other people for support.** Make the effort to build and maintain connections with friends, relatives, neighbors and fellow church members. This will help

Colossians 3:2 says to “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”

10 Dramatic Changes in Recent Decades

Lifestyles and living conditions have changed dramatically in just the past 15 to 20 years. Here’s a brief overview.

1 We now “interact” more with digital devices than with people. We work, shop, entertain ourselves, do our banking, socialize—all in front of a screen. Rather than talk on the phone or meet in person, we often rely on text messaging to try to maintain friendships. At the supermarket, we use self-checkout terminals to pay for our groceries. At restaurants and drive-throughs, we interact with AI-powered self-service kiosks to place our orders. It’s all taking away opportunities for human-to-human communication we need—even casual interactions with cashiers and clerks we don’t know personally.

2 We’re overloaded with information. Until 1900, human knowledge doubled every century. Now, with AI-powered research tools and the Internet being available to facilitate collaboration among researchers, knowledge is doubling every two to three years. Moreover, the speed and scale of information dissemination has accelerated. We’re bombarded 24/7 with emails, instant messaging, social media, news feeds, etc., sending a continual stream of new information our way—far more than most people can process.

3 The world is much more confusing. Ironically, while we have a crazy amount of information available at our fingertips 24/7, it’s become hard to know what’s true and what isn’t. Anyone can post “information” online via their own blogs and websites, even if it isn’t accurate or hasn’t been truly fact-checked.

Adding to the confusion is AI technology now being used to create deepfakes—images, videos and audio recordings that appear real but aren’t.

At the same time, scientists and intellectuals are increasingly calling into question almost everything Western civilization once espoused (including basic biblical truths), from whether unborn babies are persons from conception and the realities of gender differences, to whether miracles are possible.

4 We lead increasingly less private lives. With just a few clicks, anyone can go online and find out where we live and work, the value of our home, and other once-private details. Some people also voluntarily share a lot of personal information on social media, like details about their friends, their children, marriage problems or

even quarrels conducted online for everyone to see.

On top of that, tracker programs are harvesting data about us every time we go online or use a smart device—where we shop, what we buy, what we believe, what medical conditions we’re concerned about, whom we associate with, etc. And we don’t really know who has or may ultimately end up with this information.

5 People are losing jobs to AI. Some warn that entire industries may end up being taken over by AI over the next decade—something not foreseen a few years back. A push to replace many jobs primarily done by computer is already underway. That includes professions like copyediting, web content writing,



us get through challenging periods and allow us to provide encouragement to others as well. Ecclesiastes 4:12 reminds us of the support found in companionship: “Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a three-fold cord is not quickly broken.”

• **Keep eternity in focus.** Change becomes more stressful when we lose sight of what truly matters.

Colossians 3:2 says to “set your minds on things above, not on earthly things” (NIV). While we must stay alert to what is happening around us, our ultimate focus should be on our ultimate hope. The Bible provides us with a magnificent vision of a better world that’s coming. We know that God the Father will be sending Jesus Christ back to the earth to establish His eternal Kingdom. Keeping that in mind

as the end goal will provide us with hope, confidence and peace of mind.

So while we live in a rapidly changing, increasingly perilous world (2 Timothy 3:1), we can still live our lives with a positive outlook—if we cling tightly to the God who does not change, whose precious promises and truths are absolutely certain! **BT**

DIVE DEEPER



One overarching key to coping with difficult times—whether tumultuous and uncertain or monotonous and wearisome—is learning to trust in God and the promises of His Word. Request or download a free copy of our study guide *You Can Have Living Faith*. Through that faith will also come strength and patience to endure. Scan the code or visit ucg.org/jf26 to find it.



graphic design, medical analysis, computer programming, financial trading, legal work and even customer service. Some labor market experts predict that 40 to 60 percent of jobs worldwide could be lost or degraded due to AI within the next three to five years.

6 We rely on electronic devices to do a lot of our thinking for us. A couple decades ago, if we were planning a car trip to an unfamiliar area, we’d get out a map and plan our route. Now we just get in the car and let our GPS tell us where to drive. Another trend is students and employees using AI assistants like Copilot or ChatGPT to not just help with researching or editing reports, but to actually do the writing for them. This has many concerned, because when people rely on machines to think for them, they miss out on the “cognitive workout” that can strengthen their analytical skills.

7 We’re much closer to a cash-less society. According to credit card processing company Clearly Payments, as of 2025 84 percent of financial transactions in the United States are made digitally. Most of us rarely use cash anymore. Instead, we pay for our purchases using credit or debit cards, digital wallets, digital payment apps, cryptocurrencies, or online payment services like Google Pay and PayPal. When we have bills to pay, rather than write checks, we often make payments online using digital bank apps.

8 The LGBTQ movement has gone mainstream. Probably the biggest change in terms of morality during the last 10 to 15 years has been increased acceptance of the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) movement. Same-sex marriage became legal in the United States in 2015. That same year, “drag queen story hours” for children made their debut. Meanwhile, the entertainment industry has been busily promoting “alternative” lifestyles. It seems like practically every

TV streaming series produced within the last decade has at least one gay couple in it, with those relationships typically portrayed as “normal.”

The public is certainly being influenced. A September 2025 Gallup poll found that 64 percent of Americans now accept gay or lesbian relations, up from 40 percent in 2001.

9 Nations are more divided than ever. This past year, elections in more than 100 nations exposed a widening gulf between those with opposing political views. No matter what country we live in, if we turn on the news or scroll through social media feeds, we are likely to see the rifts.

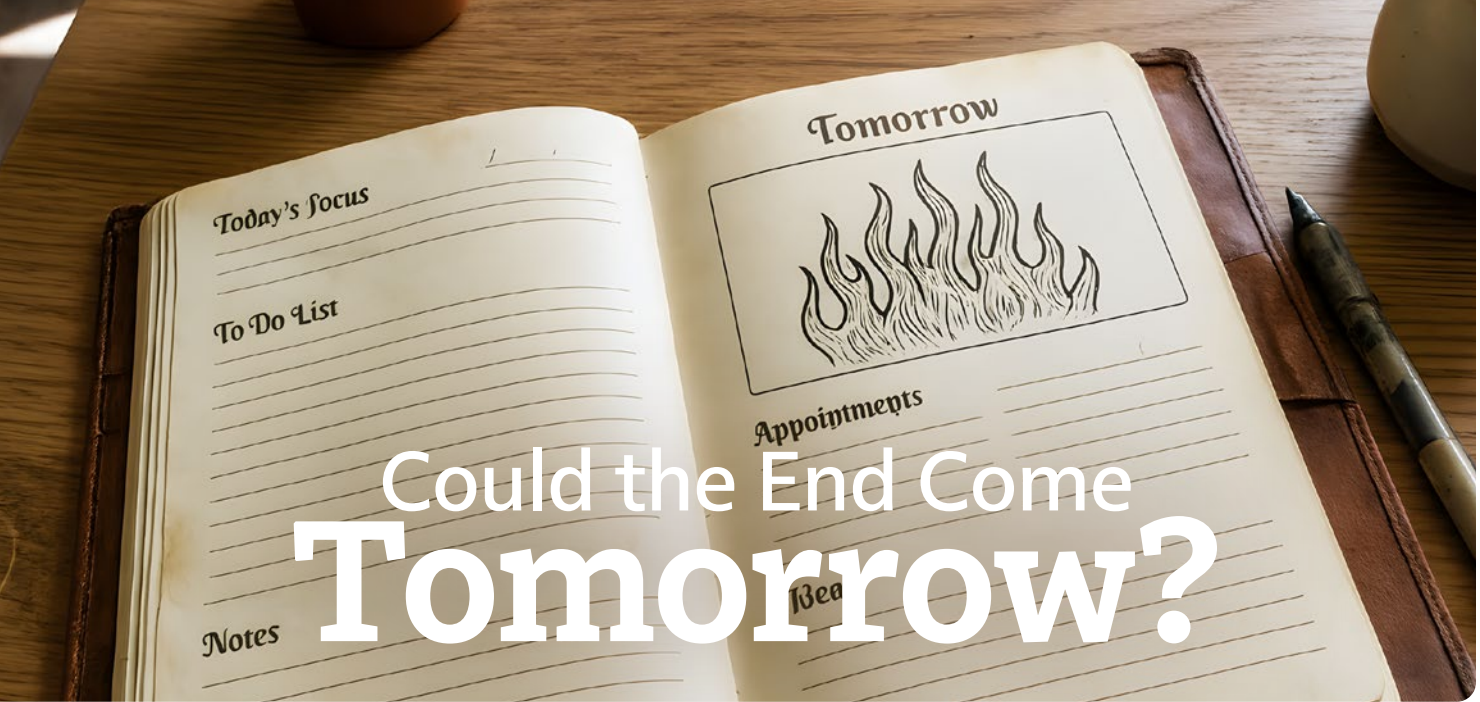
Numerous surveys confirm that America is more divided than at any time since the Civil War. A September 2024 Gallup poll reports a record-high of 80 percent of U.S. adults believe

Americans are seriously divided on politically based issues. Moreover, research confirms that political violence has increased significantly in recent years, due to increasing hatred between political factions. The September 2025 assassination of conservative Christian political spokesperson Charlie Kirk was a sobering reminder of that sad fact.

10 We worry more about the potential for war. With all the political tension in the United States, increasingly Americans believe the nation will experience a civil war sometime in the years ahead. Many are also concerned that the world is on the verge of a worldwide war.

The world feels tense. News headlines talk about wars, trade disputes and nuclear threats. Conflicts like the Israel-Hamas and Russia-Ukraine wars intensify the public’s fears. A 2025 YouGov poll conducted across five European nations and the United States revealed that between 41 and 55 percent of respondents from each nation believe World War III could erupt within the next five to ten years. Concerns haven’t been this elevated since before the start of World War II.





Could the return of Jesus Christ come at any moment? What about the Great Tribulation foretold in association with His return? Could that start tomorrow? How close are we to the end? And what does that mean for you?

by Tom Robinson

Many who believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ regard His return as imminent—in the sense of thinking it could occur at any moment. Others understand that His return must be preceded by a calamitous period of tribulation—as part of a timeline of final events. Yet many among these believe that the tribulation period could start immediately, with Jesus' coming shortly afterward.

What does Scripture say? Could the end be tomorrow? This is a big subject, and we can only sketch out an overview in this short article. But we'll also direct you to more in-depth study guides and resources to help fill in more details on what the Bible tells us.

Could Christ return at any moment?

Jesus Himself said that no one would know the exact timing of His coming (see Matthew 24:42-44). We're further told that Christ's return and end-time calamity will come on the world as a thief in the night—taking most by complete surprise (1 Thessalonians 5:2). Yet we're

further told that for God's faithful people who are watching, the day will not overtake us as a thief (verse 4).

Jesus gave definite signs of the approach of His coming, including increasing turmoil and calamities (see Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). As we look out over the world scene, there are many indications that we are in what Scripture refers to as the latter days or the time of the end. You can learn more about that in our free study guide *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*

But are we at the *very* end—with Jesus about to appear at any time?

Many who think Christ could suddenly arrive without any warning whatever believe in a secret rapture—wherein He will secretly whisk His followers away to heaven prior to the Great Tribulation. Yet Scripture makes it plain that at Christ's return “every eye will see Him” (Revelation 1:7)—“as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west” (Matthew 24:27).

And Christ's followers will not be raised up to meet Him at His return until the conclusion of the end-time

tribulation period (Matthew 24:29-31). They will remain as human beings on earth through this period of 1,260 days or 3½ years, the last part of which is a year-long period known as the Day of the Lord (see, for example, Revelation 12:14-17 and Isaiah 34:8, and to further understand this period request a copy of our free study guides *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* and *The Rapture vs. the Bible*).

So, no—Christ cannot return tomorrow. The Great Tribulation and Day of the Lord must occur first.

Of course, for any of us death could be minutes or seconds away—at which point we will be unconscious until resurrected in the future, when we will meet Jesus. So there is always that personal urgency for us to keep in perspective no matter what is happening in the world.

Could the Great Tribulation start tomorrow?

Now, could the Great Tribulation begin tomorrow? Some imagine so, but the answer is again no. A number of things must happen before that. Here are a few of the preceding conditions

Could the Great Tribulation begin tomorrow?

Some imagine so, but the answer is no. A number of things must happen before that.

or events still ahead of us—which we should be on the lookout for.

1. Further decline of the modern nations of Israel. That includes more than the modern Israeli state and the Jewish people. As explained in our comprehensive study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*, America and the nations of British heritage are the foremost representatives of the Israelites today. And many prophecies and promises about Israel in Scripture concern these modern nations descended from ancient Israel. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 record blessings for national obedience to God and curses for disobedience—which still apply.

These passages describe increasing punishment for sins, with calamities increasing over time until final destruction comes suddenly. That's what happened to both ancient Israel and Judah. God sent escalating problems the people were supposed to learn from, such as terrible droughts (see Jeremiah 12:4; 14:1-6; compare Haggai 1:9-11). They also were increasingly weakened before foreign enemies, becoming subject to them and eventually invaded by them and deported into captivity and slavery.

Many prophecies warn of these things happening again in the end time on a larger scale. The final Great Tribulation period is actually called the time of Jacob's (or Israel's) trouble (Jeremiah 30:7). With the vast power of the United States on the world scene today relative to other nations, this calamity seems yet a ways off (see "Understanding the Times: A Time for Choosing," beginning on page 6).

We are not there yet. Of course, things could change rapidly if we see an increase of natural disasters, internal fragmentation, lawlessness, terrorism, epidemics and collective confusion—all of which are also foretold.

It should be noted that after ancient Israel split into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, the height of wealth and power for the northern kingdom came under King Jeroboam II. It was 20 years later that the nation was devastated and taken into captivity—following a period of decline and paying tribute to Assyria. That's not very long—and things could of course progress even faster.

2. A powerful Europe with an ascendant church dominating the world economic system. As explained in our free study guide *The Final Superpower*, a union of 10 political powers rooted in the ancient Roman Empire will come together under a supreme leader as the last revival of what the book of Revelation calls the Beast. In partnership with a great false Christian religion and its leader, called the False Prophet in Revelation, this will be a restoration of the church-state union known to history as the Holy Roman Empire. (Refer also to our recent articles on the mark of the Beast in the in our July-August issue, available online.)

Europe is very secular in its outlook today. It seems that it will take some time to swing back to a church-state partnership. The Bible does foretell signs and wonders from the false church that can speed this up. And an attack on European Christendom could cause a backlash (see point 4 below).

While Revelation 17 presents the religious side of this wayward system known as Babylon, chapter 18 reveals its commercial side, through which the world's merchants are enriched. This chapter finds parallels in Ezekiel 27, which presents the ancient trading power of Tyre as a forerunner of the end-time system—and appears to apply in a dual sense to the future (see our online Bible commentary on this chapter).

And here we see Israel and Judah among the many international traders in this system (verse 17).

Ancient Israel and Judah entered entangling alliances with foreign powers and ended up reliant on them and paying tribute to them—until they tried to break free and ended up conquered and destroyed. God warned His people, both ancient and modern, not to put their trust in these "lovers" who would ultimately betray them (see Jeremiah 3; 4; 22; Ezekiel 16; 23; Hosea 2). Likewise, the revived European Beast power will in the end bring destruction on the United States and nations of British descent. It will be seen as the leading military power (Revelation 13:4).

Today, the present power dynamic has the United States far and away pre-eminent above other nations. A lot must change to shift hegemony to Europe.

3. A reinstitution of the sacrificial system in Jerusalem—to later be cut off. The prophecy of Daniel 11 shows that a foreign northern ruler would come to dominate the Holy Land, persecute the Jewish people and cause a defilement of the temple sanctuary, setting up an "abomination of desolation," with daily sacrifices stopped (verses 30-32). As our free study guide *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* covers in detail, this came to pass in the second century B.C. under the Greek Syrian ruler Antiochus Epiphanes.

Yet Jesus referred to this abomination as a *future* event that would usher in the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:15-22)—showing Daniel's prophecy to have dual application to the end time. Daniel 12 also shows the sacrifices being stopped—evidently 1,290 days before Daniel himself is resurrected, which will occur at Jesus' return (verses 9-13; see also Daniel 8:11-13, 17).

For the sacrifices to be cut off, they will necessarily have to begin anew, and in these contexts we also see mention of a sanctuary or holy place, which will need to be in some phase of development (Daniel 8:11-13, 17; Matthew 24:15). This system is obviously not yet functioning again, but Jewish groups have

been preparing, with recreating temple accoutrements and practicing rituals.

We have yet to see what will enable this to happen. Some speculate it will come through a period of Israeli dominance against enemies. Others think it will come in a time of desperation as a last resort against national destruction. Again, something else to be watching for.

4. A southern power bloc that pushes against Europe. Daniel 11 goes on to show that at the time of the end, a southern political power in the Middle East will ram against the northern power, followed by massive retaliation (verses 40-43). Historically, the northern power of Syria was subsumed into the Roman Empire—so that the northern power in the end-time will be the Roman revival in Europe. The southern power in ancient times was Egypt. It may well be again at the end, though Egypt has been incorporated into other powers through its history—especially having been made part of the Islamic caliphate.

There has long been conflict between European Christendom and the Muslim Middle East—and we will evidently see this play out again on a significant scale. As our study guide *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* further explains, Psalm 83 presents a broad, hostile Middle Eastern confederacy intent on wiping out Israel and seems to be prophetic. This power bloc is joined by Assyria, which was in what is now northern Iraq but today may prophetically represent the end-time northern power in Europe. That working together would come before a divide between these elements in the south's push against the north.

Perhaps increasing inundation of Europe from the south or even a massive terror attack will lead to the foretold retaliation and occupation of the Middle East—eventually including the Holy Land, leading to the aforementioned abomination of desolation of the last days.

5. An alignment of Asian nations with a vast army. Revelation 9:13-19 and 16:12-16 present a powerful eastern alliance with a 200-million-man army that will ultimately launch a devastating attack on Europe and proceed to invade down into the Middle East. See our free study guide *Russia and Bible Prophecy* to learn more about this. It seems likely that the vast military of this power bloc will need to start coming together before the final events.

6. A period of apparent peace and prosperity. Prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, having signed the Munich Agreement allowing Germany's Adolf Hitler to annex part of Czechoslovakia, famously declared “peace for our time.” He was of course sorely mistaken. It appears we will see

down with wayward focus but to watch, to remain alert and to pray to draw near to God so that we may be counted worthy to escape coming destruction and to stand before Christ (Luke 21:34-36). The same thing is reiterated in 1 Thessalonians 5:4-7—that we not fall asleep spiritually but stay watchful and sober. This concerns not only what is happening around us—but in our own lives and thoughts, living as God has called us to and encouraging one another (verses 8-11).

We need to use whatever time we have wisely, as it is fleeting (see Ephesians 5:14-16). If the time seems stretched out longer than you've anticipated, consider that, in the words of Hebrews 10:36, “you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the

promise.” Galatians 6:9 likewise exhorts us, “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”

As we consider the signs of the times, re-

member: While the end cannot come tomorrow, it's not so far away. Indications are that it will be soon. And for any of us the end can come in a moment if we die. If time goes on for a while, it won't go on *indefinitely*. At some point the final events to usher in Christ's return *will* happen—with the calamities of that time then thankfully giving way to awesome joy and peace under Christ's coming reign.

Be encouraged by the closing words of the Bible in Revelation 22:20-21: “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” **BT**

Jesus said to not be weighed down with wayward focus but to watch, to remain alert and to pray to draw near to God.

similar declarations before the chaos and war of the last days. “For when they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape” (1 Thessalonians 5:3). Participation in the commercial system described in Revelation 18 will bring a measure of prosperity for a while, but events will at length become dire. Ultimately that system will go up in flames.

Stay alert and use the remaining time wisely

What should we do in the meantime? Jesus said to not be weighed

DIVE DEEPER



Again, what Scripture says about the signs of Christ's coming is a big subject, with many interwoven elements. Besides all of the resources mentioned in the article, for some overall guidance we encourage you to request or download our study guide *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. All are available free—and you can read them immediately online at our website. **Scan the code or visit ucg.org/jf26 to find it.**



Toward a European NATO; Germany planning major military buildup

Amid European leaders negotiating what they feel are unacceptable concessions to Russia among the points of America's plan toward peace in Ukraine, there is a drive on both sides of the Atlantic to put Europeans in their own driver's seat when it comes to the Western military alliance.

Manfred Weber, leader of the European People's Party, is calling for the European Union



A German Air Force Eurofighter Typhoon taxis for a training scramble at Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base in Romania.

to be expanded into a European NATO, saying, "We can no longer rely on the USA without restrictions." Burden would necessarily fall to Europe's strongest nation, Germany.

As noted at Newsweek, "comments by President Donald Trump's envoy to NATO suggesting that Germany take over the American role of the alliance's European commander signal Washington's disengagement from European security affairs," it being rumored that "the U.S. wants to step back from the role and . . . would like to see Germany replace

the U.S. as Europe's main security guarantor" ("Could Germany Replace America's Dominance in NATO?" Nov. 30, 2025).

Moreover, U.S. Pentagon officials have threatened to pull out of some NATO defense coordination mechanisms if Europe does not take over the body within two years ("Exclusive: US Sets 2027 Deadline for Europe-led NATO Defense, Officials Say," Reuters, Dec. 6, 2025).

Other recent headlines show that Germany is preparing for its leading role: "The New German War Machine: After World War II, Germany Embraced Pacifism . . . Now the Country Is Arming Itself Again," *The Atlantic*, Dec. 1, 2025; "Germany Is Arming Itself to the Teeth to Transform Europe Again," *The Telegraph*, Nov. 2; "Germany Wants to Build Europe's Strongest Army—a New Conscription Bill Is Moving That Closer," *CNN*, Nov. 23; "Germany's Rearmament Upends Europe's Power Balance," *Politico*, Nov. 12.

Yes, change is underway. Ultimately, power in the world will shift from the United States to a German-led Europe, as foretold in biblical prophecy—spelling future destruction for America. But it appears that U.S. dominance on the world stage will yet continue a good while longer. (Be sure to read our cover story in this issue "Understanding the Times: A Time for Choosing" beginning on page 6.)

41% of U.S. voters under 40 favor rule by AI

As the United States comes up on its 250th national birthday this year, dissatisfaction with human governance has given way to dreams of technological salvation.

According to a recent Rasmussen survey sponsored by the Heartland Institute, 41 percent of likely voters ages 18 to 39 would support handing control of major public policy decisions over to artificial intelligence. More than a third "would let AI replace the U.S. Constitution and the Supreme Court," while 36 percent "support giving an advanced AI system the authority to determine . . . rights related to speech, religious practices, government authority, and property" ("41% of Young Voters Would Give Artificial Intelligence Government Power," Rasmussen Reports, Nov. 19, 2025).

Donald Kendal, a research director at Heartland Institute, says of these stunning results: "What we are seeing is the early emergence of an AI strong man mentality among younger Americans. Younger generations are increasingly disillusioned with the failures of traditional institutions, so much so, that they are willing to hand control to artificial intelligence."

An amazing 35 percent are even willing to let AI wield global military power, giving an advanced AI system the authority to control all of the world's largest militaries, thinking this will reduce deaths in war. No doubt more young people in other countries may end up caught up in such dangerous thinking.

The real answer to the problems of human government is the coming Kingdom of God. To understand more about what's happening in the AI field and how to navigate, see the previous issue of *Beyond Today* (November-December 2025, available online).

Catholic Church pursues ecumenism; will not officially designate Mary co-redeemer

Pope Leo XIV continues the Roman Catholic Church's ecumenical mission to bring all of mainstream Christianity back into the same fold. As he said he would earlier last year, he later joined with Eastern Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew I in worship in Turkey—both in Istanbul and in a pilgrimage to Nicaea, site of what's called the First Ecumenical Council 1700 years before (see the May-June 2025 *Beyond Today* online for more on this). Both spoke of the aspiration of restoring full communion ("Pope at Divine Liturgy: May We Continue to Strive Towards Christian

Unity," Vatican News, Nov. 30, 2025).

Catholic practice of venerating and praying to Mary the mother of Jesus, often calling her "co-redemptrix" or "co-mediatrix" with Christ, has been a serious point of division with Protestant churches. Now in a new doctrinal statement titled "Mother of the Faithful People of God," the Church is admitting that regard for Mary as co-redeemer "carries the risk of eclipsing the exclusive role of Jesus Christ." The Roman Church will not formally designate Mary as co-redeemer, as many of its adherents have requested

—smoothing the waters with many Protestants. But the statement further notes that the title of co-redeemer may still be used "when it does not cast doubt on 'the unique mediation of Jesus Christ, true God and true man'" ("Mary, Mother of Jesus and All Believers, Is Not Co-Redeemer, Vatican Says," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Nov. 4, 2025).

The matter has been hopelessly confused. Mary was a wonderful woman of faith. But she is currently dead and not conscious—unable to hear anyone's prayers (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10).



Pope Leo and Patriarch Bartholomew

She awaits a future resurrection. She is certainly not co-redeemer. Jesus is the one Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5).

We should keep our eyes on such overtures to help draw mainstream Christianity together under the same umbrella. This is a wayward system foretold in the Bible. (See our free study guide *Who Is the Antichrist?* to learn more.)



Isn't It About Time?

Since life is short, how can we wisely use our limited time? And do we comprehend the vital purpose of this precious, finite resource?

by John LaBissoniere

William Shakespeare penned the line, “I wasted time, and now doth time waste me”—an age-old problem affecting all of us.

It never really occurred to me how much work was involved in raising my seven brothers and sisters and me—until my wife and I had our own two children. I asked my parents how they were able to manage such a big family. They simply replied, “We just did what we had to do.” Of course, that says it mildly. Obviously, to successfully feed, house, clothe and educate so many youngsters not only took long, hard hours, but required considerable efficiency in the use of time.

Among the wise sayings passed on by American founding father Benjamin Franklin was this one: “Time is money.” And my parents were very careful about managing both their money and their minutes. I recall how they frequently reminded us not to fritter away resources such as water and electricity and to use our time profitably. My mother often advised me not to “waste time” but to quickly “get busy” on my homework and assigned chores. Television viewing, which my father often called “a big waste of time,” was allowed for only about an hour after school and never after supper. During evening meals dad would often instruct us on the flaw of spending time fruitlessly. Many of those lessons have stayed with me to this day.

Franklin also wrote, “Do not squander time, for that is the stuff life is made of.” Bearing that in mind, what are some practices we can employ to more prudently use this precious resource? Furthermore, just what is the *purpose* of time? *Why* did God give us time, and *what* does He expect us to be doing with it? Is it simply to enjoy a good life now, or is there a supremely greater reason to comprehend and act on?

Wisely managing our time

Several decades ago, an essay by time management specialist Merrill Douglass offered this poignant assessment: “Time is a different kind of resource. You can’t buy it, sell it, rent it, steal it, borrow it, loan it, store it, multiply it, manufacture it, modify it or otherwise change it. All you can do is spend it. Time is life. The way you spend your time defines the kind of life you live. To waste your time is to waste your life” (“Ideas About Time,” 1979).

Indeed, isn’t life about time, and doesn’t it seem to fly away all too quickly? (See Psalm 90:10.) King David of ancient Israel wrote, “Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow” (Psalm 144:4). The psalmist understood this when he said, “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12).

Peter Drucker, widely considered the father of modern management, stated, “Time is the scarcest resource, and unless it is managed, nothing else can be managed” (*The Effective Executive*, 2017, p. 57). Since we don’t know when our supply of this priceless commodity will end, it is critical we use it wisely. Here are seven methods for better organizing our time.

1) **Determining goals.**

I have learned that to effectively manage my time I must plainly define both work and personal goals. Mindtools.com, a career skill development website, says: “By setting sharp, clearly defined goals, you can measure and take pride in the achievement of those goals, and you’ll see forward progress in what might previously have seemed a long pointless grind. You will also raise your self-confidence, as you recognize your own ability and competence in achieving the goals that you’ve set” (Matthew Hughes, “Personal Goal Setting”).

Educator Laurence Peter, in his humorous 1969 book *The Peter Principle: Why Things Always Go Wrong*, relates what he cleverly told his students: “If you don’t know where you are going, you will probably end up somewhere else.”

2) *Avoiding procrastination.*

Procrastination has caused me to spend more time worrying about handling a project than actually taking the time to get busy on it in the first place. If I tackle a difficult project without delay, I don’t have to be concerned it will not be finished on time. And as writer Leon Edward noted: “Putting things off is the number one cause of stress. When you put things off, they tend to creep up on you all at once and you find yourself with a multitude of tasks that need to be finished all at once. This not only causes stress that leads to loss of concentration, it also can cause you to become overwhelmed with work, and that can lead to difficulties in focusing” (“Tips for Laser Like Focus,” streetdirectory.com).

3) *Getting organized.*

I have discovered that to use time productively I must be as organized as possible. A cluttered workspace, office, desk, kitchen or garage can be a big time waster since extra time is often required to locate needed items or supplies.

Several years ago my wife and I moved from an apartment to a house. On moving day we arranged the furniture, set up the beds and took care of other immediate needs. Over the next few days, other work needed to be done, including several small carpentry and plumbing jobs. However, before starting right in on them I took several hours to organize my tools and supplies in the garage.

My wife became mildly upset, but I explained that I could more efficiently accomplish the projects if I first knew where each tool and part were located. With those items carefully organized in designated places, I could quickly access them rather than spending extra time rummaging through storage and moving boxes. TimeManagementHelp.com in its article “Time Management Tips” states, “Good time management is synonymous with good organization.”

4) *Listing duties and deciding priorities.*

Preparing a written list of my daily work and personal projects has proven very useful. Also, creating deadlines for various tasks has been valuable since it provides a sense of urgency. In addition, I’ve learned that it’s important to list responsibilities in order of priority, from urgent to minor. By identifying the major or urgent duties and tackling them right away, I’m able to use my time more advantageously. When time permits, I work on the minor items, which is generally at the end of the day or the next day. Peter Drucker perceptively noted that efficiency is *doing things right*, while effectiveness is *doing the right things* (pp. 2, 4).

5) *Using a planning calendar.*

I find that consistently using a weekly planning calendar is an important means of not only scheduling upcoming events, but of prioritizing various projects. Appointments and to-do lists can be written on a desk or pocket-size calendar or entered into a computer, smartphone or tablet.

6) *Dividing large tasks into smaller ones.*

Trying to do too much all at once on a large project can seem overwhelming. It’s often better to divide larger tasks into smaller, more manageable ones that can be accomplished over a designated period of time. The TimeManagementHelp article explains: “Divide large tasks into small ones to get a better sense of accomplishment as you complete each step. In addition, when you’re interrupted in the middle of a task, it’s much easier to get back on track and regain your focus.”

7) *Concentrating on and finishing projects.*

When working on a short-term project I find it is productive to concentrate my full attention on it alone and do my

best to finish it before starting another task. Of course, this is not always possible since interruptions and other demands occasionally arise. Leon Edward also stated: “When you take on too many tasks at one time, you are setting yourself up for failure. Overwhelming yourself

with too many tasks will inhibit your ability to focus because you will stress about getting everything done on time.”

Further, it’s important to take the necessary amount of time to handle a project correctly the first time. Before writing his popular series title *Time Management for Dummies* (1999), author Jeffery Mayer asked in the title of an earlier book, *If You Haven’t Got the Time to Do It Right, When Will You Find the Time to Do It Over?* (1990).

Why time?

Of course, we need motivation. To help with that, let’s consider *why* we should diligently manage our time. Is it simply to live a better life now, or is there a significantly greater purpose we need to grasp? The Bible explains *why* we have been given time and *what* we ought to be doing with it.

Our fundamental priority is summarized in the words of Jesus Christ: “But *seek first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33, emphasis added throughout). Supporting this vital goal, the apostle Peter explains that we must use our time to “*grow* in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

Further, the apostle Paul makes clear we must “*lay hold on eternal life*” (1 Timothy 6:12). The apostle John explains we are “*to become children of God*” (John 1:12). In preparing for our future with God, we must with His help overcome life’s obstacles through faith and obedience (Romans 8:35-37; Hebrews

Time is short. We only have
a finite period to prepare for
our future in God’s family.

5:9, 6:12). And ultimately, we'll be rewarded with immense responsibility as "kings and priests" in God's coming government (see Revelation 1:5-6).

These and many other compelling scriptures help us focus on the very *purpose* of time. As a result, all other physical objectives we pursue in life must be weighed against God's central spiritual aim. Paul admonishes us to be very careful about how we spend our time since it can easily be consumed on comparatively less significant objectives. "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, *redeeming the time*" (Ephesians 5:15-16). Since we live in an immoral, sinful age, Paul urges us to be "without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation" (Philippians 2:15). This can only be accomplished if our priorities are in the right order!

Are our priorities mixed up?

Time is short. We have only a finite period to prepare for our future in God's family (Romans 8:19). Our vicious adversary Satan the devil also knows this. He realizes he has limited time to frustrate and stop our progress towards eternal life, and he will yet launch a last-ditch effort (Revelation 12:12). This deceptive and corrupt spirit being has already ingeniously devised a world in which we can become so preoccupied with competing interests and duties that we have little or no time for the true riches (Romans 11:33).

We should ask: How can we squeeze in everything we have to do each day without neglecting our chief spiritual responsibility? Consider the example of Martha and Mary of Bethany in Luke 10. Martha was given the opportunity to host a meal in her home with Jesus and some of His disciples. Of course, she wanted everything to be perfect. The project became her most important priority. As a result, she put a significant amount of time into planning, preparation and then implementing the event. However, Martha's sister Mary was more concerned about hearing Christ's words and learning from Him.

When Martha complained that Mary wasn't helping her with the physical duties of preparing and serving the meal, Christ carefully explained the correct priority: "And Jesus answered and said to her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried



Are our priorities mixed up? If so, isn't it about time we took a good look at what we consider to be important?

and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her'" (verses 41-42).

Martha had not yet fully recognized what was most significant. Could you and I be a little like her? Are *our* priorities mixed up? If so, isn't it about time we took a good look at what we consider to be important? In 1857, American

essayist Henry David Thoreau insightfully wrote to a friend about being busy: "It is not enough to be industrious; so are the ants. What are you industrious about?"

Of course, we all need to eat, sleep, work,

play and rest. "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). But how much time do we spend watching television or participating in hobbies and recreational pursuits, for example? Although these activities are not wrong, could they be consuming too much time compared to our seeking "those things which are above"? (Colossians 3:1).

It's time to awaken from sleep

As a child, my parents set a good example of time management. Growing into adulthood I was able to place many of their instructions into practice. However, it was not until later that I learned the *real purpose of time and the true priority* to "seek *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). The Scriptures plainly define for us *why* God has given us time and *what* we should be doing with it.

As we "see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25), we should ask ourselves if our priorities are properly aligned. The apostle Paul declared to the Christians at Rome, "now it is high time to awake out of sleep" (Romans 13:11). He was placing the choice before us, in effect asking, "Isn't it about time we become deeply serious about what is really important?" To be sure, God is awaiting our answer right now! **BT**

DIVE DEEPER



The Bible is full of practical advice and principles about how to live and accomplish all that we need to. To see more of the direction it gives us, request or download your copy of our free study guide *Making Life Work*.

Scan the code or visit ucg.org/jf26 to find it.



A stylized illustration in shades of blue and green showing several people in a crowd, all looking down at their smartphones. The illustration is positioned at the top of the page, behind the main title.

How to Put Down Your Phone and Pick Up the Bible

Is your smartphone's unending supply for information and entertainment drawing you away from God?

by Joy Porter

It's been getting harder for me to read the Bible. It's not that I don't want to or don't see the need. I just find it difficult to stay focused on the words and actually absorb them. My brain feels like slush when I try. It takes several minutes of rereading the same passage before I finally settle into "Bible mode."

I blame it on my smartphone—or, more specifically, my smartphone habits.

These days, there's a lot of noise in my head. When I wake up, I check my phone to see what happened overnight—texts, Facebook, Google News, Pinterest, my workout app, Instagram.

Instantly, my mind is flooded with information, ideas and those all-too-powerful images of other people's lives—both the good and the bad. A flick of my thumb, and each interesting morsel is replaced by the next. I don't know that I truly process much of what I see before I succumb to the urge to scroll on to whatever's next. It's like a hunger—hunger for more entertainment, information or validation.

This app-checking routine can repeat itself multiple times a day. It feels satisfying and even important, but it's a problem. When I pray and study, I find it difficult to stop all of this "checking." It's hard to focus on God's Word without my hand seemingly unconsciously unlocking my phone again! It's embarrassing to write this, but I suspect I'm not the only one struggling.

Here is my theory: My mind has grown dependent on the constant influx of new information. When there's a dull moment—or a Bible passage that challenges me—I instinctively reach for distraction. That's uncomfortable to acknowledge. Is this really how God wants me to live?

The physical vs. the spiritual

In Psalm 19:14, King David writes, "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer" (Majority Standard Bible). The "meditation of our hearts" is simply what we think about throughout the day. If God desires purity in our thoughts, how does constant social media scrolling affect that?

For me, social media tends to pull my thoughts

toward the physical instead of the spiritual. Seeing other people's accomplishments—outfits, vacations, workouts, political opinions, food, families and activities—draws my attention to the material side of life.

Social media can have value. It can help us check on sick friends or stay close to distant family. But when I spend hours immersed in the physical, there's little room left for the spiritual. "The meditation of my heart" becomes a futile exercise in worldliness.

The problem may be that it's simply easier to look at photos and read quick posts than to sit down, focus and study the Bible. Reading the Bible requires us to calm and quiet our minds. It takes effort to think, reflect, and pray for understanding. If the constant flow of digital distractions has totally shot your attention span, it's no wonder Bible study feels harder.

Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still, and know that I am God." That stillness—the quietness of mind—is being stolen by our phones. There is no time for reflection, no peace and no space for the Holy Spirit to guide us.

I want to change that. It's sobering to realize that focusing on God's Word has become a struggle.

So what can I do?

I want to balance my life so that my thoughts are pleasing to God, my mind isn't constantly distracted, and I can still use social media for its good aspects. Here are a few steps I've tried:

- **Keep first things first.** I bought a regular alarm clock so I can put my phone away at night. I've tried not to check it in the morning until after I've prayed and read my Bible. I've struggled with consistency on this, but when I have succeeded I have experienced the benefits of a more peaceful, purposeful morning routine.

- **Delete apps.** There is no need for me to have instant access to some apps. I can check Facebook or Pinterest on my computer, for example. It's okay for people to not be able to reach me instantaneously. My connection with God is much more important!

- **Use a timer.** I have installed apps that limit time allowed on social media. When the timer

runs out, I'm logged out. The time limit can help you focus on what's actually important and move on. I hope this works for you, and it has sometimes worked for me. The difficulty in relying on apps to fight apps, however, is that timers focus on our surface-level behavior rather than the impulse behind it. It can be easy to bypass the timer and "forget" to turn it back on.

- **Take some time off.** I've scheduled "screen-free days" from time to time. I may still need to check my phone occasionally, but I want to spend my free time being outdoors, reading, or simply thinking instead of scrolling.

- **Ask God for help!** I had to admit to God that I'd effectively turned my smartphone into an idol. Even now I often succumb to the temptation.

In Matthew 4:4 Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." We can't subsist on the daily distractions of the Internet. They may contain some good, but they'll never satisfy our true hunger for God's Word. We need to make room in our minds—a quiet place where we can feed on His Word so He can work in our lives.

(Discover more about prayer, Bible study, meditation and other vital means to building our relationship with God in our free study guide *Tools for Spiritual Growth*.)



If you must be on your device

If you find it hard to put down your phone, use it for spiritual study. Read the Bible through an app, share Scripture with friends, or explore study tools on our website ucg.org, which offers mobile-friendly articles, study guides, sermons and *Beyond Today* videos. Above all, read the Bible itself. If we use technology with purpose and prayer, it can help guide us closer to God instead of pulling us away.

It takes wisdom and discipline to stay focused, especially in the digital realm. If you set goals for yourself and miss them, don't despair. Most of these apps are *designed* to addict you. Sometimes we simply need to take a break from them.



Every Second Counts

Time is a precious and limited commodity. Don't waste it.

by Jason Godfrey

We all have 24 hours in a day, but does it sometimes feel like that is not enough?

Maybe we wish we had more time, or perhaps we are looking forward to retirement, when we might have more free time. If the latter, then think again. After retirement, days can be filled with new tasks, making us busier than ever. It's not uncommon to hear, "I don't know how I found time to go to work."

From our perspective, time flies. The good news is, we are the pilot—we have the controls. Thus, we get to dictate, for better or worse, how we spend much of our time.

Biblical instructions

In Ephesians 5:15-16 the apostle Paul advised, "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

The Good News Bible (a paraphrased version) reads: "So be careful how you live. Don't live like ignorant people, but like wise people. Make good use of every

opportunity you have, because these are evil days."

On a practical level, how can we be wise and make the most of opportunities? Let's consider some major factors.

Overcommitment

Irrespective of what we are doing, we need to ask ourselves if we are over-committed. Wasted opportunities can occur due to overcommitment. We may miss opportunities and fail to take advantage of using our time profitably if we are just too busy. Consider Martha, the sister of Mary of Bethany, who was unable to listen to Jesus because she was too involved with food preparation. Her well-intentioned actions denied her the opportunity to learn directly from Christ (Luke 10:38-42).

Sometimes we must ask ourselves whether there is too much going on in our lives. Do we have sufficient time for the fundamentals? If not, can we simplify our lives? There is a place for us in a very real Kingdom just ahead of us, and all our actions should be geared

toward that end. This world is evil and will eventually perish. We must make time for the basics now.

Distraction

Do we fail to redeem the time because we are distracted? In His parable of the sower, Jesus explained various reasons why some failed to follow Him. Describing the third of these groups, He elaborated thus: "Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful" (Mark 4:18-19).

Are we too focused on the cares or concerns of this world? It's easy to spend too much time on social media or the Internet following what is often referred to as "click bait" (moving from one story to another). TV can be used wisely, but for many it becomes a time-waster. Even a newspaper can hold similar distractions.

The writer of Psalm 119 asked God

to “turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me [give me life] in Your way” (verse 37). In this case, “worthless” doesn’t necessarily mean evil, but implies useless or false.

Instead, be wise. Stay focused.

Priorities

Another way to reduce wasted time is to prioritise our tasks. Write a list if it helps, and concentrate on those that are most important. We can waste opportunities to redeem the time simply because we treat everything as being of equal importance. We can do good but fail to do what is best.

King Solomon wrote many proverbs as well as the book of Ecclesiastes. In Ecclesiastes 3:1 he states, “To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.” And the next seven verses list various aspects of life for which there is “a time.”

The important point to remember is that, while there is *a* time or *a* season for everything, there is not necessarily *time* for everything. There is a difference, and we need to be selective and choose to spend our time carefully. Personal time is not infinite. We can neither pause nor rewind it, nor start over as if in a game.

Because time is such a precious commodity, we would be wise to ask ourselves about whatever we’re doing: *Is this the best use of my time right now? Is there something else that should be given higher priority at this time?*

For example, verse 4 of this chapter says there is a time for dancing, but if we are dancing all the time, is it at the expense of sleep or study? Dancing, which may be fine of itself, would be wrong to do if it displaced more important issues that need attention.

We might be thinking that we need to devote all our time to studying the Bible, God’s instructions to us. But do you really think you can be a Christian just by studying? Could any of us fly an aircraft just by reading the manual? As learning to fly takes practice, so does being a disciple of Christ. We need to spend time applying what we are learning.

Think of it in terms of money. If we waste or throw away money, that’s it. Are we doing the same with time? Do we spend it wisely for the best return, or do we let it slip through our fingers like sand—gone forever?

At the top of our time priority list should be prayer, studying God’s Word and meditation or reflecting on our studies (Psalm 119:15). Other priorities should include time for family (both blood relatives and our spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ) and friendships.

Room for improvement

I mentioned dancing before. There is nothing wrong with decorous dancing in context, but it cannot be at the cost of more important matters. I like watching motorcycle racing. After a stressful week I can chill for a while. I could easily watch a lot more of it, but that wouldn’t be wise. We all need some time to refresh, but that time is a single-use entity. Once used it is gone and can never be recovered.

Think of it in terms of money. We want a return on what we are spending. We want value. If we waste or throw away money, that’s it. Are we doing the same with time? Do we spend it wisely for the best return, or do we let it slip through our fingers like sand—gone forever?

Another aspect is to see everything that comes our way from God’s perspective. This is one of the reasons we must spend time with God in prayer and study so that we will begin to think as He does. Over time you get to know a person—what he or she enjoys, the person’s concerns and views of particular topics. It’s the same with God.

This, of course, can apply to a multitude of situations. We need to exercise the wisdom that God gives us. Turn away from issues that don’t matter, and focus on life as God has revealed.

Be content

The apostle Paul said he had learned to be content in all things (Philippians 4:11). In my life, despite the circumstances I have been in, I have always had a roof over my head, and I’ve always had access to food. I know that God will see to these things for me. On the other hand, time and how I use it is something I must decide on.

To possess the newest, latest and best gadgets, if that is within our means, is not a problem. To spend all our time and energy going after the newest, latest and best is folly.

Paul had learned to prioritise and focus, and to embrace each new opportunity as a gift from God. He was content to serve. He was an example of wisdom in action, a wise man who redeemed his time.

As Christ’s disciples, our primary focus is on God’s Kingdom, and we should always have an eye towards that goal. Is our time allocation helping or hindering that aim? We can fritter time away, or use it profitably. At the end of our days will we look back upon a life well-lived, or will we regret all the time we wasted?

If we are wise and prioritise our actions in these evil days, then we will focus on the right tasks at the right moment, redeem our time and enhance our relationship with God. **BT**

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For help in maintaining the right focus and building a relationship with God through prayer, Bible study and meditation, be sure to request or download our free study guide *Tools for Spiritual Growth*. Scan the code or visit ucg.org/jfz6 to find it.



Our Wondrous Cosmic-Web Universe

New discoveries about the ordered arrangement of the universe point to the One who put it all there and did so for a purpose.

by Mario Seiglie

Did you know the galaxies of the universe are not distributed through the cosmic expanse in a random way? Amazingly, new astronomical findings show that they are actually situated along crisscrossing filaments of enormous scale like a vast spiderweb.

It calls to mind Isaiah 40:22, which says that God “stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in”—speaking in terms of structure.

This should help us see even more what King David saw in Psalm 19:1: “How clearly the sky reveals God’s glory! How plainly it shows what he has done!” (Good News Translation).



Crackles of orange streak across a purple background, representing tendrils of dispersed material in the cosmic web that unites all galaxies.

The cosmic web

Astronomy magazine presented findings of the Max Planck Institute in Germany in these terms: “The Universe is constructed like an oversized spider web. All visible material is arranged along the *filamentary structure of the dark matter*. On its threads and knots, this web holds gigantic chunks of . . . [subatomic] matter” (“A Cosmic Spider Web Is Unraveled,” *Astronomy.com*, updated May 19, 2023, emphasis added throughout).

Recently, some confirmation of the cosmic web was provided through powerful telescopes. As reported at the Daily Galaxy site:

“In an extraordinary leap forward for astrophysics, astronomers have achieved a momentous breakthrough with the *first direct image of the cosmic web*, a vast and largely invisible structure that plays a *central role in the formation of galaxies and the expansion of the universe*. This cosmic web, often described as the ‘skeleton’ of the universe, connects galaxies through thin filaments of gas and dark matter, yet until now, these filaments had existed only as theoretical models and simulations. Thanks to cutting-edge observational technology, scientists have captured a real image of one such filament, solidifying decades of scientific hypotheses” (Lydia Amazouz, “Astronomers Capture the Universe’s Hidden Highways Connecting Galaxies: First-Ever Image of the ‘Cosmic Web’ Revealed!” June 30, 2025).

The universe a cradle for life

This remarkable finding helps us better understand how an orderly universe is like a cradle where life can exist. Astrophysics research professor Paul Sutter writes in *Nautilus* magazine: “Galaxies are *not* scattered about randomly in our universe. Instead, they exist in a *pattern*, dubbed the *cosmic web*. The cosmic web holds the vast majority of the contents of the *cosmos*—roughly 5 percent matter

(such as gasses and solids), 27 percent dark matter, and 68 percent dark energy. And it *spans the entire universe*, traversing otherwise relatively empty cosmic voids. It serves as the *scaffold* responsible for carrying the *plasma lifeblood of our universe*. It is the reason we exist at all” (“The Cosmic Web and the Fate of the Universe,” Dec. 11, 2023).

The vast order required for fragile life to exist adds to the ever-mounting evidence that the universe is a product of purpose and design.

When interviewed about the order in the universe, twin French physicists Igor and Grichka Bogdanov were right in pointing out: “This is a fundamental question. The

most striking feature of the universe is that order began from the very start—at its initial stage. According to some physicists, everything occurs as if mankind was born in a universe ‘created for them,’ in effect, *intentionally designed for human beings*. It is similar to preparing a bedroom before the birth of a baby” (“The Universe Was Not Born From Chance,” *Le Point*, June 10, 1991).

God framed the universe

This order clearly resonates with what Scripture reveals about a purposeful Creator. The Bible tells us in Hebrews 11:3, “By faith we understand that *the worlds were framed* by the word of God, so that *the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible*.” Indeed, scientists have discovered that much of the universe is made up of invisible forces hidden to the eyes.

Scripture also says God is not the author of confusion but of order, a characteristic He desires we emulate (see 1 Corinthians 14:33, 40). He set up the universe to function in a stable and harmonious way. Jeremiah 33:25 states, “But I, the LORD, have a covenant with day and night, and I have *made the laws that control earth and sky*” (GNT). These laws of physics are carefully fine-tuned in relation to one another. With the discovery of the cosmic web, we can better grasp how the universe maintains equilibrium, dynamism and stability while expanding outward.

Mysterious “dark matter” and “dark energy”

Besides the effect of gravity and other forces on perceptible matter, many scientists are convinced of the existence of “dark matter” and “dark energy.” The word “dark” in this context refers to not being directly observable and scientists

admitting they don't really know what these are. But these are accepted on the basis of the measurable effect they are seen as having on observable matter and energy—with what's observable constituting only a small part of the whole.

Professor Sutter goes on to state about recent findings: “The *cosmic web fills up the volume of the universe and contains up to 2 trillion galaxies* . . . Pulling from new data gathered by the James Webb Space Telescope, an international team of researchers discovered a *baby filament* containing just 10 galaxies that likely formed a mere 830 million years after the Big Bang, confirming that these filaments were important structures right from the earliest days of the universe. In addition to the gravitational pull of normal matter, there are of course, *the forces of dark matter and dark energy at work, shaping the cosmic web*. Combined, *dark matter and dark energy make up 95 percent of all the energy contents of the universe*—there's *no way* that the web won't be influenced by them.”

The balance of the universe's forces is so exact that astrophysicist Hugh Ross gives the following analogy: “Picture a huge vehicle—something much bigger than a car. Maybe the U.S. Navy's aircraft carrier the *USS John C. Stennis*. Now imagine a tiny fleck of paint from that ship, so small against your hand you can barely see it. If such a vehicle were compared to the universe in its earliest moments, removing that speck or adding an extra drop of paint to it would be enough to alter the vehicle's mass so much as to make it completely useless for transporting passengers.

“In reality, the delicacy of that ratio is *far more extreme* than the ship analogy reveals. For the reasons noted above, and if no other density factors influence the expansion of the universe, at certain early epochs in cosmic history, its mass density must have been as finely tuned as one part in 10^{60} [1 followed by 60 zeros] to allow for the possible existence of physical life at any time or place within the entirety of the universe. This degree of fine-tuning is so great that it's as if right after the universe's beginning, someone could have destroyed the possibility of life within it *by subtracting a single dime's mass* from the whole of the observable universe or *adding a single dime's mass* to it” (*Why the Universe Is the Way It Is*, 2008, p. 35).

A cosmic superhighway system

Another analogy cosmologists use to explain the design of the cosmic web is an *intricate highway system* that guides the stars and galaxies through the universe and helps establish its equilibrium.

A recent book on the topic states: “The cosmic web itself, is essentially a network of dark matter halos that are connected by filaments of gas. *These filaments act as highways through which matter can flow, and they are the primary means by which galaxies and galaxy clusters are distributed across the universe*. Without dark matter, the cosmic web would not exist in the same way, *and the structure of the universe would be vastly different*” (Michael Scott, *The Cosmic Web and Large-Scale Structures*, 2024, p. 64). So nothing is left to chance!

An article from an astronomical team at the University of Kansas said that team member Gregory Rudnick “sees the universe crisscrossed by something like an *interstellar superhighway system*. *Filaments*—the strands of aggregated matter that stretch millions of light years across the universe to connect galaxy clusters—are the *freeways*. ‘Galaxies will flow along filaments from less dense parts of the universe to more dense parts of the universe, *kind of like cars flowing down a highway to the big city*. In this case, they are going *toward big clusters*, being pulled by the gravity of those large concentrations of matter,’ he said” (“New Research Looks at How ‘Cosmic Web’ of Filaments Alters Star Formation in Galaxies,” *Phys.org*, Nov. 1, 2017).

Such intricacy not a matter of chance

The precision and complexity involved in all this is mind-boggling. Dr. Sutter compares the formation of the cosmic web itself to the difficult paper art of origami folding: “From what we do understand of the cosmic web, much of its shape can be *explained by the mathematics of origami folding*. If you take a sheet of paper and start folding it, you will find a *series of nodes and filaments*. The filaments are the simple creases, and the nodes are the places where the creases intersect. Mathematicians have studied the *relationships of the creases and folds of origami structures* . . . and astronomers have taken *that language and applied it to the cosmic web*.”

Of course, it should be considered that origami requires an artist. Sadly, most scientists today will not honestly assess the question of who made the cosmic web. Many would say no one made it since it's just the product of random aspects of matter and energy—that we just got lucky.

On the other hand, if you asked them how a spiderweb came to be and for what purpose, they would readily answer that a spider made it to catch insects to eat. Doesn't it stand to reason that the vastly more complex structure of the cosmic web—described in such building terms as the scaffolding or architecture of the universe—was also made? To say that it just happened, with no intelligence or foresight involved, is denying reality (see Psalm 14:1; Romans 1:20-21).

Made by a God who cares about us

Far more sensible than believing the intricacy of the universe is a result of blind chance is to understand that an all-powerful Creator designed the universe for the purpose of sustaining life.

As we saw in Hebrews 11:3, God made the universe from what is invisible to the human senses. Further, He made it and sustains it through Jesus Christ. Hebrews 1:2-3 says: “God *created the universe by his Son* . . . God's Son has all the brightness of God's own glory and is like Him in every way. *By his own mighty word, he holds the universe together*” (Contemporary English Version).

And He does so for *us*—as small as we may seem in the cosmic expanse. Christ once described God caring so much for us that He has the very hairs on our head counted (Matthew 10:30). He is also able to count all the stars of the universe and direct them as an orderly army throughout space, even giving each one a name (Isaiah 40:26, GNT). Similarly, He is now in the process of preparing the universe for Christ's coming “to bring many children to share his glory” (Hebrews 2:10, GNT).

Scripture declares our potential of one day reigning under Christ as coheirs of the universe. As Romans 8:16-17 states, God's Holy Spirit “bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and *if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ*, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”

What a grand purpose! And what a marvelous universe we live in—being carefully designed as a home for mankind. Let us give God the glory and so live our lives in such a way that the incredible potential He has planned for us will one day be realized in us. As 1 Corinthians 2:9 says, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man *the things which God has prepared for those who love him*.” BT

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The more we discover about our amazing universe, the more evidence we have that it was the product of an all-powerful and all-wise Creator. Prove this for yourself. Be sure to request or download a copy of our free study guide *Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?* Scan the code or visit ucg.org/jf26 to find it.



No Shadow of Turning

Our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ His Son shine on us with unwavering commitment. If you feel disconnected, you have only to turn back. For They are ever there to guide us and help us.

by Robin Webber

Walking through a lovely park recently, I saw one of my favorite garden-type features standing in an open space and bee-lined right over. It was not the glorious foliage of nature but a sundial, which always has great personal meaning. I didn't go over to see if it was working or check my watch but to view the steadfast gnomon—that projecting piece on a sundial that creates the monitoring of daylight time by the casting of its shadow.

What's the meaning behind this impulsive observation? It's an assurance that emboldens my desire to heed the great invitation offered by Jesus Christ of *"Follow Me"* (Matthew 4:19). We find it in James 1:17-18: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is *no variation or shadow of turning*. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures" (emphasis added throughout).

Did you catch that? *"No variation or shadow of turning!"* Magnificent and sweet words that express a reality beyond human imagination but for the guidance of God's Spirit to help us understand. Frankly, this passage anchors me and is intended to do so! It is a great visual reminder about a spiritual reality regarding not only our Heavenly Father, but His Son Jesus Christ. After all, Jesus proclaimed, "Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9, Amplified Bible). Indeed, we might say, "Like Father, like Son!"

And the wonderful truth is, They are always there for us.

God is always at high noon!

My goal for a few shared moments with you is to implant a concept so deeply within you that you will join me in striving to never turn from a gracious, loving and steadfast God in whom there is *"no variation or shadow of turning"* towards us. Remember: A sundial can only function in physical sunlight—but God is always at high noon, even in our darkest moments!

We live in a frenetic world that is constantly moving and ever changing. For a few minutes let's follow God's admonition to David: "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). Let's note a couple scriptures in which both our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, the living Word of God (John 1:1-3, 14), are presented as steadfast and standing fast for our spiritual well-being.

Malachi 3:6 shares God's personal self-disclosure: "For I am the LORD [the Hebrew name *YHWH* here meaning He ever exists], I do not change." God simply "is"—always. Both the Father and the One who became Jesus Christ share this name—and the first person form "I AM" (Exodus 3:14; John 8:58)—"who is and who was and who is to come" (Revelation 1:8). This identity speaks not only of Their omnipotent self-sustaining power and eternal existence, but also of God's unchanging character and relational attributes. The immortal heartbeat is summed up in 1 John 4:8-9: "For God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him." Thus, Jesus coming to earth in the flesh was God's love for us personified—once and forever.

In Hebrews 13, we see God's promise "I will never leave you nor forsake you," then followed with this assurance: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (verses 5, 8).

A light in darkest moments

This is the same Jesus who said: "I am the Light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12).

He is the One who brought light into the dark world of the man born blind, this healed man declaring, "Though I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25). Sadly, that man's confession led to being ostracized by his neighbors, family and religious circle. Yet in this darkest hour, Jesus seeks him out and asks, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" (verse 35). And now this

It's one thing to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but it is quite another to continually grow in belief that He is always at high noon even in our darkest moments.

disciple-in-the-making not only physically sees, but spiritually sees, learning that like His Father, the Son of God does not budge—He is likewise always at high noon. This man's moment of insight needs to be our moment too.

You see, it's one thing to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but it is quite another to continually grow in belief that He is always at high noon even in our darkest moments. Did He not give us His fixed position to embrace and internalize in His promise to us? He said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

But perhaps we are not worried so much about "the end of the age" as we are about the immediate moment we are experiencing—maybe one where all the lights have seemingly gone out and you feel abandoned, or even stuck in "the valley of the shadow of death" (Psalm 23:4).

Maybe you're thinking God has turned and left you after all. But allow me to ask a question, please. If you sense a broken relationship with Him, is it He in whom there is "no variation or shadow of turning" who has turned from you, or is it you who have turned from Him? Let us be honest as to who has moved and return to the light.

Jesus' trust of His Father in the face of death

Let me remind you of three simple yet profound verses uttered by our Savior—the One who says, "Follow Me" and most importantly practiced what He preached in the face of approaching and engulfing darkness and death.

In a moment of darkness in the town of Bethany, as

friends and family mourned the death of Lazarus, Jesus spoke before he opened the tomb for all to hear, including down to our day: "Father, I thank you that you have heard Me. And I know that you always hear Me" (John 11:41-42). Jesus knew that with His Father—our Father too—there is no shadow of turning in time of need.

In a darkened garden on the last night of His human experience, we find Jesus praying to His Father that there might be an alternate ending to what our Savior was about to experience for our sakes. He passionately implored, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me . . ." (Luke 22:42). Yet in the face of the answer from Above remaining the same, our spiritual champion already stated His personal resolute position in the words that followed: "... nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be

done." There would be no variableness or shadow of turning either from God Above or "the Son of Man" below.

Jesus' dying breath says it all to each of us. Luke 23:46 records: "And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, 'Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.' Having said this He breathed His last." This verse seizes upon the moment and shares a snapshot of our

Savior's inner awareness that even as His vision was blurred by the encrusted blood on His face from the crown of thorns jammed onto His head, He knew and gained comfort from the fact that His God, our God, is always at high noon even at midnight. We recognize His knowing and comfort here in His declaring in a "loud voice"—that we might hear down to our day and take heart.

Turn back, and stop turning away

Again, we should ask, who has moved? Perhaps like Israel of old you have turned and walked away and thought your relationship with our Creator is over and done! But just like ancient Israel, God is never done with us as disciples of Jesus Christ who constitute a renewed spiritual Israel (Galatians 6:15-16) if we will only return to Him. And He will help us in that.

What God declared to His people in Jeremiah 29:11-13 applies as well to you today: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart." **BT**

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ARE YOU... ALONE?

Making Friends

by Dan Preston



One of my current favorite shows to watch is a series called *Alone*. It's a reality series in which 10 contestants are placed by themselves in the Canadian wilderness with only a handful of supplies. They are challenged to create shelter, catch food, survive the harsh weather and occasionally fend off aggressive wildlife. There's no electricity, cell phones or any way to communicate with the outside world (other than an emergency radio). The person who stays out the longest (sometimes six months or more) wins \$500,000.

While some contestants wind up dropping out due to injury or other health concerns (there are regular medical checks of the contestants), and some wind up "tapping out" because they can't find enough food or survive the cold, when it gets down to the last few contestants it's almost always the same thing that determines who wins and loses—who can stand the loneliness.

THE NEED FOR COMPANIONSHIP

I have to admit, I like being alone sometimes. It gives me time to think, reflect on life and just relax. I'm not the kind of person who needs to go to a party every weekend or be on the phone talking to friends every day. I like those things, but I'm content to be by myself much of the time. However, I recognize that's not always good for me.

Proverbs 27:9 tells us, "Ointment and perfume delight the heart, and the sweetness of a man's friend gives delight by hearty counsel." All of us need advice from time to time, whether we like to admit it or not. Good advice from a good friend is sweet indeed. Sometimes though, it's not what we want to hear. Consider how Jonathan had to tell David that he needed to run for his life because Saul was angry with him (1 Samuel 20). Good advice is sweet, even if a little unpleasant in the moment.

But friends do more than give advice. They provide encouragement too. In 1 Thessalonians 5, the apostle Paul talks about the hard times that Christians face. Like the trials encountered by those in the wilderness on *Alone*, it's a natural part of life that we are going to be confronted with. He reminds us that as faithful people we shouldn't view these trials with the fear and worry that some do. Then, in verse 11 he says, "Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing." Many translations actually render the word "comfort" as "encourage." Regardless of which word is used, the point is very clear—we need to encourage others during difficult times.

Another great thing about friends is that they often help us to be better people. Hebrews 10:23 states, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." The writer (likely Paul) is reminding us that we need to remain faithful to God and His teachings, because He is faithful to us. He then follows this admonishment in verse 24 with "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works." He points out that we can help stir one another to action to be more loving and to do good things.

Those of you who've attended church youth summer camps with a strong focus on Christian living have experienced this kind of positive influence. How much easier was it to "be good" when you were surrounded by people who were also trying to be better people and follow Jesus Christ's example?

Of course, while we all need good advice, encouragement and help in being motivated to do good things, we should remember that others need that as well. Proverbs 27:17 tells us, "As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend." The friends you have need all of these things just as much as, or perhaps even more than, you do.

HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS

Okay, you're probably thinking, everybody wants to have friends. But how do I *make* friends? Below are a few tips that will not only make it easier to make friends, but will also help ensure that you're making *good* friends.

1. To make a friend, be a friend.

One of the hardest things about meeting new people is making the first step. While you don't know if the new person you start talking to will wind up being a friend or not, you'll never know if you don't at least try to have a conversation.

Jesus said we should treat others the way we want to be treated (Luke 6:31). And Scripture gives the further principle that we reap what we sow—whether sparingly or bountifully, positively or negatively (2 Corinthians 9:6; Galatians 6:7). That is, we get out of our efforts what we put into them.

Showing friendliness toward others will encourage friendliness in return. This doesn't mean you should fake being nice when you talk to people, but it does mean you have to put some

effort into making yourself available for new friendships. A warm smile and simple question like "Hi, how are you today?" or maybe, "Did you do anything interesting in the past few months?" are good ways to get a conversation started.

2. Fish where the fish are.

As simple as it might sound, you wouldn't go fishing in a mud puddle, would you? If any fish are in there at all, they'd be very small, and probably not good to eat. You'd be far better off to pick a nice mountain stream or a pristine lake.

Similarly, you probably won't find the best people to be

One great thing about friends is that they often help us to be better people. "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24).

friends with at just a random encounter in the store, or worse yet, hanging around at a place you probably shouldn't be at, like a vape shop. You'd be far better off going somewhere where people with similar interests hang out. Maybe a library, a county fair, or better yet, a regional church activity, or the teen hospitality room at the Feast of Tabernacles later in the year.

3. Be balanced.

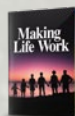
When it comes to having a conversation, try to make sure you're not the one doing all the talking. While some people have problems making friends because they don't say enough, others have trouble because they say too much. Proverbs 10:19 says, "In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise." While it's not necessarily a sin to talk too much, it's wise to refrain every now and then and let other people share their thoughts and experiences.

4. Don't force it.

One last thing to consider in your effort to make friends—you can't force anyone to like you, nor should you. If someone doesn't seem that interested in getting to know you, don't let it bother you. Maybe he or she is having a bad day, or maybe the person wouldn't be the greatest influence on you. Going back to the fishing analogy, there are plenty of other fish in the sea!

Making new friends can be difficult for some of us. I'm not the most outgoing person myself, and reaching out and introducing myself to new people has never been super easy. But by putting a little thought into how you go about it, you might just find your new best friend! **BT**

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Q: Is a one-time choice to accept Jesus Christ as Savior enough for salvation?

A: Many have the idea that eternal salvation is the result of a one-time choice that requires nothing further from us. A popular notion holds that if we sincerely and humbly pray a prayer asking forgiveness for our sins and for Jesus to come into our hearts as personal Savior, then our destiny is forever sealed from that moment—with us now saved eternally. That is assuredly not what the Bible teaches. We certainly must make that vital choice, but then we must keep choosing it—with God’s help. Our challenge is to not turn away, as we could still do that.

There are millions who believe in what is called the doctrine of eternal security—or “once saved, always saved.” The idea is that in initially receiving Jesus Christ we are saved and can never reject God’s grace and be lost. This is a serious misunderstanding of the biblical teaching on salvation and grace.

Yes, we are in a state of salvation in being freed from our past sins and their penalty when we receive Jesus Christ through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). But that is not ultimate salvation. Jesus said that “he who *endures to the end* shall be saved” (Matthew 10:22; 24:13, emphasis added throughout). Hebrews 10:36 affirms, “For you have need of *endurance*, so that *after you have done the will of God*, you may receive the promise.”

Of course we cannot do this on our own. We need God’s help, as the apostle Paul explained: “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). Yet God doesn’t do it all for us. We ourselves must be striving. As Jesus said, “*Strive* to enter through the narrow gate” (Luke 13:24). And this must be in partnership with God, Paul writing, “To this end *I also labor, striving* according to His working which works in me mightily” (Colossians 1:29).

Paul fought his own ongoing battle with sin, as laid out in Romans 7. And note that in 1 Corinthians 9:26 he stated that if he gave up he would be lost: “Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air [just shadowboxing, not truly struggling]. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, *lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*”

Clearly salvation is not automatic after initial acceptance of Christ. We have to *continue* with God and *not turn away*. The same apostle explained in Romans 2:7 that God will grant “eternal life to those who *by patient continuance in doing good* seek for glory, honor, and immortality.”

He told gentiles who came into the Church that God would grant “toward you, goodness, *if you continue in His goodness.* Otherwise you also will be cut off” (Romans 11:22).

Paul told other gentile converts to Christianity that Jesus Christ had reconciled them to God through His death and would present them holy and blameless before God “*if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away* from the hope of the gospel which you heard” (Colossians 1:21-23).

Paul told the evangelist Timothy, “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine [or teachings]. *Continue in them, for in doing this* you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Timothy 4:16; 2 Timothy 3:14-15). Of course, the others hearing would need to take the same heed.

The apostle James further stated, “But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty *and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work*, this one will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:25).

Still, we will often fail. Besides Paul’s discussion of his own failings in Romans 7, the apostle John explained that Christians still sin (1 John 1:8-10). The key is to get back up, ask for God’s forgiveness, and keep going.

Yet it’s possible to cease from doing that and to lose salvation, as the book of Hebrews repeatedly warns against. Hebrews 2:1-3 states: “Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, *lest we drift away* . . . How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation . . . ?”

Hebrews 6:4-6 tells us, “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, *if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance*, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.”

Yes, this could happen to truly converted Christians. Hebrews 10:26-27 further states: “For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, *there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins*, but a certain fearful expectation

of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries” (Hebrews 10:26-27).

These are stark warnings. The same book tells us that we will remain as God’s people in Christ “*if we hold fast* the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope *firm to the end*” and, again, “*if we hold* the beginning of our confidence *steadfast to the end*” (Hebrews 3:6, 14). The message throughout the New Testament is quite consistent.

Thankfully we need not live in worry and fear, for as long as we do not through prolonged neglect or bitterness come to utterly reject God, our future salvation is assured. Paul said he was “confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). But we obviously have a part to play in that.

No, accepting and following God through Jesus Christ is not a one-time choice. It is an *ongoing* choice that we must *continue* making throughout our lives. And we can trust that God will help us in remaining faithful. **BT**



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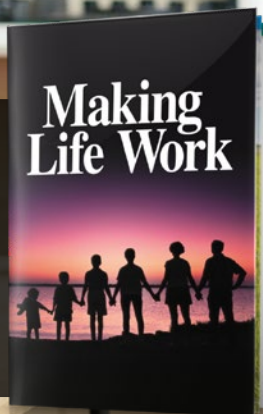
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