



German Language Region Celebrates 60th Anniversary

by Paul Kieffer, Editor,
UCG-Germany publications

On Dec. 20, 2025 UCG-Germany celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Church of God in the German language region after church services. The halls were decorated festively and special cakes and champagne were served. After services a video presentation highlighted the history of the Church in the region. Here's a summary of what was covered.

In the late 1950s, Germans who moved to the United States translated the first Worldwide Church of God publications. From early 1960 to 1972, the radio program *Die Welt von morgen* (*The World Tomorrow*) was broadcast early in the morning on Ra-

dio Luxembourg. In August 1961, the first foreign-language edition of the *Plain Truth* magazine was published: *Die reine Wahrheit*.

In his coworker letter of June 18, 1962, Mr. Armstrong wrote that the London office could no longer manage the work with the circulation of the German edition already at 5,000 copies. An office was being opened in Düsseldorf and an Ambassador College student in Pasadena, California, who was born in Germany, would manage the new office there. A post office box in Düsseldorf was also procured, as readers were reluctant to write to England to order literature.

On Dec. 25, 1965, the German language Church had its first Sabbath service in Frankfurt, Germany. Over the next

two years, regular services were conducted in seven cities.

The radio program, *Die Welt von morgen* on Radio Luxembourg also reached people in East Germany. A small group was called behind the Iron Curtain. Also, a member in Poland was called.

Keeping the Feast of Tabernacles in East Germany was often difficult. In 1971, the Stasi interrupted church services and the visiting minister was asked to leave East Germany. To help our brethren behind the Iron Curtain to keep the Feast of Tabernacles, a new Feast site was set up in neighboring Czechoslovakia: first in Karlsbad, later in Brno.

In 1968 circulation of the magazine *Die reine Wahrheit* reached 70,000 copies, later ris-



Frank Schnee in the Deutsche Demokratische Republik (East Germany)

ing to just under 100,000. The title was changed to *Klar und Wahr* and four-color printing was used.

The Church advertised in newsstands and train station bookstores. In Berlin, Munich

and Vienna 15,000 copies were distributed monthly at newsstands from 1975 to 1977.

Continued on page 2

Blantyre, Malawi Speakers Club Graduation Banquet

by Gracious Mpilangwe,
Pastor, Blantyre, Malawi

The Blantyre, Malawi congregation hosted a graduation banquet to honor the 12 members of the local speakers club and their spouses. The first of its kind since the Blantyre congregation's church hall was officially opened in 2018, this memorable event took place on Dec. 21, 2025.

Over nearly four years, the members of the speakers club completed every one of the twelve lessons from the club manual—quite an achievement! As they worked their way through the material, led by pastor and director of the club, Gracious Mpilangwe, they were



already putting their new skills into practice at Sabbath services.

To celebrate the occasion, it was decided to hold a special banquet. Each of the speakers and their wives were invited to attend. The tables were decorated beautifully and set for the meal. The spouses of the club members all contributed to the buffet style banquet—a three-course meal with soup, a main dish, and a dessert, complete with wine and soft



drinks to add to the celebration.

After the main part of the meal, three members of the club were chosen to give a speech on a topic of their choice. This was followed by the presentation of certificates by the director. After the speeches were given, Gracious

Mpilangwe came to the podium and gave a brief background of the event and the purpose of the club: to help those who speak in church services to speak with confidence and expound God's words effectively, preparing a people for God's Kingdom.



For the rest of the evening, soft music played over the speakers and the floor was opened for dancing. The evening ended with the couples enjoying coffee and cake for dessert. Everyone ate to the fullest and the remaining food was taken home by the attendees to share with their families. It was an altogether memorable night that will be fondly remembered. **UN**

In This Issue

Local Church News

Recent events held by Church family and news from members—p. 2

Announcements

Births and weddings—p. 3

Ambassador Bible College

Updates from the Ambassador Bible College class of 2026—p. 4

Light of Hope

Faith, Patience and Understanding Autism—p. 7

Becoming a Widow—My Journey

Laura Peabody reflects on her experiences with grief—p. 8

Resources for the Whole Family

Featured content for all ages—p. 9

The Good News

A Winning Strategy for Tests and Trials

(Robert Curry)—p. 5

God's Law and Sin

(UCG Fundamental Beliefs)—p. 6

German Language Region Celebrates 60th Anniversary

At the end of 1974, the church office relocated to Bonn.

When the WCG Pastor General announced in 1995 that the Sabbath was not holy time, it was time for a change. The first meeting of the United Church of God, an International Association in Germany took place on Aug. 12, 1995 in Dormagen. By the end of 1995, church services were being held in Bielefeld, Hamburg, Dormagen, Darmstadt, Stuttgart and Switzerland.

A sermon cassette program was launched in February 1996. In January 2006, the cassette program was replaced by sermon CDs distributed every two months with eight sermons.

On April 5, 1996 the found-

ing meeting of the Vereinigte Kirche Gottes e.V. (UCG-Germany) took place in Dormagen. On Aug. 13, 1996 the Church was officially registered.

In 1997 the *Gute Nachrichten* and *Intern* (German *United News*) magazines are published bimonthly along with many booklets and the Bible correspondence course.

In January 1998, we placed our first print ad in *Das Beste* (German version of *Reader's Digest*). It brought 2,000 orders.

A small church office was rented for the first time in August 2003. It also served as a warehouse for about 10,000 booklets.

In 2005 the Church began advertising with Google key-

words, resulting in 15,570 new subscribers by December 2025.

The new hymnal was distributed at the 2009 Feast of Tabernacles. The 1:1 reproduction of the English hymnal contains 17 additional German hymns.

In 2014, the first *Beyond Today* program in German was produced, initially dubbed, later with original German audio thanks to the help of the home office.

With the revamp of the *Gute Nachrichten* website at the end of 2022, a weekly newsletter was introduced. We conducted two webinars as a test in 2025.

Our stats as of December 2025 are the following:

- 8,627 *Gute Nachrichten* subscribers

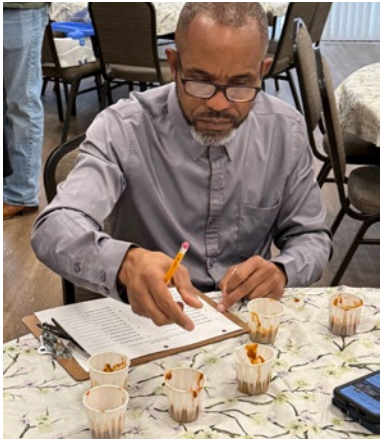
- 744 *Intern* subscribers
- 25,873 former *Gute Nachrichten* subscribers
- 34 booklets
- 12 Correspondence course lessons
- 1,531 Articles online, accessible individually
- 154 Videos, 96 “Shorts” on YouTube

Last but not least, we should pray for more workers for the harvest. From German-language countries, 46 people studied at Ambassador College. Of those, 13 didn't return and nine people remained faithful (five of whom now live in the German language region, four of whom are with UCG-Germany). We should pray for more work-



ers to help with the harvest—workers who remain faithful and continue to help reap the harvest. **UN**

Chili Cook-off Columbia, Maryland



On Dec. 13, 2025, the Columbia, Maryland congregation held a chili cook-off for all to enjoy. Brethren were able to enjoy a variety of chilis, from spicy chilis to chicken chili. There were six pots of chili entered into the competition.

Five judges tasted each chili and rated them in the categories of Most Flavorful, Best Consistency, and Most

like Mom's. After the judges chose the winners, those pots of chili along with other delicious chilis that were not entered into the competition fed a hungry crowd. There were toppings provided to enhance the chili dinner even more.

A big pot of chili is always a win and we are thankful to those who shared their chili for the meal.

Rhonda Diggins

“Battle of the States” Potluck



LEXINGTON, Kentucky—Members worked together to organize a unique potluck and competition with the theme “Battle of the States.” The cooking, decorating, planning and eating resulted in an enjoyable event.

The results of the competition were as follows:

Most Creative: Texas—The team who created the Texas table did a great job with the food, especially the smoked meat.

Team members of all ages made the many decorations and drawings. They topped it off with a Texan musical presentation.

Most Authentic: Kentucky—The Kentucky table was very detailed. Everyone learned something they didn't know about the state from the flyers, maps and table items. There was even a music box that sang “Kentucky Home.” There was much food to share, including bourbon balls and Kentucky

Fried Chicken (although we didn't open the actual bourbon).

Youngest Participants: New England—Our youngest members made great artwork, cooked, brought stuffed animals and provided fact sheets from home to add to the New England table. Baked beans, coffee milk, homemade breads and the Yankee pot roast were all hits.

Everyone had a great time! Thanks to all who participated!

Ellen Burton



Announcements



Shepherd Ky Tomes

July 9, 2025

Births

Shepherd Ky Tomes

Kyle and Shaylee Tomes of South Lake Tahoe, California welcomed their son, Shepherd Ky Tomes on July 9, 2025. He weighed 8 pounds and 9 ounces and measured 21 inches long. He was born on a beautiful summer day at 6,237 feet

Church News

British National Council Meeting

Members of the National Council of UCG-British Isles met by Zoom on the evening of Monday Nov. 17, 2025.

The minutes of this meeting will be distributed to the members of the UCG-British Isles Charity once they have been approved by the National Council at its next meeting.

Chairman Jason Godfrey opened the meeting, which began with the Council welcoming Jennifer Marrs as a new non-executive member of the National Council, and

On Jan. 10, 2026, the Baltics, Eastern Europe and Scandinavia (B.E.E.S.) virtual congregation reflected on our first year together. We enjoyed having a few guests who support the work in this region, and had a productive town hall meeting afterwards (see results below).

While it was encouraging to see how far God has brought us in a relatively short time, we recognize He is building in us a foundation for an even greater



Alex Kinney and Kathleen Kelly

Dec. 7, 2025

elevation, a couple miles from Lake Tahoe. He is completely adored by his two loving big sisters, Luna (4 years old) and River (2 years old).

The Tomes family attends the Reno, Nevada congregation. They are very grateful to add this sweet little boy to their family! Grandparents include Keith and Christy Tomes of the Reno, Nevada congregation, Dean and Laurie Matson

Bryan Ellams who by agreement with the UCG-British Isles ministry returns for a new three-year term as ministerial member.

The Council received a report from the chief executive officer David Fenney covering the work of the Church, its proclamation activities, and administrative matters. Print copies of the November/December 2025 *Beyond Today* magazine and British Isles Supplement were mailed to 5,993 subscribers. In the first

Baltics, Eastern Europe and Scandinavia Virtual Congregation

work in the coming year(s). It is exciting to see the powerful work God can produce through such a small group of His servants working together in unity.

We have a world in chaos that needs to hear the gospel message, and God has given us time, resources, and each other to help get it out. We grow together through doing the work together, and I am excited to have a part in it with each of you. Thank you for answering God's call.

of the Fargo, North Dakota congregation, and Dennis and Maria Thomas of Southern California.

Weddings

Alex Kinney and Kathleen Kelly

With grateful hearts, Alex and Kathleen Kinney were recently united in marriage, surrounded by family, dear friends and their church community. Their ceremony was filled with joy and meaningful moments and highlighted by heartfelt words shared by loved ones.

Located at the rustic barn at the Crystal Coop, the wedding took place on Dec. 7, 2025.

A soft snowfall outside added a beautiful and memorable touch to the day.

The couple met online through a Church of God dating website. The parents of the groom are Ken and Ruth Kinney, and the parents of the bride are Stuart and Tammy Kelly.

The couple is deeply thankful to the Indianapolis congregation for the love, generosity and support that helped make the celebration possible, and to the many friends and family members who traveled from near and far to be part of such a special moment. They praise God for His faithfulness and for the blessing of beginning their marriage wrapped in so much love, encouragement and community. **UN**

Announcements for *United News* can be sent by email (preferred) to un@ucg.org, or by mail to *United News*, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027. Please include a color photo; if mailing in, please indicate if you would like the photo returned. Announcements should not exceed 500 words, and may be lightly edited for length and/or clarity by *United News* staff.

You can also submit announcements using the following QR codes:

Births



Weddings



Anniversaries



Obituaries



four months of the current 2025-2026 year over 1,400 booklets and study aids have been mailed from the British Isles Church office.

The treasurer, Barbara Fenney, advised that the Church's

accountant has now started work on reviewing the accounts for the 2024-2025 year.

The Council considered updates regarding plans for the 2026 Feast of Tabernacles and Family Summer Camp. **UN**

Town Hall Results

Below is a summary of initiatives/concerns that were derived from the encouraging and productive town hall meeting following services last Sabbath. We will work to address these over the coming weeks and year.

- Calendar of activities.
- Midweek Bible study.
- Identify opportunities for members to help.
- Provide opportunities for a women's meeting.

- Further explore the opportunity for an in-person Pentecost/service weekend.
- Opportunity to get-together outside of church services.
- Develop and utilize a mailing list.
- Locate different locations for the Feast.
- Get listed on UCG.org.
- Add a link for contributions on ucgeurope.org.
- Work in more visits.

James Ginn

Class of 2026 Student Officers Chosen

This year's Ambassador Bible College student council officers have been chosen. Kyle McKenzie will serve as the ABC student body president, assisted by secretary Katerina Fitch and treasurer Matthew Leiby. Austin Furman will lead the social committee assisted by Melody Porter. Andrey Halvorsen will lead the service committee assisted by Ayla Docken.

Ensuring the room and materials are prepared for class each day, Jesse O'Hare will serve as monitor for this year's ABC class. Katie French will keep the class updated on upcoming events and maintain the message board. Teresa Havens, assisted by Flower Duyck, will ensure that cards are sent to the sick. Technical support will be provided by Junia

Marin, including class audio recordings. He will be assisted by Matthew Allison. Adam Miller will edit the ABC Times and class yearbook. Serving as music coordinator, Rebecca Anderson will be assisted by Melody Porter and Kyle McKenzie as they prepare for the ABC chorale presentations this school year.

Heidi Braun

Invest in your future with Ambassador Bible College!

There are many wonderful reasons to attend ABC!

- Learn God's Word inside and out.
- Make friends and memories that will last a lifetime.
- Prove the truth of the Bible for yourself.
- Tuition is \$2,500; waivers are available based on need.

Apply today at: abc.ucg.org/applications



L-R: Melody Porter and Austin Furman



L-R: Katerina Fitch, Kyle McKenzie, Matthew Leiby and Jesse O'Hare



L-R: Ayla Docken and Andrey Halvorsen



Adam Miller



ABC Class of 2026



Flower Duyck and Teresa Havens



L-R: Melody Porter, Kyle McKenzie and Rebecca Anderson



Katie French



L-R: Junia Marin and Matthew Allison

GN

The Good News

A Winning Strategy for Tests and Trials

A simple strategy that helps one prepare for academic tests can also strengthen us for upcoming spiritual trials—and even improve sleep.

by Robert Curry

In high school, my main goal was to achieve academic success like my older sister Jean did. But since her SAT scores far exceeded mine, I knew I had to make the most of every effective study technique. For my first big test, I pulled an all-nighter. I was in a fog during the test, thinking I was all right, but I couldn't think clearly!

After that I discovered a better approach: reviewing all the material once right before bed, getting seven solid hours of sleep, and then going over as much as possible in the morning before the test. Through the years, including college and beyond, I also noticed that I would do better if I reviewed the previous day's study material while eating breakfast.

Learning during sleep?

Even back then I had heard the idea that learning can actually take place during sleep. Although the experts don't believe it's possible to learn a language, or complete study material while you sleep, it seems that study just before sleep can have positive benefits. In 1914 German psychologist Rosa Heine found that learning new material in the evening before sleep results in better recall compared to learning during the day.

"Can You Learn in Your Sleep? Yes, and Here's How"—Medical News Today, Ana Sandolu, March 8, 2018, says "Our data suggest that . . . sleep spindles might represent the key underlying mechanism. When you are awake you learn new things,

Study just before sleep can have positive benefits.

Try this winning strategy for facing trials!

Study has a positive impact in our lives—"Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11). This is the same outcome Exodus 20:20 stated God desired for the Israelites when He tested them at Mt. Sinai and gave the Ten Commandments. This matches Deuteronomy 8:2, where it says another desired out-

come from God testing us is "to humble you and . . . know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not."

A few months ago, in an "ah-ha!" moment, I realized that this winning recipe for acing academic tests can be used to prepare for spiritual trials.

Study at night.

Study at night, then sleep on it, allowing your brain to clean up all the day's input and refile it. Weeks before I tried this, I struggled with falling asleep, but when I tried studying before bed, I found I slept better! When you feel a little restless and would really like to "lie down in peace, and sleep" that would be a good time to include verses such as Psalm 3:5, 4:8 or 127:2 in your study.

Tests and trials are coming; now is the time to prepare.

Supplement with prayer.

When we add the important element of prayer, we increase the effectiveness of study. Consider the powerful possibilities of praying like David and Daniel three times a day! (Psalm 55:17; Daniel 6:10)

Revisit in the morning.

The next morning, pray and study some more—and the Holy Spirit will bring things to mind! (John 14:26). When tests arise, they present more than just challenges. They can help determine whether we will walk God's way (Exodus 16:4), be used "to do you good in the end" (Deuteronomy 8:16), and show that God will bring "us out to rich fulfillment" (Psalm 66:12).

Pray and study more!

Tests and trials are coming. We can count it all joy (James 1:2) knowing God's desired outcomes will be worth it. But now is the time to prepare. Increase your faith and build a closer relationship with God our Father and Jesus Christ our Brother by implementing this study method—and enjoy the bonus of better sleep! It can't hurt any of us to pray and study more as we battle the cares of this life (Matthew 13:22). **GN**



Aaron Burden/Unsplash

Study has a positive impact in our lives.

God's Law and Sin

The pervasive nature of sin and death is demonstrated by the human tendency to disregard God's law.

from Fundamental Beliefs of the United Church of God

There are ultimately two ways of life. One is the way of selflessness and outflowing concern for others—that is, the way of love, desiring to give and help. This is the way of God, who is the very embodiment of love (1 John 4:8, 16). His way of life is codified for human beings in His law, which expresses love (Romans 13:10; 1 John 5:3).

Opposed to this is the way of vanity and selfishness—striving to get for oneself. This approach constitutes violation of God's law, which is sin (1 John 3:4). This is the way of Satan, his demons and, following their lead, mankind.

Yet God created human beings to ultimately become members of His family, destined to inherit immortality and live in a harmonious relationship with Him and each other for eternity (Hebrews 2:6-13). To ultimately share eternity with God, we must also share His thoughts, agree with His approach, embrace His way of life and appreciate and uphold His values as expressed by His law (Philippians 2:5-13).

God's written revelation to mankind, the Holy Scriptures, reveals this essential knowledge to us through His laws and teachings (2 Timothy 3:15-17). This forms the basis for the everlasting relationship God desires to have with us. Therefore it is imperative that anyone who seeks this ultimate relationship with God heed the directives of God's law as revealed in His Word.

Within the broad principle of love, Jesus Christ in Matthew 22:37-40 summarized God's law in two great commandments from the Old Testament: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind [from Deuteronomy 6:5]. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself [from Leviticus 19:18]. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.'"

These two commandments summarize the more specific delineation found in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5). The first four of these commandments concern showing love toward God. The last six concern love toward neighbor—one's fellow man. We should understand these commands as summary principles as well, rather than limiting each to the strict wording in the verses where they are listed.

Part of Jesus' purpose in coming to earth was to "magnify the law" (Isaiah 42:21, King James Version). An important way He did this was by showing the full spiritual intent of God's commandments—both through His teachings and through His perfect example of obedience.

In His teaching, Jesus explained that God's commandments apply well beyond the mere letter. They are to regulate even our thoughts. For instance, He explained that unjust rage against someone is breaking God's Sixth Commandment against murder and that

We believe that sin is the transgression of the law. The law is spiritual, perfect, holy, just and good. The law defines God's love and is based upon the two great principles of love toward God and love toward neighbor. It is immutable and binding. The Ten Commandments are the 10 points of God's law of love. We believe that breaking any one point of the law brings upon a person the penalty of sin. We believe that this fundamental spiritual law reveals the only way to true life and the only possible way of happiness, peace and joy. All unhappiness, misery, anguish and woe have come from transgressing God's law (1 John 3:4; 5:3; Matthew 5:17-19; Matthew 19:17-19; Matthew 22:37-40; James 2:10-11; Romans 2:5-9; Romans 7:12-14; Romans 13:8-10).

lust after a person not one's spouse is committing adultery in the heart, constituting a violation of the Seventh Commandment (Matthew 5:21-28).

God requires that we obey the spirit of each of the Ten Commandments. Starting with the first four on love toward God, the First Commandment against not worshipping other gods also means that we are not to allow anything to come before God in our lives.

The Second Commandment forbids worshipping before physical representations of God, like statues or pictures of Christ, but it also prohibits limiting God with a false image in one's mind.

The Third Commandment says we are not to take God's name in vain, which means we must be quite careful in how we use it, but also that we must not dishonor God's reputation by how we live.

The Fourth Commandment, about keeping the Sabbath holy and not working on it, also includes the principle of structuring our workweek around it and maintaining a spiritual focus throughout the day.

Moving to the last six of the Ten Commandments on loving our neighbor, the Fifth Commandment tells us to honor our parents, which includes obeying them when young, respecting their wisdom when we are adults, caring for them when they are old and not bringing shame on one's family name. (Implicit in this command is also the need for parents to be honorable.)

The Sixth Commandment, as already mentioned, prohibits murder. In the letter this means not usurping God's prerogative in taking human life (as only He has the authority to do so or to command that someone else do so). We are not to murder self or help someone else to commit suicide, and we are not to commit abortion. In the spirit of the law, we are not to hate or devalue another person.

The Seventh Commandment, forbidding adultery, in its spiritual intent prohibits any sexual relations outside of marriage, as well as fantasizing about such relations. Thus sexual immorality in general, including premarital sex and homosexual relations, is forbidden, as detailed elsewhere in God's laws.

The Eighth Commandment, prohibiting stealing, in the spirit includes safeguarding what belongs to others and seeking honest gain in order to even share with others in need.

The Ninth Commandment, forbidding the bearing of false witness against one's neighbor, in its full intent includes protecting the reputation of others and maintaining complete honesty and integrity in all dealings—always telling the truth.

And finally, the Tenth Commandment, prohibiting coveting what belongs to a neighbor, is, even as expressed in the letter, a spiritual commandment about thoughts in one's mind. We must refrain from lusting after what we cannot lawfully obtain.

These commandments are further supported and clarified by other laws and instructions in Scripture. In fact, the entire Bible serves as God's revealed law to us, telling us what He requires. Yet sadly, man rejected God's law at the very outset of human history.

Sin, the transgression of the law, was introduced to humanity in the Garden of Eden. Satan lied to Adam and Eve concerning the tree of the knowledge of good

and evil (Genesis 3:4; John 8:44). Contrary to His deceptive prediction, the first man and woman did die. As their descendants, we all share the common condition of mortality (Hebrews 9:27).

It's no coincidence that sin's universal presence in all human beings (Romans 3:23) is connected to death and the withholding of God's gift, eternal life (Romans 6:23).

The pervasive nature of sin and death is demonstrated by the human tendency to disregard and disobey God's law (Romans 8:7). Self-deception frequently accompanies this departure from God's perfect guidelines (Jeremiah 17:9; 10:23). The influence of Satan is unmistakable in this pattern, both directly (Ephesians 2:1-3) and indirectly through those he deceives (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Having become the adversary of God through his own rebellion, Satan has covertly enlisted the human race in his battle. Sinful human beings become enemies of God since all sin, in addition to its effect on other people, is by definition against God (Genesis 39:9; Psalm 51:4).

Violating any of God's instructions is sin (1 John 5:17), but it is also sinful to omit doing what one should do (James 4:17) or to violate one's conscience (Romans 14:23). Furthermore, sin is an enslaving power from which we need redemption and release (Romans 7:23-25). We are powerless to bring about this redemption on our own (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Since sin in any form brings about alienation from God (Isaiah 59:1-3; Ephesians 4:17-19) and eventual death, no amount of obedience following such conduct can reverse its effect, even though obedience is expected. Only the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ can procure our release (Hebrews 2:14-15) and reconcile us to God.

Through forgiveness of sin, available by God's grace (Romans 3:24), a Christian finds freedom in obeying God's law (James 1:21-25). Rather than being enslaved to sin by disobedience, we serve God by obedience and walk the path He intends, to be led to eternal life in His Kingdom by His generous and undeserved gift (Romans 6:16-23).

To return to a former life of sin is a serious matter in the sight of God (2 Peter 2:20-22). However, the only sin that cannot be forgiven is the fully informed, willful refusal to repent, utterly rejecting God and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, by which forgiveness of sin is made possible (Hebrews 6:4-6; Hebrews 10:26-31).

This sin is described by Christ as "blasphemy against the Spirit" (Matthew 12:31), a knowing outright rejection of the power and authority of God. After every human being has had a full opportunity for salvation, those still unrepentant will be destroyed (Revelation 20:14-15), thus fulfilling the ultimate penalty of sin, the second death. (See the chapter titled *The Resurrections and Eternal Judgment*.)

Although every person is responsible for his own sin (Ezekiel 18:4; 20), Satan the devil is identified as the tempter, the deceiver of mankind and the one ultimately responsible for leading humanity into sin (Matthew 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5; Revelation 12:9; Revelation 20:1-3). **GN**

Faith, Patience and Understanding Autism

by Daniel Evans

Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), is a neurological and developmental condition that affects how individuals interact, communicate, learn and behave. It is often marked by challenges in social skills, repetitive behaviors and difficulties with speech or nonverbal communication. Autism is called a “spectrum” because it manifests differently in every individual.

According to the CDC Community Report on Autism 2025, 1 in 31 eight-year-old children is diagnosed with autism—a number that has increased by approximately 317 percent since 2000. Researchers point to a combination of genetic and environmental factors, including complications during pregnancy, advanced parental age and exposure to toxins, as contributing to the rise in diagnoses.

Many of us interact daily with people on the autism spectrum—whether in our congregations, communities or families. From my own personal experience of raising a child with autism, I can say it has been an interesting and joyful experience filled with both challenges and joy.

After noticing a regression in my son Tidus’s verbal skills and eye contact around age two, we sought answers through specialists and testing. After some rather lengthy appointments with multiple specialists and completion of thorough testing, by age three, he was diagnosed with moderate autism. The doctor warned us he might never regain verbal ability—a difficult moment for any parent.

Our first course of action was to have him anointed and then we pursued various therapies addressing speech, occupational and physical development. Six years later, Tidus has made remarkable progress. Those who know him are amazed by his growth—he is loving, kind and thoughtful.

Every individual with ASD is unique, and their challenges may improve or worsen over time. Understanding these struggles not only helps us support those with autism but also reflects Christ’s call to love, include and serve all members of the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). By learning about autism, we can foster patience, compassion and encouragement in our congregations, honoring God’s teaching that every person is fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14).

There was a time when I would carry Tidus into a restaurant, church or any public building, and he would immediately begin screaming. There were no outward signs explaining why, and at the time he had no verbal ability to tell us what he was feeling. He would simply scream and cry, overwhelmed by something we could not see.

One challenge that often co-occurs with autism is sensory sensitivity, also known as sensory processing disorder (SPD). This involves difficulty processing sensory input—where the brain overreacts to sounds, lights, touch, movement or crowds that others may tolerate with ease. For Tidus, large crowds and loud environments were particularly distressing.

Through trial and observation, we discovered that placing him on my shoulders provided enough relief to help him feel safe. Being above the crowd created a kind of “safe zone,” where fewer people could invade his space. This simple adjustment allowed us to enter buildings that had once felt impossible for him.

This went on for years and required patience,

persistence and gradual desensitization. Over time, Tidus progressed from needing noise-dampening headphones to learning how to tolerate loud and crowded environments. Today, he is able to walk into buildings independently. While sensory challenges remain an ongoing struggle, witnessing his perseverance has deeply shaped my own growth in patience, empathy and understanding.



The Struggles of Those with Autism

While every individual with autism is unique, many people on the spectrum experience varying challenges that affect daily life. These may include:

- Social interaction difficulties: challenges with eye contact, interpreting body language, or forming peer relationships.
- Communication challenges: delayed speech, limited conversational skills, or nonverbal communication.
- Sensory sensitivities: over- or under-reactivity to sounds, lights, textures or crowds.
- Repetitive behaviors: routines, rituals, hand-flapping or focused interests.
- Emotional regulation challenges: difficulty managing frustration, anxiety or changes in routine.
- Executive functioning difficulties: trouble with planning, organizing or transitioning between tasks.

Understanding these challenges is essential—especially within our congregations. Why? Because it reflects Christ’s call to love, include and serve all members of the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Without understanding, individuals with ASD may feel isolated, misunderstood, or excluded in church settings.

By learning about autism, we can help create congregations that are more patient, welcoming and supportive—places where everyone, regardless of ability, can worship, grow in faith and use their God-given gifts. This honors the truth that every person is fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14) and reflects our calling to bear one another’s burdens, thus fulfilling the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).

Autism and the Christian Walk

While autism and the Christian life are very different in nature, there are meaningful parallels between the challenges faced by individuals with ASD and the spiritual journey of following Christ. These similarities become especially important when we remember

that a Christian with autism may experience both struggles simultaneously.

1. Daily Effort and Perseverance

Both the Christian walk and life with autism require ongoing effort, patience and intentional perseverance. A Christian strives daily to follow God’s teachings and resist worldly influences, while a person with autism—or their caregiver—works continually to manage sensory, emotional and social challenges (Romans 5:3-5).

As James 1:2-4 tells us, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (New International Version used throughout).

These verses remind us that trials produce perseverance and maturity. When approached with faith, daily struggles—whether spiritual, emotional or physical—can lead to growth, purpose and strength.

2. Feeling Misunderstood or Isolated

Christians may often feel out of step with the world’s values, just as individuals with autism can feel out of sync with social norms. In both cases, there may be a deep sense of being different or misunderstood.

Romans 12:2 tells us, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Psalm 34:18 reminds us that “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”

These verses reassure us that feeling different or alone is not a sign of failure—God’s presence and purpose remain steady, even when acceptance feels distant.

3. Growth Through Struggle

Both journeys involve learning through hardship. Christians grow spiritually by overcoming trials and seeking God’s guidance; those living with autism grow through persistence, support and learning to navigate a world that they may perceive as “not built for them.”

Scriptures such as John 15:2, Isaiah 43:2 and Philippians 1:6 remind us that struggles are not dead ends—they are part of a refining process guided by God. Through these challenges, endurance, compassion and deeper purpose can emerge.

A Call to Love the Whole Body

Ultimately, both journeys call for understanding and compassion—toward ourselves and toward others. As Paul reminds us in Ephesians 4:2, we are to walk with humility, gentleness and patience, bearing with one another in love. And in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, we are reminded “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body . . . and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”

Let’s continue to nourish the entire Body of Christ, fostering church environments where those with ASD or other developmental challenges feel encouraged, understood and deeply loved. Let us uplift those who struggle, affirming their value and dignity—remembering that every person is made in God’s image (Genesis 1:27). **UN**

8 Becoming a Widow—My Journey

by Laura Peabody

He lay there before me, breathing his last four breaths, and he was gone . . .

We were just returning from celebrating our son's 50th birthday. It was a long drive home but we were so grateful to have been at my son's home surrounded by all of our children and grandchildren for the first time. They all lived in different states but we had purposed to gather for this special day. It was wonderful. As we drove home, reminiscing about our family, my husband's cell phone rang. It was the doctor that we had seen a month or so before. Don had prostate cancer and we had gone in for his normal biopsy.

As I sat in the waiting room that day, my cell phone rang and the doctor told me that they had found a mass in my husband's bladder so they were going to biopsy that instead. I wasn't sure what to make of that. We waited for the results, and waited, and waited. They kept sending the biopsy off for further testing.

Meanwhile one of Don's kidneys began to fail. There was a blockage and they needed to surgically repair it. He came out of that surgery with a tube out of his back. Nerves were on high alert. Keeping that clean was of major importance. I learned over this time that my calling was not in nursing. This tube had to be constantly cleaned—my job.

That was that most dreaded of all calls, that day in the car, returning from our son's home. The doctor informed us that my husband had been diagnosed with the most invasive, aggressive bladder cancer there was. We pulled off the road, found a deserted parking lot, got out of the car and just held each other.

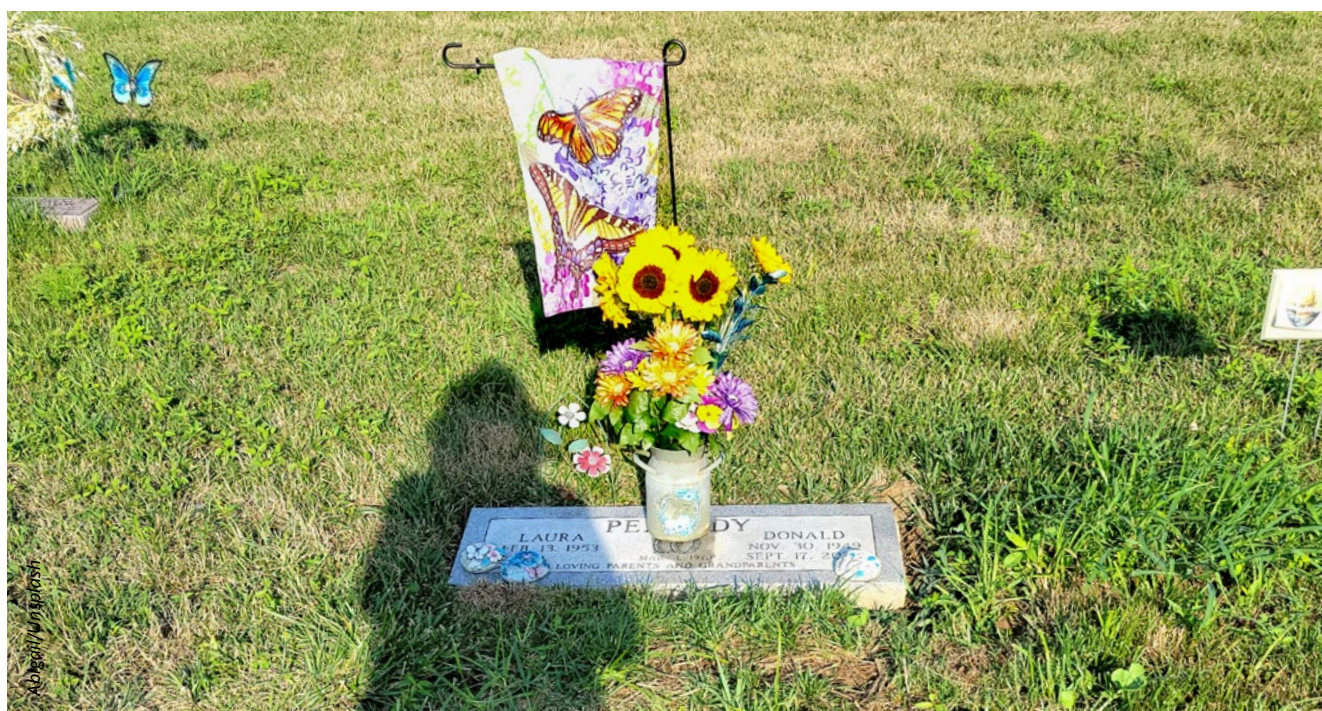
Upon arriving home, we waited for that appointment with the surgeon. While waiting, I had an appointment with my doctor who found a mass in my uterus. Knowing of my husband's illness they asked if we should wait and tackle my issue later. Don said no. He wanted to see me through my surgery and know that I was okay. The day of my surgery is a blur. It was successful, no problems, but as we arrived home, we received a call from the surgeon's office saying that they had a cancellation and could Don come in? There was no way that we were going to miss that appointment so we got back in the car and drove to his appointment. As I sat there listening, I was feeling woozy from the anesthesia that I had been under that morning. But I remember the surgeon pulling his chair in front of Don's and saying "I believe this could be a lifesaving surgery for you." He had told us that chemo wouldn't even touch the cancer that Don had.

We left the surgeon's office in somewhat of a shock. But we knew that God was in control and that He would see us through.

Don needed a cardiologist's approval before they could perform the eight-hour surgery that could save his life. His cardiologist had retired the year before and Don hadn't gotten a new one. So, we had to get referrals and wait for a "first time" appointment with a new one.

Don's pain began to increase at an alarming rate. The pain meds had to be continually increased. It came time for his cardiologist appointment. On the very morning of that appointment his second kidney failed; not the day before his appointment, not the day after. I knew that God knew how important that appointment to the cardiologist was. But we knew that God was in control.

Another surgery, another tube. I felt like I was in over my head. I went to our Father and prayed "I don't know how to do this." It was getting to be too much and I didn't know what to do. Prayer requests had



Losing a loved one is a difficult challenge, especially when that person is your spouse.

been going out so I knew God knew. We both knew that He was in control.

We waited now for another appointment with the cardiologist. It seemed like forever but we finally got in and got his approval for surgery.

Because of Don's pain level, we were in and out of the ER several times. The staff there told me that we should buy stock in the hospital as they knew us as soon as we walked in the door. That's not a place where you want to be well known.

A week before Don's "surgery," we went into the hospital to conference with a nurse. She explained what they were going to do and assured us that many people had undergone this surgery and gone on to live productive lives. We left encouraged.

It had been three months since we had been told of the seriousness of Don's illness. The morning of the surgery had arrived. We had been encouraged, so on the way to the hospital I told Don that I loved him very much and wanted him to come through this. He said "I just want God's will." Don was tired. It had been a very long, painful, stressful summer and he had come to truly put his life in God's hands. I accepted His will, not knowing what His will would be.

I had prayed that they would find all the cancer and remove it all. So, an hour into his surgery, as I sat with my sons and close friends in the hospital cafeteria, I looked at the clock and thought, one hour—they've seen it all by now. And my phone rang, the worst call of my life. It was the surgeon from the operating room. He said that they couldn't finish. I needed to go to the waiting area where they would take me to a private room and that he would meet me there. Of course, I panicked.

When he came into the room, he looked at me and said "If we continued, he would have bled out." There was nothing that they could do for him. I lost it.

After a few days in the hospital where they tried to stabilize Don's pain level, we went home on hospice care. Every time a nurse came in, a couple of times a day, they increased his pain meds. Then they gave me the morphine to administer every few hours to keep him comfortable.

I still didn't think he would die! God was on His throne and He wouldn't let this happen! I was in complete denial. I could only think of keeping Don, the love of my physical life, comfortable; not prepare him for death!

One week after Don's surgery (that didn't work), I was praying next to him and suddenly noticed that his

breathing was calmer. It was like none of this had ever happened. I was elated. Surely the worst was past. All was peaceful. Then I counted his breaths—four—and then nothing . . .

Don died. I fell apart and so much of those days are a blur. I remember them wheeling him out of our home, never to return. I went again to our Father. "I don't know how to do this." I was a widow . . .

God saw me through those first few months in miraculous ways. Everything fell into place in ways I never would have thought. And God remains with me today.

I tell this story to help others. I've been asked what I've learned from this. Ha! We never finish learning and after just a year I am still grieving and processing. Grieving and processing what my life was, what it could have been, and where do I go from here?

What do you say to a widow/widower? Give yourself some slack. There is absolutely nothing that you can say or do that is going to make them feel better. You can't bring their loved one back. But be there. Just be there. Talk to them about their loved one. Let them talk as they are ready and have desire or need. Include them. Don't ignore them. Their life has suddenly and drastically changed. It's hard for them to realize and accept that yours hasn't. They don't want to be a burden to you or anyone; they just want to be accepted in, and work through the new phase of their life.

And caregivers? Love them! They, too, may be going through the most difficult time of their lives. They need support. They can easily get lost (by themselves and others) in what they are doing.

My husband and I were married for over 50 years—give or take. We had a few hiccups but we reconciled! Our marriage ended in his death after years of working things out, forgiving and loving. I'm sure I love him more now as I see all that he did for me. He left me well taken care of. It was just seven or so months before he died that we made all our end-of-life plans, not knowing what our future held. I tend to think now that God knew and was getting things in order. Everything was taken care of. If you're thinking you have time for that—don't! You never know when you may have only three months or less to "take care of things."

My love goes out to all the widows, widowers and caregivers for what they are going through. As I and others continue on a new path that we never asked for, please be there for us. **UN**

Teens

When you think about your future and what the Bible has to say about it, you probably don't think of the book of Lamentations—yet it's full of insight.



Young Adults

If we never felt unsuccessful, would we truly desire to push ourselves to improve? Learn why failure can actually be helpful in achieving success.



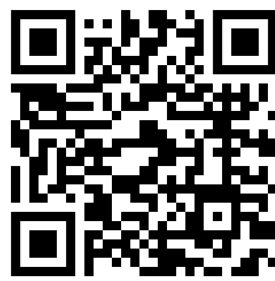
Seniors

For converted Christians, old age is not a time of stagnation, nor is it a time of chronic discouragement. How can we make the best use of these years?



Men

How does God define masculinity? In this sermon, originally given at a men's weekend, we can review what Scripture says about being a man.



Women

The UCG members' site has a dedicated page where you can find announcements about upcoming women's events. Visit this page to learn more!



Singles

Dating can be challenging, especially if you've already made mistakes. How can you recover from the devastating effects of sexual sin?



CHILDREN'S CORNER
Matching: People (and an Animal) Angels Appeared To

Fill in the correct letter from the names on the right to show the people (or animal) who saw angels. If you get stuck, the scriptures can help. An angel (or angels) appeared:

1. To _____ as he was burning incense in the temple (Luke 1:11-12).

2. To _____ after he beat his donkey (Numbers 22:31-32).

3. To _____ as he prepared to meet his brother (Genesis 32:1-2).

4. To _____ with a drawn sword (Numbers 22:22-27).

5. At Christ's tomb to _____ (Matthew 28:2-4).

6. In Nazareth to _____ (Luke 1:26-28).

7. To _____ in prison and released him (Acts 12:3-11).

8. In Ophrah where _____ was threshing wheat (Judges 6:11).

9. To _____ who brought spices to anoint Jesus' body (Mark 16:1-6).

10. To _____ at the tomb seated where Jesus' body had been (John 20:1, 11-13).
- A. A donkey

B. Roman guards

C. Three women

D. Mary, Jesus' mother

E. Zacharias

F. Peter

G. Mary Magdalene

H. Jacob

I. Gideon

J. Balaam

—by Mavis Stevens, Ann Arbor, Michigan congregation

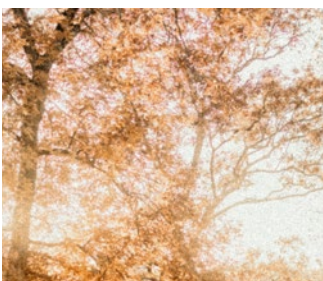
Married Couples

An interview with relationship expert Gary Smalley reveals some helpful principles about supporting a healthy marriage.



Widows/Widowers

Why doesn't God always answer our prayers for those who are suffering and in need of a miracle? This article helps us better understand these challenges.



Parents/Grandparents

How can we work with children to help them learn and grow? Gary Petty shares three tips that will help you navigate the challenges of parenthood.



Carl Anderson



Carl Anderson died peacefully at home on Dec. 30, 2025. Born in Petersburg, Alaska on May 20, 1932, he spent his childhood in Alaska and in the Seattle, Washington area. At age 17, Carl went back to Alaska to fish commercially, but ended up working on a Federal Geological Survey ship until September 1950.

At that time, the Korean War had begun. Carl enlisted in the Army in September 1950. After basic training in Georgia, he was shipped to Korea, where he served for 14 months in combat and as an MP.

At the end of that tour of duty, Carl was shipped back to Seattle. His cousin had been working with a lovely young lady named Joanne Edith Golliet and introduced Carl to her. He had a 40-day leave and a whirlwind romance! He finished his tour of duty with the Army in Georgia and was discharged in September, 1953.

After serving in the Army, Carl returned to Seattle and married Jo on Oct. 10, 1953. They were married for 54 years, until her death on July 8, 2007. They had two children, Lynn and Bruce.

Shortly after they were married, Jo's mother, Ethel West, began sending them literature she was receiving from the Radio Church of God and Herbert W. Armstrong. In the beginning, Carl was definitely not happy about that! But, by early 1961, both Carl and Jo began attending services in Seattle and were baptized together on Aug. 12, 1961.

In July 1971, Carl was asked to move to Pasadena, California and be in charge of the maintenance of all off-campus properties of Ambassador College. He returned to the Seattle area in July 1974.

In October 1977, Carl became active in 12 Step Recovery, which he considered a major milestone in his life and a turning point in his spiritual growth. He was ordained a deacon in 1982 and then ordained an elder on April 4, 1987. Carl was a strong support for years for those struggling with recovery from addiction and helped many in gaining and maintaining sobriety.

Carl was a solid, faithful man whose wisdom, steadiness and solid relationship with Christ was an example and a help to the congregation. He remained an active elder in Seattle until he moved to the Sedro-Woolley/Burlington church area in 2019, where he also served faithfully until his health began to decline.

Carl is survived by his daughter, Lynn and son, Bruce, who were both loving and devoted caregivers to him. He was able to die peacefully at home, as he wanted, because of their care.

Gerald Hoyer



Gerald (Jerry) Hoyer, devoted husband, father, grandfather, longtime Church elder, silviculturist and banjo player, died quietly in his sleep on Oct. 19, 2025 at the age of 94. Jerry had been in declining health for months but his condition was never painful. For that the family is grateful to our loving God.

Jerry was known for many things. He served his country in the U.S. Army, and was honorably discharged ranking as sergeant in the fall of 1955. He met his loving wife Kathryn while climbing mountains in Washington. They were married in 1959. In 1966 they devoted their lives to Christ and His Kingdom and were for many years pillars in the Church of God in the Pacific Northwest where they touched many lives through their devoted service, patience, counsel, hospitality and unwavering commitment to the Body of Christ. Their home in Tumwater, Washington became a gathering place for many at all hours and seasons. Jerry had a PhD in forestry science and worked over 40 years for the state of Washington.

After retirement, their service and dedication to the church membership and their affinity for hospitality continued after he and Kathryn relocated to the Prescott Valley, Arizona area for more than 20 years. He was a great lover of nature and instilled that love in his children and grandchildren through many outdoor adventures and activities over the years. He loved music, writing several hymns, gardening, wine making and had an extensive collection of bonsai trees he crafted over the years.

His greatest love was for God and His truth and when asked what he would advise people desirous of a long-lasting relationship with God he replied, "Get humble and stay humble." Jerry is survived by his wife Kathryn, three children and eight grandchildren.

Homer Moore



Maureen DeLong



On Dec. 28, 2025 Maureen DeLong, wife of elder Larry DeLong, fell 12 feet onto a concrete pad and sustained life-threatening injuries. On Tuesday, Dec. 30, 2025 surrounded by family she breathed her last.

She ran her race with a deep love for her "Papa" God, her Elder Brother and Savior Jesus Christ, her family and her church family. She served them with every ounce of her being, stepping in where others feared to tread, standing for the truth, encouraging, guiding and holding up the arms of those weaker than herself.

She will be greatly missed by her family and all those that were touched by her loving service and dedication to the Word of God. Well done good and faithful servant!

Renee Kellers



Charlotte Renee Kellers, wife of retired pastor Fred Kellers, died the morning of December 25, 2025 at the age of 87, just hours after being placed in hospice care due to progressive complications resulting from Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS).

Renee steadfastly professed her faith in God as she quickly declined, and God mercifully gave her the rest that she desired. Mr. Kellers is thankful and relieved that she didn't suffer for long and is now asleep and says, "She is going to awake to her eternal husband," but of course he mourns and has already shed many tears. Thank you to our faithful brethren who prayed for Renee, and who continue to pray for the family.

Homer Moore, (84) a longtime elder in the Orange County, California congregation, died peacefully on Nov. 15, 2025. He had a servant's heart and will be greatly missed. He faithfully served the Church along with his wife, Anna, who continues to serve as a deaconess.



BEYOND TODAY

- Feb. 1-7 **It's Time to Choose / What Will You Choose?**
Presented by Darris McNeely
Literature offered: *Seven Prophetic Signs Before Jesus Returns*
- Feb. 8-14 **When Christianity Becomes Anti-Jesus Part 1 and Part 2**
Presented by Gary Petty
Literature offered: *Jesus Christ: The Real Story / The Ten Commandments*
- Feb. 15-21 **Isn't It Time You Read the Book? / The Book that Changes Lives**
Presented by Steve Myers
Literature offered: *How to Understand the Bible*
- Feb. 22-28 **Why Do Good People Suffer?**
Presented by Steve Myers
Literature offered: *Why Does God Allow Suffering?*



Periodicals Postage Paid
at Milford, Ohio, and at
additional mailing offices

Sign up for Bible study Texts!

Life can feel chaotic—let us help you stay connected with God. Sign up for our Know Your Sword texts and you'll get a quick Bible study reflection text each weekday to help you have a touchpoint with God's word.

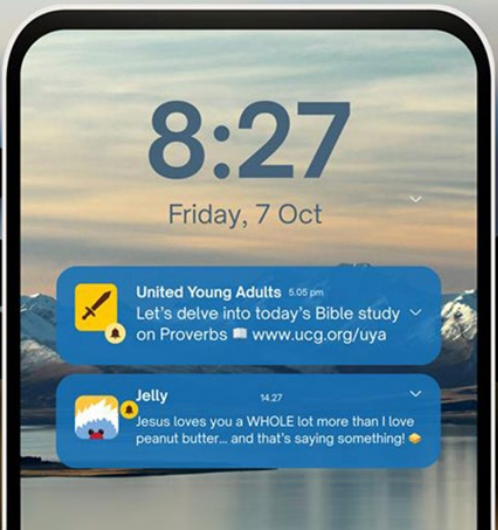


SIGN UP
HERE



WWW.UCG.ORG/PUBLICATION/KNOW-YOUR-SWORD

OR SCAN HERE!



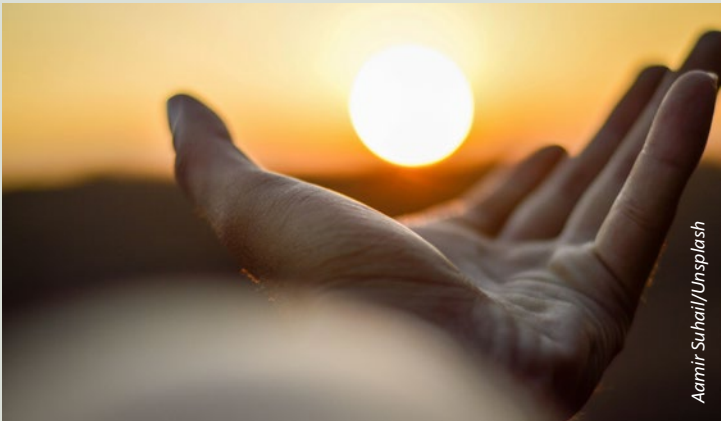
UCG Radio

Listen to booklet and magazines, Bible passages, Bible Q&As, sermons, ABC classes, interviews, the BT Daily series and more!

You can download the app in you Apple or Google app-store. Look for UCG Radio, and begin listening today!



Light of Hope Helpline



Aamir Suhail/Unsplash

If you feel like you're facing challenges alone, please know that we're here to help. We'd like to offer guidance and encouragement. You can contact the Light of Hope Helpline at (888) 241-6211 or email us at hope@ucg.org.

This confidential resource, provided by the United Church of God, connects individuals with licensed mental health professionals within the Church who are ready to offer support and help you find constructive, godly ways to address your challenges.

BY THE NUMBERS

110 K

Number of subscribers on the *Beyond Today* YouTube channel