

BEYOND TODAY

Envisioning a Better World Tomorrow

THE DEPTHS OF SIN

& THE LIFELINE OUT

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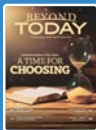
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Understanding the Times: A Time for Choosing

In our January–February 2026 issue, we urged readers to discern the times and resist complacency in the face of rapid change throughout the world, leaning on Jesus Christ through faith as we prepare for God’s Kingdom on earth.

Recent articles helpful and inspiring

I love your articles, especially the ones [in the January-February issue] about where we are in prophecy and what still needs to happen before Christ’s return. We need more of this. I was really glad you pointed out how things could change very quickly.

Reader in Ohio

Mr. Mario Seigle’s articles on science and proving the validity of God as our Creator are so, so good. Love them, and they inspire me to dig deeper. The latest on the cosmic web [in the January-February issue] and another on the sunflower [in the November-December issue] were extremely good. Thanks so much.

From the Internet

Questions about article on the status of Mary

In your January-February edition, the article about Mary and Pope Leo XIV [in Current Events & Trends], you mentioned: “Mary was a wonderful woman of faith. But she is currently dead and not conscious—unable to hear anyone’s prayers.” What about the Assumption, and Mary appearing at Lourdes, Fatima, and Champion? Isn’t Mary in heaven?

From the Internet

Thanks for your question. Right after the quoted sentence, the article cited Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10. These verses, along with many others, show death to be, like sleep, a state of unconsciousness. Those who have died await a future resurrection from death. None have gone consciously to heaven at death. And the only person who has, following death and resurrection, ascended to heaven is Jesus Christ (John 3:13; compare Acts 2:29, 34; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

Mary, like all of Christ’s followers of the past, will be resurrected from death at the return of Jesus Christ (see 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). The teaching of Mary’s bodily “assumption” into heaven is contrary to Scripture. And all reports

of her appearing since her physical lifetime are not genuine—whether fabrication, hallucination or demonic deception. To learn more, please request or download our free study guide Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach? at ucg.org/mj26.

Appreciation for biblical teaching

I’ve committed my life to reading the Bible every day and part of the night. It is a wonderful book! See, I thought I knew a lot about God, but in reality I knew very little. Taking this step, I find that the more I read, the more my heart desires to know of His life, His truths and His Word. Today, as I read, I’m a little more knowledgeable but still have a lot to learn. I thank UCG for the many resources to help me understand the things I could not understand.

From the Internet

I have heard your excellent spiritual messages and have been strengthened spiritually. What I have learned from you I am sharing among our people in various locations. All are enjoying it so much. Please remember my ministry in your prayers. God bless you richly. In Christian love.

Reader in India

Hello, I just discovered your website, magazine and booklets and am placing my first order. Thank you very much for making these materials available free. I am ready to learn and grow in my spiritual understanding and look forward to more communication.

From the Internet

Donation to support helpful material

At this time, I wish to thank you for your magazine and the other material which you have sent. They are enjoyable and informative. Articles are well laid out with the associated verses as well as critical thinking, which we don’t see applied anymore.

Enclosed is a donation. Thank you. Keep up God’s good work.

Subscriber in Ontario, Canada

Thank you for your support! Our materials are always free to the public, supported by members in the United Church of God and other readers around the world.

Looking to attend a congregation

Hello! I have been doing some research to find a denomination that better fits me, as I was raised Catholic, and I have become very interested in your church! I was curious where you are located and how I could join.

From the Internet

We’d be very glad for you to meet with us for worship and fellowship! You can find a list of our congregations at ucg.org/congregations. Contact the minister closest to you, and he’ll be happy to help with details about attending.

I wanted to know if your church celebrates any pagan holidays. I am looking for a church that strictly teaches from the Bible. I do not celebrate pagan holidays because I believe the Bible doesn’t teach that and is against that, and I am looking for a church that believes the same.

From the Internet

Thank you for your interest! UCG observes God’s Holy Days mentioned in Leviticus 23. We do not celebrate holidays like Easter and Christmas, as we understand these practices to have originated in pagan religion, which we are not to emulate in the worship of God (Deuteronomy 12:29-32). For more detail, read or request our free study guide Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe? at ucg.org/mj26.

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Grab Hold of Help and Hope

Do you feel like you're sinking—that struggle as you might, you can never escape to true freedom and security? The problem of sin has a way of overwhelming us—of pulling us down into the depths to swallow us up. The dire predicament can seem unbeatable, like there's no way out. It saps our energy, erodes our resolve and leaves us feeling trapped in despair.

This is far more than a personal problem. It's a *human* problem, affecting the world at large. Looking out, we see that society is drowning in sorrows rooted in sin. But for the most part, society does not even understand what sin is.

The Bible defines sin as *lawlessness*—that is, living in violation of God's laws (1 John 3:4). Many read “law” and imagine a stern God ready to “smite” people for failing to toe His rigorous line. As they see it, a loving God would not impose such burdensome moral restrictions. Yet God explains that the laws He gives are *for our good* (Deuteronomy 6:24; 10:13). He wants the best for us. His laws teach us how to treat others in a loving way (compare Romans 13:10; 1 John 5:3). If everyone obeyed them, all would experience harmony and joy. “Happy is he who keeps the law” (Proverbs 29:18).

But the world has been led astray into ways of selfishness and of disregard for God and His ways—even open defiance. This is a problem all people must come to recognize in themselves—that the human heart has become “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9), with a mind that's “hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot” (Romans 8:7, English Standard Version).

So does God just leave us to flail and drown? No—His intent has always been to rescue us, to extend a lifeline to pull us up. Yet we must take hold of what He offers us.

He offers us forgiveness of sins, which He grants upon our committed repentance and acceptance of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for us. Jesus came to die in our place so that we can live. This profound deliverance is vital to being set free and leaving our past behind!

But what's to keep us from falling back into the ways of sin? How do we deal with our corrupt nature that pulls us down? God's rescue is not just pulling us against our will. Rather, He will give us power to pull with strength ourselves toward Him and to hold onto Him. This power from God is the other great help He offers us—the power of the Holy Spirit, given following our repentance through faith in Christ and baptism (Acts 2:38).

The magnitude of the problem facing all people—and the necessity of accepting God's help in rescuing us—is laid out in our cover story, “The Depths of Sin—and the Lifeline Out.” Accompanying it is an overview of the plummeting morality of the world around us and the need to not go with the flow. Further, in our look at world news, we see the terrible consequences of a

history of hatred fueled by false religion, as we see in Iran—and the need for God to ultimately set things right.

Vital perspective on this theme is found in an article on the meaning of the biblical Feast of Firstfruits or Pentecost, which comes annually in late spring (May-June)—this year on May 24. It was on this day that God gave His Holy Spirit to His followers in a miraculous display after Christ's death and resurrection. Christ's empowered followers of this age will at His return assist Him in leading the whole world to embrace God's lifeline of rescue.

Other articles encourage developing faith and faithfulness and hope through the help God gives—along with steps we can take in the process of recovering from sin and moving forward.

In receiving God's help, we need to remember that His Spirit will empower us but not force us into compliance. We must *choose* to yield to His help. In speaking of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul told the young evangelist Timothy he needed to stir up this gift or “fan [it] into flame” (2 Timothy 1:6-7, ESV).

While the power comes from God, we don't just coast on autopilot. We must be actively engaged. As Jesus told us, “*Strive to enter through the narrow gate*” (Luke 13:24, emphasis added). Paul described his own struggle as a real fight, not just shadowboxing, with determined self-discipline (1 Corinthians 9:26-27). Yet all the striving in the world will not bring our salvation. All of us need the miraculous transforming power of God to overcome and remain faithful to the end.

May we all grab hold of God's lifeline and press toward ultimate salvation. As Paul wrote: “Not that I . . . am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended [or laid hold of it]; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12-14).

We can break through in ultimate deliverance. As Jesus Himself tells us, “If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). Accept the lifeline God offers and hold fast!

Tom Robinson, Managing Editor

P.S. On a personal note, this will be my last issue as managing editor of *Beyond Today*. I will remain involved, but my main responsibility is shifting to our study guides, Bible study course and online Bible commentary. It has been a privilege serving in this role for the past few years. Praying all our media efforts continue to provide you with the help and hope you need.

THE DEPTHS OF SIN

& THE LIFELINE OUT

War, injustice, broken families and human suffering all trace back to a single root cause the modern world rarely wants to confront—sin. Yet the Bible reveals not only the depth of humanity’s problem but God’s remarkable rescue line to ultimate freedom.

by Ken Loucks and Tom Robinson



Sin is not a popular topic today. Modern culture increasingly encourages people to live according to their own “truth,” guided by personal preference or shifting social expectations. Standards that once seemed firm are now fluid, and what one generation condemned another may celebrate.

In public conversation today, the language of *sin* is rarely used. Behavior once described as morally wrong is now explained as “personal struggle,” “emotional difficulty” or “social pressure” and the like. Rather than speaking of transgression, society often speaks of “mistakes” or “lifestyle choices.” Moral authority is increasingly defined by the individual rather than by the Creator.

Yet beneath this changing moral landscape lies an uncomfortable reality—*much of what is wrong in our world ultimately traces back to sin.*

Consider the conditions of the world around us. Wars devastate nations and leave millions displaced. Corruption undermines governments and erodes public trust. Families fracture under conflict and betrayal. Violence, exploitation and injustice appear across every society. Anxiety and instability increase where moral certainty declines.

One can see the effects everywhere—in broken homes,

dishonesty at all levels of society, rising distrust among neighbors and cycles of violence that repeat generation after generation.

Despite remarkable advances in science, medicine and technology, humanity has not solved its deepest problems. Education and policy reforms may address *symptoms*, but the *root cause* remains.

These troubles are not merely political, economic or psychological. They are fundamentally *spiritual*.

The Bible identifies the root cause plainly. Scripture defines sin as “the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4, King James Version). It also explains that “all unrighteousness is sin” (1 John 5:17). This begins in the mind (see Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28; Romans 7:14; James 1:14-15). In other words, sin is anything that violates the ways God commands us to live and even think.

God’s law expresses His character—what is right, just and good. When human beings disregard that standard, *disorder*

follows. Sin violates divine authority and disrupts the order established by the Creator.

This is not a modern problem. It is an ancient human condition stretching back to the beginning of the world.

The misery humanity experiences today—conflict, oppression, corruption and death itself—can ultimately be traced to mankind’s departure from the ways of the Creator. To understand the depth of humanity’s predicament—and the hope for its resolution—we must consider the full scope of the problem of sin and the remarkable way God is solving it.

All the world guilty before God

When God created intelligent beings, He gave them something extraordinary—free will. Obedience and love only have meaning when they are chosen freely. Yet free will also meant that created beings could choose to act contrary to God’s will.

The Bible reveals that sin first appeared among the angels. One of the highest-ranking angels became filled with pride and rebellion. Rather than serving under God’s authority, he sought to exalt himself above it.

Isaiah records his ambition: “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God” (Isaiah 14:13). That rebellion transformed him into Satan—the *adversary* of God.

Jesus later described him as one who “does not stand in the truth” and has sought the destruction of others from the beginning (John 8:44). His rebellion introduced opposition to God’s rule within creation.

Humanity soon encountered this rebellion. In the Garden of Eden, Satan tempted Eve to distrust God’s command. Rather than relying on God’s wisdom, she chose her own judgment. Adam followed her example (see Genesis 3).

Their decision brought profound consequences. The apostle Paul explains the result: “Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12).

This does not mean that humanity inherits the guilt of Adam’s sin, as some think. Rather, with mankind separated from God and living in a world influenced by Satan, every person eventually follows the same pattern of disobedience. Notice again: “because *all* sinned.”

History confirms this pattern. Generation after generation repeats the same cycle of pride, selfishness and rebellion against God’s ways. Paul summarized the human condition bluntly: “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). And again: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (verse 23).

The problem lies not only in external behavior but within the human heart itself. The prophet Jeremiah wrote, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). Human beings often deceive themselves about their own motives and actions. What appears justified in our own minds may in fact contradict God’s ways.

The results are visible everywhere. Pride fuels conflict. Greed produces exploitation. Envy and anger lead to violence. Deception destroys trust. Broken relationships, corruption in leadership and injustice within societies reflect a deeper moral disorder.

These tendencies produce the wars, injustices and suffering that have marked human history. Yet the Bible reveals an even deeper problem. Sin does not merely damage relationships or societies—it carries a defined penalty. “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

Death is not symbolic language. It is the earned result of disobedience to God’s law. Mortality itself stands as the final consequence of rebellion against the Creator.

God’s law reveals the failure of people to live up to God’s requirements, showing “that the entire world is guilty before God” (Romans 3:19, New Living Translation). Indeed, the problem of sin is universal. It includes nations, societies and each one of us personally.

If that were the end of the story, humanity would have no hope. But from the beginning, God had a plan to rescue mankind from the consequences of sin.

The cost of redemption

God did not abandon humanity to its fate. In His love and mercy, He established a plan to save mankind from the consequences of sin.

Yet God’s solution could not simply overlook wrongdoing. God is perfectly just, and His law reflects His own righteous character.

Scripture says, “The LORD is a God of justice” (Isaiah 30:18). In fact, “all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice” (Deuteronomy 32:4). And justice requires that wrongdoing carries consequences. Law without consequence would lose its authority.

From the beginning God declared the principle plainly. Adam was told that disobedience would result in death (Genesis 2:17). This principle remains unchanged: “The wages of sin is death.”

This created a profound dilemma. Since every human being has sinned, every human being stands under the sentence of death. No one could pay the penalty for others because all are already guilty.

Only one life possessed sufficient worth to redeem humanity. The Bible explains that God the Father created all things through the One called “the Word” (John 1:1–3). This divine Being later came to earth as a human being—Jesus Christ: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

Jesus lived a completely sinless life. The apostle Peter wrote that He “committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth” (1 Peter 2:22). Because He never sinned, Christ did not deserve death. Yet He willingly gave His life as a sacrifice for humanity. This demonstrated God’s perfect justice and extraordinary love.

There is also a profound sense in which God accepted responsibility for the consequences of creating free moral beings. Sin was not God's fault—He is perfectly righteous—but the possibility of sin existed because He granted His creation freedom of choice.

In Christ's sacrifice, God Himself bore the cost of that freedom.

The suffering and death of Jesus Christ reveal the true gravity of sin. It took nothing less than the sacrifice of the Creator to atone for humanity's disobedience. Yet the same sacrifice also reveals the depth of God's love. Both the Father and Christ were willing to endure unimaginable suffering so that humanity could be redeemed.

Isaiah foretold this act centuries earlier: "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:5). Forgiveness through Christ's sacrifice is therefore a gift no one could ever earn. But receiving that gift involves important conditions.

On the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter explained what God requires: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38).

Repentance means more than regret. It involves a genuine turning—a decision to stop disobeying God and begin living according to His ways.

When a person repents and is baptized, God forgives that person completely. Past sins are no longer counted against them. They are reconciled to God and regarded as righteous through Christ's sacrifice. But what does that mean for the life that follows?

The remaining dilemma

Once we are cleared, forgiven, regarded as righteous and sinless, does that give us license to continue in sin? Paul asks and answers: "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!" (Romans 6:1-2).

Repentance is not merely a one-time confession of sin or a momentary emotional reaction. Again, it's about a change of life—turning around, ceasing to disobey God and surrendering your life to Him in ongoing obedience.

Also understand that Jesus did not die so we could continue to live as we were. Rather, our old self is to die with Him, as baptism pictures (as Romans 6 further explains). We are to be in a sense "crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20)—putting to death our wrong fleshly wants and actions (Colossians 3:1-10; Romans 8:13).

Beyond that, we are to be figuratively raised with Him to walk in newness of life, no longer slaves of sin but effectively slaves of righteousness in a positive way (again, Romans 6). For we are bought with a price through Christ's death (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Repentance means more than regret. It involves a genuine turning— a decision to stop disobeying God and begin living according to His ways.

But God does not compel and control us. He still gives us free will.

That fact leaves us still facing a problem, as our old nature is not yet eradicated from our fleshly minds and lives. And the

carnal, unconverted mind is hostile to the law of God and not subject to it (Romans 8:7). Christians still sin (1 John 1:8, 10).

If that is true, how can the change of life God requires actually take place?

Power to overcome through the Holy Spirit

Thankfully, God's work does not end with forgiveness. If Christ died because of our violations of God's law, it would make little sense for God to forgive us only so we could continue living in disobedience. God's purpose is not merely to declare people righteous in theory. His purpose is to transform them so they *actually become* righteous.

Paul explains that believers are "reconciled to God through the death of His Son," but "saved by His life" (Romans 5:10). Christ not only died for humanity, He lives again—to intercede for us, live in us and lead us to ultimate salvation.

Before His death, Jesus promised that He and the Father would send the Holy Spirit to His followers (John 15:26; 14:26). Through this Spirit, both the Father and Christ dwell within believers (verse 23).

The Holy Spirit is the power, mind and life of God working in human lives. (Be sure to request or download our free study guide *The Power of the Holy Spirit* to learn more.)

Through the Spirit, believers receive the ability to truly change. Paul wrote that "the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:5). And the apostle John explains what that love produces: "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John 5:3). The Holy Spirit thus empowers us to obey God—to live according to His commandments.

Interestingly, God gave His commandments to ancient Israel around the time of the late spring festival later called Pentecost. Centuries later, it was on that same festival that God first poured out the Holy Spirit on a large scale, beginning the New Testament Church. (For more on this annual observance, read "The Amazing Lesson of God's Feast of First-fruits" beginning on page 13.)

The ancient Israelites did not have a heart to continue in God's laws and understand His ways (Deuteronomy 5:29; 29:4). But the needed "spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7) is now given to the spiritual people of God.

Yet transformation does not happen overnight.

Even the apostle Paul described his ongoing struggle with

(Continued on page 21)



Modern Society's MORAL CRISIS

Society has largely abandoned God's code of moral conduct as set forth in the Bible. Instead, people decide for themselves what is appropriate behavior. All must come to see the devastating consequences of rejecting biblical morality—and the need to turn around.

by Becky Sweat

We may live in a time of deep political polarization, but one thing many people agree on is that modern society is in a moral free fall. They believe people are less trustworthy, honest, civil and ethical than they used to be. Daily news presents seemingly endless reports of murders, mass shootings, school violence, looting, rioting, sex scandals, child exploitation, political corruption and business fraud, to name just some of society's ills, indicating epidemic levels of immorality.

All is not hopeless, but we need to recognize that something is terribly wrong before we can see the need and means for it to be set right—in the world at large and in our own lives.

The world led astray into rejecting God

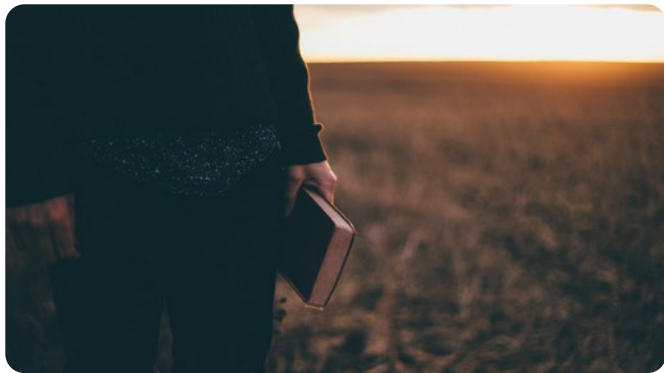
So, what exactly is causing this moral meltdown? It stems from the rejection of God and His code of moral conduct as set forth in the Bible—sinking into sin, the transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4). And this is rooted in choices mankind made

long ago and continues to make under the malevolent influence of the unseen ruler of the world, Satan the devil (see "The Depths of Sin—and the Lifeline Out" beginning on page 6).

God is the one Source of absolute ethical truth (see Psalms 93:5; 111:7; John 14:6; 17:17), and His laws are perfect (see Psalm 19:7). A number of modern nations at one time looked to biblical laws and principles as the foundational ethical code to help them shape their own legal systems.

But today, people in these nations who truly look to the Bible are becoming the minority. The Bible has largely been pushed out of governments, schools and public life. Many deny God exists and completely dismiss His written Word.

Once people stop believing in God, they no longer feel accountable to Him and feel free to start deciding for themselves what *is* and *isn't* appropriate behavior. Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins epitomized this thinking a few years back when he spearheaded an atheist advertising campaign in England with the slogan: "There's probably no God.



It's important to assess what's happening in our culture, so those striving to live a Christ-like life don't get caught up in wrong ways of thinking.

Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.”

Of course, even those who still profess belief in God might come to the faulty conclusion that they don't need to adhere to biblical commands. The deceitful human heart—again, under the influence of Satan (see Jeremiah 17:9, Matthew 15:19, Revelation 12:9)—has individuals and entire nations abandoning biblical instruction on a major scale, perhaps to a degree the world hasn't experienced since the days before the Flood of Noah's time (see Genesis 6:5).

It's important to assess what's happening in our culture, so we don't get caught up in wrong ways of thinking. Here are six tendencies you may be witnessing in the world around you that lead to terrible outcomes. These may pose real challenges for those striving to live a Christ-like life, but all need to be resisted—and they can be with God's help.

1. The rise of self-idolatry

When people start abandoning the Bible, often one of the first of God's mandates to be ditched is the First Commandment: “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3). Instead, *self-idolatry* becomes predominant.

Self-idolatry refers to an excessive admiration or devotion to oneself, or prioritizing one's personal perspectives or desires above considering what God wants or values. He equates stubborn self-will with idolatry (1 Samuel 15:23). And Scripture directly labels covetous people as idolaters (Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5). They will often obsessively seek attention, money, possessions, prestige, positions of influence or control, etc.—to boost their sense of self-importance or preeminence or to make themselves happy. They tend to be “wise in their own eyes” (see Proverbs 3:7) and think they don't need guidance from God or anyone else, and may be way too confident about what they can achieve all by themselves.

The signs of self-idolatry are everywhere. On social networking sites, people self-promote unashamedly and have heated debates to exalt their own opinions. Hashtags like *self-love* and *loveyourself* have become extremely common. Tropes like “Put yourself first” and “Believe in yourself” are echoed all over the media. In terms of lifestyles, self-idolaters often focus their time and energy on attaining wealth and material possessions to satisfy personal wants, while neglecting their relationships with God and other people.

Contrast all this with the healthy view Scripture teaches—

that we not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to (Romans 12:3). We need to keep this biblical perspective in our own lives. While it's okay to have a certain amount of self-confidence, our ultimate confidence should be in God who sustains us (Proverbs 3:5-6). It's also okay to fulfill personal desires, but Matthew 22:37-39 says doing so should be in the proper placement—after loving God and other people.

When self-idolatry rules, it diverts our attention and allegiance away from our Creator, and we stop thinking about what's good for the people around us (in the workplace, at church, in the community, etc.). Healthy relationships become impossible to achieve. A society can't succeed when its citizenry is self-serving. But in following what the Bible says, we will experience blessings.

2. The normalization of deception

Another biblical directive that has been trampled on is Leviticus 19:11: “You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another.” This verse emphasizes the importance of honesty and integrity in our relationships and business dealings.

The Bible instructs us to follow through on commitments, be respectful of other people's property, and not intentionally take advantage of others or mislead people (through deceit, half-truths, exaggeration, etc.). We won't have good relationships if others can't rely on us to deal fairly with them (and vice versa, if we can't trust others). Truthfulness and integrity build community, whereas deception destroys it.

Additional verses that underscore the importance of honesty include these: “Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal truthfully are His delight” (Proverbs 12:22); “Speak each man the truth to his neighbor” (Zechariah 8:16); “Do not lie to one another” (Colossians 3:9); “You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him” (Leviticus 19:13); and “Dishonest scales are an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is His delight” (Proverbs 11:1). Learn more about these principles in our resource offered at the end of the article.

Sadly, society is again doing the opposite of what God commands. People lie on their tax returns and on job applications, cheat on examinations, and pilfer from their employers or call in sick when they aren't— and think nothing of it. Scam artists trick the public as a routine way of doing business. Politicians and their proxies look people in the eyes and speak words they know aren't true. Numerous surveys report that many Westerners believe there are situations where it's

acceptable to lie. All of these infractions relate to point 1—when fulfilling our personal desires is our top priority, the human mind can reason that it’s okay to cheat or deceive if that’s what it takes to get what we want.

Instead, we all need to strive to be trustworthy. (See also “Grow in Faithfulness—to Be Like God” beginning on page 22.)

3. The decline of civility

In every corner of modern life, we’re seeing less civility, the quality of being polite, respectful and courteous. Instead, rudeness, bullying, road rage and coarse insults are rampant in our age. We see lack of self-control everywhere—especially in public debate or in anonymous comments on the Internet. So many these days feel they have the right to publicly bash those they clash with.

On the surface, this may seem innocuous. But even relatively minor infractions matter. Bad-mannered attitudes can intensify and brew if we allow them to, and turn into the more disruptive episodes we hear about in the news—when people become violent at airports, malls, schools, office buildings,

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etc., because they’re angry about something. Civility is essential to stable, strong and harmonious communities.

Historians point out that incivility has played a role in the decline of nearly every great civilization. In his classic work *Reflections on the Rise and Fall of the Ancient Republics*, 18th-century author Edward Wortley Montagu observed that with the plummeting of civic virtues in the Greek and Roman empires came a “degeneracy of manners, which reduced those once brave and free people into the most abject slavery” (1759).

When civility breaks down, civilization begins to fracture.

Most importantly, incivility is in stark contrast with biblical morality, where our focus must be. Scripture instructs us to “lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” (1 Timothy 2:2), to “show proper respect to everyone” (1 Peter 2:17, NIV), and “to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men” (Titus 3:2). When we show concern and respect to others, our relationships improve and society functions better.

4. The disregard for the sanctity of life

While homicide rates have dropped some in recent years through much of the West, the sanctity of human life remains woefully undervalued. The Sixth Commandment explicitly states, “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13). Proverbs 6:16–17 warns us that shedding innocent blood is an abomination

to God. So many do not seem to hear this message, or care.

Globally, there are about six deaths from homicide per 100,000 inhabitants each year, according to United Nations statistics.

On top of that are all the innocent lives lost to abortion. The World Health Organization reports that around 73 million babies are aborted worldwide every year—or about 200,000 a day. This reflects a profound disdain for the sanctity of life that God wants us to cherish. God expects us to honor and protect the human life He created.

“To terminate a pregnancy is not only to commit an act of violence but also to assume responsibility for destroying a work of God,” writes Richard Hays in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*. “We are God’s creatures. We neither create ourselves nor belong to ourselves . . . [Abortion] presumptuously assumes authority to dispose of life that does not belong to us” (1996, p. 450). He stresses that human life is a gift from God and that abortion or any form of murder is clearly an affront to God and obviously not good for society.



It’s important to see the wrong in all this and to “sigh and cry over all the abominations” done within society (compare Ezekiel 9:4). And we should speak out against the wrongs as we have opportunity (see Isaiah 58:1).

5. The redefining of marriage, family and gender

The family has often been called the “building block of society.” That’s exactly what God intended it to be. Genesis 2:24 describes a “one flesh” union between a man and a woman. It is within this context that children are to be welcomed and brought up to be moral and upright (Malachi 2:15).

In *Invitation to Christian Ethics*, Ken Magnuson explains that “marriage provides for the right ordering of sex, and prevents the breakdown of relationships and order caused by promiscuity” (2020, p. 188). He stresses that the family is the primary means by which moral truths are transmitted from one generation to the next. Families that function according to biblical principles create stable homes, in turn fostering stable societies. Conversely, when families break down, the ripple effects are felt throughout society in the form of increased crime, poverty and moral decay.

Once again, people are sadly lost, having been misled into

turning from God's instructions. Many people no longer believe marriage has to be between a man and a woman. Neither do most people think a marital commitment is necessary for couples to live together. Those who do marry are having fewer children or none at all. Divorce rates remain high. The number of single-parent households (usually headed by mothers) has doubled since the 1960s, and 40 percent of children live apart from their natural fathers.

Amid the confusion, our culture has even redefined gender. Rather than just the two genders, male and female, as we're told in Genesis 1:27, we're expected to accept a whole spectrum of genders and "fluid" shifting between them. Sadly, parents are actually praised for not "imposing" gender or sexual preferences on their kids.

The danger is, when we don't follow our Creator's blueprint for us and try to somehow change our genders, we are, as Andrew Walker writes in *God and the Transgender Debate*, "both rebelling against the natural order of how things objectively are, and we are rejecting the life that is going to be the highest good for us" (2017, pp. 54-55). God ultimately desires the best for us, so it's vital that we conform to His design and laws. Those who have veered need to turn to Him for mercy and help to live on the right path.

6. The acceptance of sexual immorality

Related to the last section is the whole topic of sexual intimacy. The Bible teaches that sex is to be practiced only within the bond of marriage, between one man and one woman (Ephesians 5:31). Sexual activity outside of a husband-and-wife marital union or between people of the same gender is prohibited (Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 18:20, 22; 20:13). God created sexual intimacy for human reproduction as well as to be a shared pleasurable experience to bond husbands and wives more closely. Lamentably, society has steered away from these divinely ordained purposes for sex.

For many decades, there has been little or no shame attached to premarital or extramarital sexual relations, which was formerly more of a deterrent. "Casual" sex without long-term commitment has become increasingly accepted. This creates new problems, as sex outside of marriage can lead to unplanned pregnancies, which very often result in abortions.

Another development is that more people are becoming involved in same-sex sexual encounters. A 2025 Gallup poll reports that the number of Americans who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or as other than heterosexual has doubled in the last five years. In big part, this is certainly due to the entertainment industry promoting "alternative" lifestyles in its programming.

Pornography is also widespread, estimated to be a \$100-billion-dollar global industry. Studies report that two-thirds of American men view pornography at least once monthly, often on the Internet, which has made it very accessible.

The ramifications are very troubling. When people steer

away from God's design for sexual intimacy, they're almost always focusing on fulfilling their own selfish desires—in line with point 1. And in doing so, they devalue or hurt other people, leading to relationship breakups and leaving children without stable homes or good role models. Ultimately, the family unit weakens, which, as was noted in point 5, is the basic building block of a stable and strong society.

Yet so many avoid any thought that all of this is destructive—because they are trapped in a wrong way of thinking. For those of us stuck in wrong ways, we need to pray to God for the help to be free. And those of us mourning for the waywardness of the world should be praying to God for the day when things will be set right—and even now offering help and encouragement as we are able.

A warning and our one true hope

As long as today's nations continue to walk contrary to God's moral laws, social ills will only intensify. No civilization can survive long-term when its citizens do not live by absolute moral standards and instead do whatever feels right in their own eyes. Scripture says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

The apostle Paul warns us that the last days will be "perilous times" (2 Timothy 3:1), because people will have become "lovers of themselves" and "despisers of good" (verses 2-3). Another way of putting that might be to say human beings will have become so full of themselves that they don't think they need God. That sure sounds like contemporary culture.

But you don't have to go with the flow of the surrounding crowd. God reveals a different way to withstand the prevailing culture and live as He desires—the way that is best for you and everyone. Be sure to read the accompanying lead article "The Depths of Sin—and the Lifeline Out" beginning on page 6. Amid the darkness of this age, take a stand for God, and He will give you the help you need.

Moreover, beyond today's troubled world, there is good news on the horizon. The Bible tells us that at some point Jesus Christ will return to earth to establish the Kingdom of God. God's perfect moral laws, which help us understand right and wrong and show us how to live in harmony with other people, will become the prescribed code of conduct for the entire world. At last, people will experience freedom from the destructive ways of sin and the true joy and benefits of living God's way of life!

That is mankind's one true hope, and the only way societal immorality will ever end. God speed that day! Begin living in the surety of that hope today—with the help God wants to give you. **BT**

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God gave laws that would bring true blessings of freedom and harmony if obeyed. To learn more about this broad moral code, request or download a copy of our free study guide *The Ten Commandments*. Scan the code or visit ucg.org/mj26 to find it.



The Amazing Lesson of *God's Feast of Firstfruits*

If Jesus Christ came to save mankind, why is the world in such sad shape?
The answer is found in a little-understood festival God revealed in the Bible.

by Bill Bradford

Has Jesus Christ really succeeded in His mission? Consider that He said He “did not come to judge the world but to save the world”—and that He also said, “God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 12:47; 3:17).

Yet we live in a world in which hundreds die every day from violence, starvation, disease and natural disasters, in which injustice, immorality and every godless act abound, in which thousands die daily without having ever heard the name of Jesus Christ or even seen a Bible. So can we truly say that Christ’s mission was successful? Has the world been saved?

These questions have always posed an enigma to those willing to face the facts. If the Christian Church had as its mission to take the message of Christ to the world so the world could be saved, why is the world in such religious disarray? Further, if the gospel Christ brought holds the answers to man’s problems, why is the world in such terrible shape?

Did Jesus fail to gain the cooperation of His own Church in carrying out this mission? Is He not able to inspire faith among His followers to do greater works than He, as He promised? (See John 14:12.) Or are the opposing forces simply too powerful for faithless mankind?

The answer is *none of the above*.

However, there *are* answers to these questions—and they are illustrated in a biblical festival called the Day of the Firstfruits (Numbers 28:26) and the Feast of Harvest of the Firstfruits (Exodus 23:16), shortened to the Feast of Firstfruits. This observance, along with the rest of God’s annual Holy Days, is commanded by God in Leviticus 23 (see verses 15-21).

In describing these sacred observances, God said, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are *My* feasts’” (verse 2, emphasis added throughout).

Later, we find that the Church Jesus founded continued to celebrate this particular festival, known by Jesus’ followers as the Feast of Pentecost. In fact, the New Testament Church began on this very day, accompanied by miraculous events (Acts 2:1-41). The festival has great relevance and importance for Christians today.

God had a reason for Israel to remember and celebrate His festivals and for His Church to do the same. Through these observances, God reveals the stages of His plan of salvation for humanity. In particular, this feast that celebrated the firstfruits of the wheat harvest in ancient Israel (Exodus 34:22) has a meaning that reveals one of the major phases of God’s plan for salvation.

Common but erroneous assumptions

Most churches assume that God intended for everyone alive to hear the message of salvation, starting immediately after Jesus Christ's resurrection. Most also believe that every person hearing that message would then have the opportunity for salvation now, in this life. The mission of Christ's followers was thus understood to involve bringing this message to every living person, giving all the opportunity to accept Christ before it was too late.

Thus, many churches believe they must bring as many people as possible to accept Christ as Savior immediately, regardless of the depth of their interest or commitment.

But how many people have never accepted Christ—or never *truly* accepted Him? And how many millions over the centuries *have never even heard of Him*?

If salvation is only a matter of accepting Christ during this physical lifetime, what is the fate of the countless people who lived and died before He was born and for whom it was impossible to accept Him as Savior?

Faced with these questions, must we conclude that the power Jesus promised His disciples simply never translated into the saving work He envisioned? No—we should not doubt the saving power of Jesus Christ. Instead, perhaps we should *examine our understanding of the plan*. Perhaps God has had something else in mind all along.

How this feast fits in God's plan

What does the Feast of Firstfruits have to do with these all-important questions?

God's bringing of people into His spiritual family is described metaphorically in Scripture as a harvest (Matthew 9:37-38; John 4:35).

There is great significance in the name *Feast of Harvest of the Firstfruits*. It indicates some harvesting would come *first*, before a *later* period of harvesting. As we will see, this festival foreshadows God's intention to reap first a small harvest of people for salvation (called "firstfruits" in the Scriptures), and to later call a vastly greater number of people to salvation.

Let's notice this amazing truth as demonstrated by the divinely revealed festivals of God. God timed His feasts to coincide with the agricultural cycle of the two major harvest periods in the Holy Land—one in spring and the other at the end of summer—to teach His people an important lesson.

The Feast of Firstfruits coincided with the spring wheat harvest in that area (Exodus 34:22). The Greek name for this feast is *Pentecost*, meaning "fiftieth," in this case implying "fiftieth *day*," so named because it was celebrated 50 days from the offering of the first sheaf of barley each year, called the wave sheaf or omer. This period of seven weeks gives the festival yet another name—the Feast of Weeks (Deuteronomy 16:9-10).

On the 50th day, the Israelites offered two loaves of bread made from flour taken from the new grain of the harvest. These loaves were called "the firstfruits to the LORD" (Leviticus

23:16-17). The people were to "do no customary work" on this day and to gather for a sacred religious assembly (Leviticus 23:21). This was a very significant occasion.

A festival that came later in the year, the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles or Ingathering (Exodus 34:22) followed by a special Eighth Day (Leviticus 23:36, 39), coincided with the conclusion of the later harvest when other types of produce, including cucumbers, melons, lentils, chickpeas, nuts and especially dates, figs, olives and grapes had all been gathered in. This, too, was an event of great significance marked by sacred religious assemblies and cessation from work.

These two feast periods both represent major stages in the spiritual harvest of mankind for salvation. The Feast of Firstfruits symbolizes the calling and preparing of the Church in this age. This is the early phase of the spiritual harvest.

The firstfruits of God's plan for salvation are those called to be in God's Church in this age. The Church, also spoken of as "the body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:27), is made up of individuals in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. Also known as saints, those sanctified or set apart, they have repented of their sins and turned to Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. They have committed themselves to obedience to His holy and righteous laws. They are willing to give up everything to remain faithful to Him (Luke 14:33).

Through the Holy Spirit, which God gives to those who are part of His Church, members are empowered to overcome the world. It is through God's Holy Spirit that the Church can preach the gospel to the world and make disciples of all nations (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19-20). It is this Spirit that enables a person to belong to Jesus Christ and be part of the Church (Romans 8:9). For the New Testament Church to exist, it was necessary for God to send His Holy Spirit.

Order to salvation shown in the physical harvest periods

So, then, what about those who are not being called now? That is where the meaning of the later part of the spiritual harvest comes into play. It will take place in the age to come and is the point where those who are not a part of the firstfruits will have an opportunity to know and accept Jesus Christ. God's initial harvest of people occurs in preparation for that coming





age when Jesus Christ will bring His Kingdom to the earth.

The spiritual significance of the first harvest period, celebrated by the Feast of Firstfruits, is made clear in the Scriptures. The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23: “Now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the *firstfruits* of those who have fallen asleep . . . For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: *Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming.*”

The previously mentioned wave sheaf offering of barley 50 days prior to Pentecost pictured Jesus Christ being presented to His Father after His resurrection as the first of the firstfruits. The later offering

of the firstfruits of the wheat harvest on Pentecost (Leviticus 23:17) was then symbolic of the other firstfruits that would follow in God’s harvest of humankind for salvation. And these would be followed later by still other people.

Did you notice that Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 clearly states that God will resurrect the dead *in a specific order*? First was Jesus Christ, who was resurrected as “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep,” to be followed by others at His return.

Paul states that the resurrection of Christ’s followers at His coming, when they will receive immortal, spirit bodies (verses 44, 53), will take place “at the last trumpet” (verse 52)—the mighty, supernatural call that will announce the return of Jesus Christ to rule the earth (see also Revelation 11:15; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

This miraculous event is described as “the *first* resurrection” in Revelation 20:6: “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”

Under Christ’s rule, the opportunity for salvation will expand to all

During this reign of Jesus Christ and the resurrected saints on earth (Revelation 5:10), the later harvesting of humanity for salvation will begin. God’s knowledge will at last be widely available: “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14). All people will experience firsthand the wonderful Kingdom of God, which Jesus Christ proclaimed during His earthly

ministry (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:14; Luke 4:43).

Beginning with Israel and spreading out to all humanity, everyone will then have the opportunity to learn and live according to God’s ways: “No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:34; see also Isaiah 2:2-3).

But what about those who have lived and died in the past, having never known anything of God the Father and Jesus Christ? Revelation 20:6, quoted above, shows that God’s faithful saints are in “the first resurrection.” But, if there is a *first* resurrection, there must be another!

And indeed there is. The book of Revelation makes it clear that there will be *another* resurrection of the dead after the 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ and His resurrected followers from this age: “the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished” (Revelation 20:5).

This will continue God’s great second harvest of humanity for salvation. At that time, all who have ever lived but did not have the opportunity to learn of God’s ways or hear of Jesus Christ’s atoning sacrifice will receive their opportunity for salvation.

This resurrection of countless millions of people to a physical, perishable life is described in multiple passages (see Ezekiel 37:1-11; Matthew 12:41-42; Revelation 20:5, 13). These people will then be given the opportunity—for the first time—to repent and be converted through God’s Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 3:19). Then they, too, will inherit eternal life.

We see in this wonderful plan the fulfillment of God’s desire for “all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).

God is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9), and through His plan all who have never had the real opportunity for salvation in this age can at last be saved!

We now live in the age of the firstfruits, the time during which God is preparing a special, chosen people to reign and teach with Christ in His Kingdom (1 Peter 2:9). In preparation, those who are God’s firstfruits today should be observing the very day that pictures the calling and harvest of the firstfruits of God’s plan and the granting of His Holy Spirit to empower them, the Day of Pentecost.

Are you part of that group? If God is opening your mind to His truth and drawing you to greater understanding and a relationship with Him, it is vital that you respond to His calling! **BT**

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More and more people are discovering that the biblical Holy Days, far from being obsolete or just for the Jews, are God’s teaching tools for revealing His plan for the salvation of humanity! For help in learning what they’re all about, request or download our free study guide *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. **Scan the code or visit ucg.org/mj26 to find it.**



The Strait of Hormuz and the growing U.S.-European rift

When the United States and Israel began striking Iranian targets in the recent conflict, Iran's forces were able to impede sea traffic through the narrow Strait of Hormuz between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. Nearly a quarter of the world's oil passes through this critical sea gate. Asia and Europe are heavily dependent on free passage of oil, natural gas and other commodities like fertilizers through the chokepoint.

While America is not as dependent on oil from the Middle East, it is connected to the world's economy and prioritizes global economic stability. As of this issue going to press in early April, the strait was still not secured for world trade, and large numbers of ships remained trapped. Hopefully the situation has since resolved.

Though needing the strait open, other countries did not initially step in to help secure it. A *Newsweek* article March 16 was titled "Countries Reject Trump's Strait Demand, Saying 'We Did Not Start War.'" Some countries—such as India and Japan—did send some ships to protect the strait. But few, if any, NATO countries did. By early April, a group of over 40 countries launched a coalition to secure free passage through the strait—but after cessation of military strikes, thus bypassing the U.S. request for immediate action.

U.S.-European relations were already eroding and



will likely continue to. An earlier Agence France-Presse article, prior to the recent strikes on Iran, was titled "Europe needs to lose 'nostalgia' for US: [says] Germany's Merz" (Feb. 2, 2026). It reported that German Chancellor Friedrich Merz "called on Europe to become more independent of its traditional ally and argued that old certainties no longer held. 'We must become more sovereign and independent, especially in terms of technology,' Merz said. 'And yes, this also applies to the United States of America.'"

The NATO alliance may be on its last legs, though it could last a good while longer. If it does crumble, who would fill the power vacuum in Europe? While France and Germany have been striving to take the

lead in Europe, Germany under Merz has been the more vocal. Yet French President Emmanuel Macron is, meanwhile, pressing for a "coalition of independence" among middle-power countries to stand up to both the United States and China, working to avoid being "vassals of two hegemonic powers" ("Macron Says Nations Should Stand Up to U.S. and China as Trump Feud Grows," *Forbes*, April 3, 2026).

Eventually, the United States will decline as a global power, and a powerful Europe will emerge to oppose it and ultimately bring destruction, as many prophecies show (see our free study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* and the accompanying article "A European superpower with a single leader?").

For now, though, the United States remains far more powerful, spending as much on its military capability as the next 15 largest military-spending countries combined. And trade will again be flowing. Revelation 18 shows the world economy prospering from an unprecedented period of growth, with commodities traded across the nations, creating a period of great wealth (verses 11-18). Of course, in the end it will all come down—yet at last replaced by a much better world under the reign of Jesus Christ. Keep praying for that future and for the strength to weather the difficult times until it arrives.

A European superpower with a single leader?

Early this year, European leaders held an emergency summit in Belgium. As *The Telegraph* described it: "The building blocks of an empire were beginning to take shape . . . In a brutal new age of world powers, the EU wants to build a richer, stronger 'super Europe' that is able to resist the dangerous whims of the globe's autocrats" ("The Plans to Turn Europe Into a New Superpower," Jan. 26, 2026).

It further noted: "The EU is often compared to the Holy Roman Empire, which Voltaire said was 'neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire.' To avoid the same accusation, it needs to streamline its decision-making, but that means giving up powers to Brussels." This was followed by the question, "Baby steps to a United States of Europe?" One significant change is moving from unanimous consensus to majority vote, weighted by population (ibid.).

Just after, German Finance Minister Lars Klingbeil stated, "Now is the time for a Europe of two speeds," announcing Germany was "calling for a core group of member states to move ahead on key policies to make Europe stronger and more independent." He invited

France, Poland, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands to join ("Germany Pushes for 'Two-Speed' Europe With New Bloc of Six Leading Economies," Reuters, Jan. 27, 2026).

Right after that, the leader of the largest EU political party, the European People's Party, Manfred Weber, said that the current jobs of president of the European Commission and president of the European Council should be merged into one and did not rule himself out for the position ("One All-Powerful President of Europe? Conservative Chief Calls for EU Merger," Politico, Jan. 28).

Mario Draghi, former Italian prime minister and European Central Bank president, spoke of working with willing partner nations to speed up integration, noting, "Power requires Europe to move from confederation to federation . . . Where Europe has federated [such as] on trade, on competition, on the single market, on monetary policy, we are respected as a power and negotiate as one" ("Draghi: Europe Needs to Integrate Faster If It Wants to Matter on World Stage," Politico, Feb. 2, 2026).

A *Financial Times* article pointed out that European



defense is plagued by 30 separate, often incompatible military structures and needs one unified military. NATO is necessary for coordination now, but the goal is Europe functioning independently ("Only an Army—and True Integration—Will Solve Europe's Defence Problem," Feb. 20).

These calls for more integration are heading somewhere. Europe cannot be what it wants to become for a while. Yet at some point, it will happen. The Bible in Daniel 2 and 7 and Revelation 13 and 17 foretells a final revival of the Roman Empire, which will also be a continuation of ancient Babylon. This tyrannical system will rise up to dominate the world, yet it will come to its end at the return of Jesus Christ. To learn more, request or download our free study guide *The Final Superpower*.

Is the Iran war a direct fulfillment of Bible prophecy?

A number of Bible prophecy analysts have been touting the recent U.S. and Israeli bombings throughout Iran as fulfillment of a prophecy against Elam in Jeremiah 49:34-39. But is that so?

The ancient Elamites dwelt in the land that became known as Persia and much later Iran. The prophecy in question speaks of God breaking Elam's bow, representing its power, and bringing winds of destruction against it from the four quarters of heaven (verses 35-36).

It's further noted that "the king and princes" would be destroyed (verse 38)—which could refer to the chief political ruler and other rulers under him. It's true that Iran's leadership was taken out at multiple tiers.

But the prophecy further mentions the Elamites being scattered into other nations, pursued by enemy forces and meeting disaster until they are consumed (verses 36-37). This has not happened to the Iranian people in the recent conflict.

God also states in context of destroying the leaders, "I will set My throne in Elam" (verse 38). While this could maybe just mean that God decides who rules in the nations (see Daniel 5:21), it seems to have a more specific meaning. Verse 39 further states that God would bring back the captives of Elam in the latter days.

Our online Bible commentary on Jeremiah 49:34-39 (found in harmony with the section on Jeremiah 31:27-40) points out that this prophecy is dated in Jeremiah 49:34 to early in the reign of Judah's King Zedekiah, which began in 597 B.C. The Elamites had not long before helped the Babylonians gain victory over Assyria. But once in power, the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar conquered and subjugated the Elamites—in 594-593 B.C., which could fit with what was prophesied.

Yet the Persians came back and overthrew Babylon in 539 B.C. So a more likely fulfillment of the prophecy would be the fall of the Persian Empire to Alexander the Great in 331 B.C., as this was the great destruction of the Elamites in ancient times. And they became scattered over the centuries—a few moving



An explosion in Tehran, Iran on March 2, 2026 when the U.S. and Israel attacked.

to the east but many migrating west.

However, it seems reasonable from the end-time context of the return from captivity in verse 39 that the preceding verses also concern end-time calamity—which would mean this could well be a dual prophecy, referring to both ancient and end-time destruction. Still, the Jeremiah 49 prophecy does not appear to fit overall with what U.S. and Israeli forces have done—to this point. Of course, prophecy more generally does show the unrivaled military power of the Israelite nations in the end time (see our study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* to learn more).

Our commentary further notes that the Lord setting His throne in Elam probably refers mainly to the establishment of the Kingdom of God over all nations at Christ's return. We do know that eastern powers will come against Jerusalem in the end time—just before Christ's return (Revelation 16:14) and soon after (Ezekiel 38-39)—and will meet with destruction. The latter will include Persia (Ezekiel 38:5), and it seems the previous one will as well. (For more on this, see our free study guide *Russia and Bible Prophecy*.)

Some good news in all this is God's promise in Jeremiah 49:39 to bring back the captives of Elam in the last days. Clearly He cares about these people! This promise could apply to survivors who are scattered when Christ returns coming back soon after. But it would ultimately apply to all who fled in the past and even those who died then and up through today being returned to life in a future resurrection to receive their first opportunity for salvation (see "The Amazing Lesson of God's Feast of Firstfruits" beginning on page 13).

Continue to pray for those suffering in the world's conflicts, asking of God, "Your Kingdom come."

Back to the moon after more than half a century

NASA's space mission Artemis II launched on April 1, 2026, its Orion capsule carrying four astronauts in a trip around the moon—going farther into space than any manned craft has ever gone. It had been more than 53 years since Apollo 17, the last mission to the moon in December 1972.

The Artemis astronauts passed behind the moon on April 6, able to look down on lunar features no human being had directly beheld before—being higher above the moon and with a wider field of vision than the Apollo astronauts had and with more revealing lighting angles from the sun. As this issue of *Beyond Today* was going to press on April 7, the astronauts were on course to return to the earth on April 10, this written with the assumption that all was successful.

This voyage, intended as a step to further missions, is helping to map out future landings on the moon. It's a very big thing in terms of human achievement and aspiration. Traveling back to the moon with the goal of harvesting energy from the lunar surface (some say the moon will become a "gas station") to power further flight to Mars sets out a path of exploration to inspire a generation in need of aspirational goals.



The Artemis II crew: Victor Glover, Jeremy Hansen, Christina Koch, and Reid Wiseman.

Harrison Schmitt, who walked on the moon as part of Apollo 17, is now 90. Asked about future plans before the recent launch, he was quite hopeful. "Mars is attainable," he said. "We're humans. That's what we've always done."

This is a time to think about the One who gave human beings such extraordinary abilities. And it can also be a moment to dream and think big. We have enough problems here among ourselves to discourage even the strongest among us, but people can still do great things. Considering a story like this, we can say: We're going back to the moon—let's hope for big positive steps ahead.

Of course, as big as it is, this is just a small step into our future inheritance touched on in Deuteronomy 4:19—"the sun, the moon, and the stars . . . which the LORD your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage." To learn more, request or download our free study guide *Why Were You Born?*



The Iran War

A Background of Decades and Centuries

Many in the world are dangerously unaware of the crucial background behind the recent war in Iran and the religious beliefs driving its nuclear program.

There's a great need for perspective.

by Scott Ashley

I've followed news of the recent Iran war particularly closely, not least in part because I was scheduled to fly to Israel as part of a *Beyond Today* television crew to film some long-planned programs. Due to the outbreak of the war, all our flights were cancelled. It would've been my seventh trip to this region.

I was in Jerusalem in October 2023 when thousands of Hamas terrorists invaded, killing some 1,200 civilians and soldiers and taking more than 250 hostages into Gaza. The group I was part of evacuated to neighboring Jordan, flying home from Amman several days later.

On a previous trip to Israel in 2005, the night before *Beyond Today* writer Darris McNeely and I were scheduled to fly out of Amman, three hotels near ours were struck by suicide bombings that killed and maimed hundreds of people.

As the saying goes, the Middle East is a dangerous neighborhood. We know that Bible prophecy foretells a time of unparalleled global turmoil in which weapons of mass destruction and religious deception play major roles (Matthew 24:4-7, 21-22). The Middle East is also at the center of many end-time prophecies.

What is it about this part of the world that brings so much bloodshed, destruction and chaos—including in Iran? What has drawn American and Israeli intervention? Have they faced serious threat here? And where should our focus be as we see great conflicts arise with potential for terrible destruction?

A 47-year war

The Iran war did not start with the latest hostilities. The current phase of this war started *47 years ago* with the

overthrow of the Iranian Shah and the takeover of the U.S. embassy in Tehran. In that event, 52 U.S. embassy employees were taken hostage and held for 444 days in one of the most embarrassing and humiliating episodes in American history.

But that wasn't all. Four years later the U.S. embassy in Beirut, Lebanon, was bombed, killing 63 and injuring many more. Later that year a U.S. Marines barracks in Beirut was blown up by a massive car bomb, killing 241 American military personnel and injuring roughly 150 others. In 1996, another bombing in Saudi Arabia killed 19 U.S. airmen and wounded more than 400.

During the Iraq war, Iranian-supplied bombs and Iranian-supported militants killed more than 600 U.S. soldiers and injured countless others. Since then, other sporadic attacks have taken place on U.S. forces at bases throughout the Middle East. *All of these attacks were carried out by individuals and groups that were supported, financed and armed by the Iranian government.* And in March of this year a Pakistani man, trained and supported by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, was convicted of plotting to assassinate U.S. President Donald Trump.

These are just some of the many attacks against the United States that were organized, funded and armed by Iran's government. Together, they have taken the lives of hundreds of Americans over the last 47 years, with many more maimed and injured.

Iran has clearly been at war with the United States for almost half a century. It's just that America hadn't decided to fight back until last year with targeted attacks on Iran's nuclear weapons facilities and more recently all-out attacks

on Iran's ballistic missile program and its attempt to rebuild its nuclear program.

The last straw

The last straw apparently took place just before the war started when Iranian "peace talk" negotiators announced that they had enriched enough uranium to 60 percent purity to create *10 to 12 nuclear bombs*. This 60 percent enrichment may not sound like much, but further enrichment to make a nuclear weapon *takes about one week*. So Iran presented itself as extremely close to being able to produce live nuclear warheads, which could strike any nearby national capitals or military bases.

This amounted to an admission that Iranian officials had deliberately fooled Western nations for years by lying while they secretly continued their pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Claims that their nuclear material production was for the peaceful generation of civilian power are belied by the fact that commercial nuclear power uses

uranium enriched to only 3 to 20 percent. Iran's claimed 60 percent enrichment of half a ton is useful *only for nuclear weapons* and totally unusable for peaceful power generation.

The seriousness of this development, along with other intelligence about Iranian missile stockpiling, made the situation utterly untenable.

Iran's war on Israel

What about Israel? Why did Israel join in joint attacks with the U.S. military? Again, some historical perspective is helpful.

More than 30 years ago, in 1992, an explosion at the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina, killed nearly 30 people and injured 240. Two years later a Jewish community center was bombed, also in Buenos Aires, and 85 were killed and more than 300 injured. These attacks were traced back to Iran.

Iran has also funded and supported and armed various Middle Eastern terror groups whose hostility is directed toward Israel. One of the largest is Hezbollah, which arguably dominates Lebanon. In 2006, a war started in response to repeated Hezbollah terror attacks. During those hostilities, 163 Israelis were killed and more than 2,500 were wounded and maimed.

Iran also provided support for the war that broke out 2½ years ago when thousands of Hamas terrorists attacked southern Israel. During that initial attack, approximately 1,200 Israeli civilians and soldiers were killed and 251 were taken hostage. As a percentage of population, that would be the equivalent of an attack in the United States killing some *40,000* Americans.

In the years since then, Iran has launched repeated drone

and missile strikes on Israel, in addition to the missiles launched from Hezbollah and Hamas. And Israel is of course determined to keep the Iranians from acquiring weapons of mass destruction, as we'll note more about shortly.

Why Iran's leaders have sought to destroy Western powers

Now we'll look at *why* Iran has pursued international conflict for 47 years. And to be clear, we're discussing *the Iranian government*, not the Iranian people. Iranians I've personally met have been very friendly and industrious. It's the *theocratic government* that is the problem. To understand what we've

covered so far, we need to grasp what drives the regime.

This goes back to the last Shah or monarch of Iran, who ruled from 1941 to 1979. The Shah was quite Western-oriented and a close ally of the United States. Iran was a major producer of oil, which it sold to Western nations. But that all changed in 1979 with the Islamic revolution that over-

threw the Shah and took over Iran. It was led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, an extreme Islamic hard-liner. Once the Shah fled and the direction of the revolution became obvious, thousands upon thousands of Iranians fled the country to Western nations.

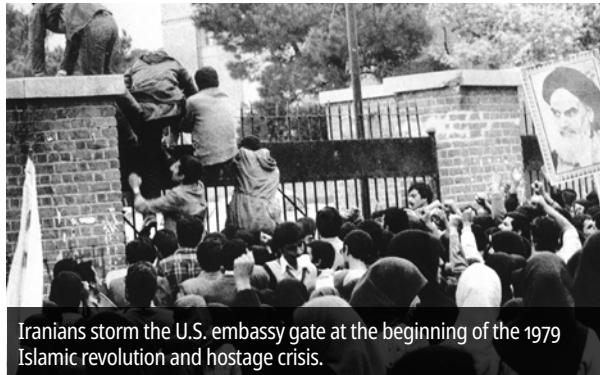
What were Ayatollah Khomeini's beliefs? The teaching of Islam, going back all the way to Muhammad in the seventh century, is that it is the *supreme* and *only* true religion, that it will ultimately conquer all other religions, and that eventually the entire world will come under Islamic rule. The Quran, essentially the Bible of Islam, says this (Dawood translation):

"Fight against them until idolatry [disbelief or worship of any God other than Allah, which includes Christianity] is no more and Allah's religion [Islam] reigns supreme" (Sura 2:193).

"It is He [Allah] who has sent for His apostle [Muhammad] with guidance and the true faith, so that he may exalt it above all religions, much as the idolaters [those who worship other gods, including Christians] may dislike it" (Sura 61:9).

Understand that "idolaters" in the Quran are those who practice any religion other than Islam—be they Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, or anyone else holding different beliefs.

Again, I want to make a distinction between the religion of Islam and individual Muslims. I've encountered many Muslims in travels to Israel, Turkey, Jordan and Egypt. And most have been very friendly and hospitable. However, their holy book is clear in what it says. So the religious theocracy in Iran and those who support Hezbollah, Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood and other terror groups are following what they read in their holy book.



Iranians storm the U.S. embassy gate at the beginning of the 1979 Islamic revolution and hostage crisis.

Khamenei's Proclamations Against America, Britain and Israel

Ali Khamenei was Iran's supreme ruler for 37 years until his recent death by U.S.-Israeli military action. Among his many declarations against America, along with Britain, were these:

- March 2006: "Today, America is a threat to global peace and security. Therefore, today, 'Death to America' is not just a slogan . . ."

- June 2009: "They [Western nations] are showing their true enmity towards the Iranian Islamic state and the most evil of them is the British government" (prompting chants of "Death to the English").

- Sept. 2017: "The regime of the United States is indeed the most vicious Satan."

- Aug. 2025, just last year: [The Iranian Islamic revolution] "empowered everyone to courageously chant 'Death to America' and 'Death to Israel.'"

This was proclaimed to their own people in Farsi and Arabic while in English they maintained, "We want peace; we want to negotiate."



Note also what Khamenei was saying about Israel all this time:

- July 2016: "Nothing called the 'Zionist regime' will exist by 25 years from now."

- June 2018: "There is no cure for the conflict in Palestine except the annihilation of the Zionist regime."

- Oct. 2023, just before the Hamas terror attack that killed some 1,200 Israelis: "This cancer [Israel] will definitely be eradicated, [Allah] willing, at the hands of the Palestinian people and the resistance forces throughout the region."

- March 2025, just last year: "It's everyone's religious, human duty to strive to eliminate the Zionist criminal gang [meaning Israel] from the region."

These quotes are not repeated in our agenda-driven Western media. But this is what Iran's top leadership was consistently telling its people and the terror groups it supported over many years—that the United States, Israel, Britain and other obstacles needed to be eradicated.

Another major feature of Islamic theology is that the world is divided into two spheres—*dar al-Islam*, meaning "the abode of Islam," and *dar al-harb*, meaning "the abode of war," signifying the need to fight against all non-Muslim lands to eventually absorb them into the abode of Islam, as noted in the verse from the Quran quoted earlier. Initial offers of "peaceful" conversion to Islam would, upon rejection, be followed by force.

This is a primary reason why there is so much longstanding hostility in the Muslim world toward Israel—because it's completely unacceptable for land that was once *dar al-Islam*, part of the reign of Islam, to revert to *dar al-harb*, to come under the control of Christians or Jews. The land of Israel came under Roman and Byzantine Christian control until conquered by Muslims in A.D. 636-638, then was retaken during the Crusades, then recaptured under the Muslim leader Saladin in A.D. 1187, then again came under Christian control with the fall of the Ottoman Empire after World War I before becoming a Jewish state again in 1948. Most Muslims today are united in their desire to bring it back under Muslim rule—and Iranian leaders have been at the forefront of that effort.

Regardless of what happens in the near term in Iran, this larger conflict is not going to stop.

Implications of the beliefs of Iran's leadership

Returning to Iran in particular, let's note more about the progression of the conflict. Ayatollah Khomeini, who led the Islamic revolution in Iran, started the "Death to America!" and "Death to Israel!" chants and popularized the phrase that America is "the Great Satan"—the enemy of Islam and the great

obstacle standing in the way. He called Israel "the little Satan."

He died of natural causes in 1989 and was followed by Ali Khamenei, who was recently killed in the opening minutes of the Iran war. For decades, he and his officials referred to America and Israel with the same terms, and also referred to Britain as "the little Satan." (See "Khamenei's Proclamations Against America, Britain and Israel" above.)

Hashemi Rafsanjani, the Iranian president and commander-in-chief from 1989 to 1997, openly threatened in 2001 to use nuclear weapons against Israel, saying: "The use of even one nuclear bomb inside Israel will destroy everything . . . It is not irrational to contemplate such an eventuality."

What he meant was that Israel is so small, less than 300 miles north to south and averaging about 40 miles wide, that one well-placed nuclear warhead would destroy the entire country—again, a possibility the Israelis could never allow.

Ever since the 1979 revolution, Iran's top leaders have belonged to a particular sect of Islam that believes an Islamic messiah known as the *mahdi* will arise in a period of end-time trouble and lead Islam to its rightful place as the dominant religion of the world. (Their sect identifies this individual as the last of a series of 12 imams or Muslim religious leaders through history.)

This belief was demonstrated to the entire world in the opening words of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's 2009 address to the United Nations: "In the Name of [Allah], the Compassionate, the Merciful, praise be to Allah, the Lord of the universe, and peace and blessings be upon our master and prophet, Muhammad . . . O [Allah], *hasten the arrival of Imam Mahdi and grant him good health and victory and make us his followers and those who attest to his righteousness.*"

Ahmadinejad closed his speech by stating, “There will come a time when justice will prevail across the globe”—that time being “*under the rule of the Perfect Man, the last Divine source on earth, the Great Mahdi.*” He then called on the world to begin preparing for what he called “that bright future” under the reign of this coming Islamic messiah.

The bottom line is that these Iranian leaders have been driven by the deeply rooted belief that their Islamic messiah is going to appear soon, and that they *can and must* hasten that day by launching wars leading to global chaos. This is why they have for decades been sponsoring terror groups like Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah, the Houthis in Yemen, and their own Revolutionary Guards. This is also why they have been aggressively pursuing nuclear weapons—because nothing would launch a period of global chaos faster and more effectively than nuclear detonations in Western capitals around the world. For other nations, the idea of a regime with such apocalyptic intentions acquiring nuclear weapons should be out of the question.

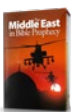
Weathering the storms

This background should give insight into dangerous and volatile geopolitics of this region of the world. End-time events will center on this area—including massive invasions, devastating battles and leaders who will bring the world to the brink of destruction (Matthew 24:21-22), with Jerusalem remaining the focal point of international conflict (Zechariah 12:2-3).

The question for us is: Where should our focus be amid the turmoil of the present—and the worsening conflict that lies ahead? In Matthew 7:24, Jesus Christ compared those who follow what He taught with a wise man building his house on a rock—a house that amid the raging storms did not fall. Likewise, we can weather all the coming storms by building our lives on Christ and His teachings (watch our *Beyond Today* short video “Iran’s Storm” at ucg.org/mj26).

It’s not enough to know what’s going on. We must trust God, doing as He commands us, and He will see us through—to His glorious Kingdom that lies beyond. May it come soon! **BT**

DIVE DEEPER



This article was adapted from a lengthier talk by the author titled “What’s Behind the War in Iran?”—available at our website. And to

better understand the history of this volatile region and where events are ultimately headed, download or request your free copy of our study guide *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*.

Scan the code or visit ucg.org/mj26 to find both resources.



(Continued from page 8)

sin many years after his conversion, as laid out in Romans 7. Though he loved God’s law, he sometimes found himself falling short.

But Paul also understood the solution, writing: “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—[deliverance would come] through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (verses 24-25). He further explained that it is through the Spirit that believers gradually defeat the wrong ways of the flesh, overcoming sin (Romans 8:4-5, 15).

Over time those led by God’s Spirit grow and mature in His ways—repenting when they fall short and continuing forward in obedience.

The way to freedom from sin for all people

God’s solution to sin extends far beyond individual forgiveness today. Under the Old Covenant with ancient Israel, the people promised to obey God’s law. But they lacked the inner transformation—called “conversion” in the Bible—necessary to keep that promise consistently.

Through the New Covenant, which Christ initiated with His disciples on the Passover evening before His death (Matthew 26:28), God promises something greater. As He had foretold, He will write His laws on the hearts and minds of His people (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:8-12), giving them both the desire and the power to live according to His ways (see Philippians 2:13).

Yet the biblical prophecy of the New Covenant specifically speaks of a future relationship with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. The Church today serves as a forerunner in this covenant relationship. Those who follow Christ now are learning to live by God’s ways in preparation for a much greater future.

When Jesus Christ returns to rule the earth, He will lead all nations to learn God’s ways (see Isaiah 2:1-4). People around the world will have the opportunity to repent of sin, accept Christ’s sacrifice and receive the power of the Holy Spirit. The world will finally experience the peace and justice that have eluded human civilization for thousands of years.

Some will still refuse to turn from sin. Scripture warns that those who persist in rebellion will ultimately face final destruction. But those who remain committed to overcoming sin through Christ will experience an extraordinary future. They will live forever as members of the family of God.

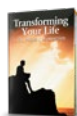
The Bible promises a time when suffering, injustice and death itself will disappear. Humanity will finally be freed from the destructive power of sin.

God’s solution to the problem of sin is complete. Through Christ’s sacrifice, forgiveness is possible. Through the Holy Spirit, transformation begins. And through God’s Kingdom, the opportunity for redemption will extend to all humanity.

For now, the invitation still stands open.

Each of us must decide whether to continue in the way that leads to sin and death—or to receive and follow the way that leads to life, to ultimate freedom in the ways of God forever! **BT**

DIVE DEEPER



Are you suffering from guilt over past wrongs? Do you keep falling into the same destructive thinking and bad habits you’ve wrestled with before? For help in finding the way to needed change, request or download our free study guide *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.

Scan the code or visit ucg.org/mj26 to find it.





Grow in Faithfulness —to Be Like God

True faithfulness means being completely honest, dependable and loyal in every area of life—reflecting the very character of God. As Jesus Christ taught, being faithful in little prepares us for much. With the help of God’s Spirit, we can grow in this costly virtue and one day hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

by Peter Eddington

When we think of being faithful, most people think first of marital fidelity. But faithfulness is much broader than that. It can involve almost every aspect of our life.

More than a human aspiration, faithfulness is a quality of God Himself, who we are to emulate in this regard. (See “Relying on the Faithfulness of God” on the next page.)

What is faithfulness? How do we practice it, and when do we exhibit it in our lives?

Developing faithfulness

In our effort to *become like God in our character*, we must ensure that faithfulness is very high in *our* value system. Many people will *profess* faithfulness, but very few will *demonstrate* it. Why? Because often the virtue is *costly*, and few people are willing to pay the price. But for the godly person, faithfulness is an essential quality—regardless of what it might cost.

What is faithfulness? The underlying biblical words denote that which is firm and can be counted on. *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary* defines the equivalent English term *faithful* as “firm in adherence to promises or in observance of duty.” Some common synonyms are “dependable,” “reliable,” “trustworthy” and “loyal.” The word also has the

connotation of *absolute honesty or integrity*.

The faithful person is one who is trustworthy and loyal, dependable in *all* relationships and completely honest and ethical in *all* he or she does.

How does our faithfulness measure up to the faithfulness of God? How much more each day are we becoming like God our Father and our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ?

What should our faithfulness look like? Let’s consider three areas.

1. Absolute honesty

Absolute honesty in speech and in personal affairs has to be the hallmark of a faithful Christian. “*Lying lips* are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal *truthfully* are His delight” (Proverbs 12:22). And, “Dishonest scales are an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is His delight” (Proverbs 11:1).

Note, we can be unfaithful in our *words*, but also in our *deeds* and in our *business dealings*! God detests lying and abhors dishonest business transactions—using underhanded tactics to cheat others. Not only are we commanded not to lie, but we are also commanded not to practice deception.

We lie or deceive when we pretend to be something we are not, when as students we cheat on an exam, or as taxpayers

Relying on the Faithfulness of God

The Bible contains more than 60 references to the faithfulness of God. It's not surprising that some 40 of these instances occur in the book of Psalms, which recounts the struggles of the people of God and their total dependence on His faithfulness.

We are totally dependent on God's faithfulness. Consider the absolute necessity of the *faithfulness of God*—even for our very breath. We are dependent on God's faithfulness for many things.

- For salvation (1 Corinthians 1:9).
- For deliverance from temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13).
- For sanctification (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).
- For forgiveness of our sins (1 John 1:9).
- For deliverance from suffering (1 Peter 4:19).
- For eternal life (Hebrews 10:23).

We can easily see how every aspect of the Christian life rests on the faithfulness of God. No wonder, then, that the psalmist says, in reflecting on the faithfulness of God: "I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever; with my mouth will I make known Your *faithfulness* to all generations. For I have said, 'Mercy shall be built up forever; Your *faithfulness* You shall establish in the very heavens'" (Psalm 89:1-2, emphasis added throughout).

Even in the midst of *lamentations* over the judgment of God on Judah, the prophet Jeremiah could still proclaim of God, "Great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:23). Even study of the 60 biblical declarations of the faithfulness of God couldn't do full justice to the subject. The entire Bible expounds on that theme. *God's faithfulness* appears in precept or illustration on almost every page. And it moves beyond the written Word to God's involvement in our lives.

we fail to report all of our income. How much would you tell a prospective buyer about your used car? The issue of honesty pervades every area of our lives. We must exhibit absolute honesty.

Sometimes we are reminded of other occasions of seemingly innocent "social lying," of instances of *exaggeration*, or *manipulating the facts* of a story just a bit. Perhaps we are not quite as honest as we might have considered ourselves to be.

Think of Jesus Christ. One day He asked His enemies, "Which of you convicts Me of sin?" (John 8:46)—or "Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?" (New International Version). If Jesus had *ever* distorted the truth *even a little bit*, He could not have asked that question with such total confidence. We are called to be like Jesus—to be as *absolutely honest as He was*.

Why go into such detail about absolute honesty in the social minutiae of life? Because this is where honesty begins. If we are careful to be honest in the little things, we will certainly be careful to be honest in the more important things of life.

Remember what Jesus said? "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much" (Luke 16:10). Our society desperately needs to reemphasize honesty in both its business transactions and its social dealings. Recall corporate scandals like Enron and WorldCom. Their executives thought it impossible to succeed in business today without compromising the truth. In some cases, the same attitude prevails in politics, sports and every aspect of our society.

As sons and daughters of God, we are called to be different, and that entails being models of *absolute honesty* in faithfulness.

2. Utter dependability

Few things are more frustrating than relying on someone who is not dependable. Notice what Solomon observed: "As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the lazy man to those who send him" (Proverbs 10:26).

It's like fingernails on a chalkboard when you can't rely on someone who is lazy. His or her unfaithfulness makes them exasperating. We may be indifferent about a lazy person's habits if we don't have to rely on them. But if we are dependent on their actions, we see those lazy habits as unfaithfulness.

Our society needs to reemphasize placing great importance on *dependability*. Today it so often takes a back seat to personal desire or *convenience*. Some people keep commitments *only if it's convenient for them*.

For the person who is practicing godliness, dependability is a duty owed not only to our fellow man, but more importantly to God. Reliability is not just a *social* obligation; it's a *spiritual obligation*. God is most concerned about our faithfulness to *Him*.

In Psalm 15, David asks an important question and gives the answer: "LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and *speaks the truth in his heart* [absolute honesty]; . . . *He who swears to his own hurt and does not change* [utter dependability]" (verses 1-4).

This psalm contains a written list of ethical standards a person must keep to dwell in God's house and eventually be a part of His family. In the middle of that list is the last phrase we saw, also translated as one "who keeps an oath *even when it hurts*" (verse 4, NIV). God wants us to be dependable even when it *costs us*. This is what distinguishes *godly faithfulness* from the *ordinary dependability* of secular society.

There are numerous instances in which *all of us make commitments* that from time to time *may prove costly to keep*. At times such as these we especially need, with God's help, to manifest the fruit of the Spirit that is faithfulness.

We must be people of *utter dependability*.

3. Unswerving loyalty

The faithful person is not only honest and dependable, but is also *loyal*. The issue of loyalty typically arises in connection with our friends. The word has come to have a connotation of sticking with someone through thick and thin. There is perhaps no greater description of loyalty than Solomon's words: "A friend loves at *all* times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Proverbs 17:17).

There is no such person as a "fair-weather friend." If a person's loyalty doesn't ensure his or her faithfulness to you in times of stress, then that person really isn't a friend. The person is simply using you to satisfy some of his or her *own* social needs.

King Saul's son Jonathan provides one of the best illustrations of loyalty in the Bible. His loyal friendship with David *almost cost him his life* at the hands of his own father. Amazingly, Jonathan realized how his loyalty to David would, in the end, *cost him the throne of Israel*. Whether it be in *honesty* or *dependability* or *loyalty*, faithfulness is frequently a costly virtue.

There is a kind of loyalty we must avoid—so-called "blind loyalty." This kind refuses to admit the mistakes or faults of a friend, and it's actually a disservice. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Proverbs 27:6)—rendered in the New Revised Standard Version as: "Well meant are the wounds a friend inflicts, but profuse are the kisses of an enemy."

Only the truly faithful friend cares enough about us to undertake the often-thankless task of pointing out where we are wrong. None of us enjoys being confronted with our faults or sins or mistakes, so we often make it difficult for our friends to do so. As a result, many are more concerned to express agreement with each other than about speaking the truth.

This is *not* loyalty. Loyalty speaks the truth in faithfulness, but it also speaks it in *love*. Loyalty says, "I care enough about you that I will not allow you to continue unchecked in your wrong action or sinful attitude that will ultimately be harmful to you."

We must have *unswerving loyalty* in faithfulness to God, and to each other.

How do we meet God's requirement?

The first step in growing in faithfulness is to *acknowledge the biblical standard*. We must develop convictions consistent with this standard based on the Word of God. How do we do this?

- First, *study biblical verses* on the topic of faithfulness.
- Second, *evaluate your life*. Perhaps chat with a spouse or close friend. Do you seek to be scrupulously honest? Can others depend on you even when it is costly? Can *God* depend on you even when it is costly? Think of specific instances that either

affirm your faithfulness or *show you where you need to grow*.

• Third, where you see a specific need for faithfulness, make that both a matter of *prayer* and the object of some concrete *actions* on your part. Our *effort* and the *power of God's Holy Spirit* work together to strengthen our *godly character*.

We cannot become a faithful person merely by trying. There is a divine dimension through God's Spirit. Faithfulness is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, against which there is no law (Galatians 5:22-23). But it is also true that we will not become a faithful person *without* trying, *without* action.

While we usually don't have to be faithful unto death, there may come a time when it is required. Jesus says, "Be *faithful until death*, and I will *give you the crown of life*" (Revelation 2:10). So, consider the *reward* for faithfulness. It is the *crown of life*—which represents *eternal life!*

Proving faithful to God and one another

We all appreciate a friend or acquaintance who has proven to be faithful—and even more so does God. You knew you could *depend* on that person to *do* what they said. You learned that

their word was *completely trustworthy*. If they said they would call you, they would. If they said they'd be somewhere at a certain time, they'd be there. It's great to have friends who are faithful.

In the parable of the talents, notice what the Master said: "His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and *faithful* servant; you were *faithful* over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord'" (Matthew 25:21).

It may be argued that the faithfulness in this passage is in relation to God, rather than to one another. That is indeed true. But faithfulness to God *includes faithfulness to one another*. Jesus in the same chapter says: "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (verse 40). This is a key element to understand in each scriptural passage on faithfulness.

The two Great Commandments show how we must love God first, and our neighbor as ourselves. It is *God* who requires that we be *faithful* in *all* of our earthly relationships. If we seek to grow in faithfulness toward God and one another, we have the hope of hearing our Lord ultimately say, "Well done, good and *faithful* servant." BT

DIVE DEEPER



Far removed in time from the writing of the Scriptures, most today do not really understand biblical concepts like faithfulness. In the time of the New Testament, this was regarded as an appropriate response to a bestowal of grace, another often-misunderstood term. To better grasp these concepts, request or download our free study guide *What Does the Bible Teach About Grace?* Scan the code or visit ucg.org/mj26 to find it.



GIANT PROBLEMS

When life's giants loom large, it's easy to feel defeated. But like David, you can shift your focus from your weakness to God's power—and discover that no challenge is greater than Him.

by Steve Myers

You can imagine the challenging scene: The Philistine giant Goliath taunts the armies of Israel every single day. As he strides across the battlefield, his enormous stature and boisterous threats leave the soldiers paralyzed in fear. Then the young shepherd boy David arrives, and the contrast is striking. If David had measured his own strength against Goliath's, he would have bolted from the battlefield. But that's not what David did. Instead, he measured Goliath against the strength of God.

At times, your problems can feel just as overwhelming. They loom before you like giants, threatening to crush you under their weight. When you look at the enormity of your struggles, it can seem impossible to overcome. If you measure them against your own abilities, defeat seems inevitable.

But what if you changed the way you think? What if, instead of sizing up your problems against your own limited strength, you measured them against the power of God? The God who created the universe, who is all-powerful and all-knowing, and who has infinite resources at His disposal. Suddenly, those once-giant problems begin to shrink.

This truth is not just for David. It's for you too. Your God is greater than any challenge or calamity you'll ever face. "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

The challenge is learning not to let your problems define you. You don't have to face them alone. When you bring God into your fight by trusting Him, He promises to be with you and to help you overcome. As the Bible says, "Do not fear them, for the LORD your God, He shall fight for you" (Deuteronomy 3:22, Modern English Version). It's not by your own strength that you overcome, but by *relying on His*.

Stan's turning point

I'll never forget visiting Stan after he suffered a stroke. He was just 48 years old—too young for something like that. The man who had always been strong and full of life now struggled just to speak and move his hand. I could see the



frustration in his eyes when he whispered, "I don't even feel like myself anymore."

Over the next few months, I watched Stan face a giant that wasn't just physical—it was the fear that his life would never be the same. He worked hard in therapy, pushing himself every day, but progress was slow. Fear loomed large, taunting him like Goliath: "You'll never recover. You'll never be useful again."

Then one day, a turning point came. Stan told me: "I've been fighting this all wrong. I've been focusing on how small I am instead of how mighty God is." Isaiah 41:10 became his anchor: "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you."

From that moment, something changed. The fear didn't vanish overnight, but peace began to take its place. Each day, he prayed for God's strength instead of relying on his own.

Slowly, his strength improved, and his faith became stronger than ever. Months later, Stan told me, "That stroke didn't defeat me—it showed me how powerful God really is."

Measuring against God

He was right. When you measure your giants against your own strength, they'll always seem

impossible. But when you measure them against the strength of God, they shrink to their true size. The battle was never Stan's to win—it was God's all along.

So, when you face giants—whether in the form of physical suffering, emotional trauma or life-altering challenges—you can find the strength to overcome, not by relying on your own power, but by trusting in God's ultimate control. As Joshua 1:9 encourages: "Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

By shifting your focus from your own weakness to God's power, your problems lose their grip on you. The more you center your attention on Him, the less your problems will dominate. As Ephesians 6:10 says, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." When you trust in God and allow Him to lead you, you'll grow spiritually stronger and He will receive all the glory.

And when you overcome your giants, you'll be able to declare, just as David did, "The LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD's" (1 Samuel 17:47).

No giant is too big for God. No challenge is too overwhelming when you face it with the strength of the Almighty on your side. Just as David defeated Goliath with a sling and a stone, you too have the power to overcome whatever stands in your way—not by your own strength, but by trusting in the One who has *already won* the battle for you.

When you trust in God's power, His victory becomes your victory. Stand firm in that truth, step onto your battlefield, and face your giants with the same confidence David had—knowing that, with God, the battle is already won! **BT**

DIVE DEEPER



The key to true victory in life is trusting in God to lead us. No matter how grim things may seem, we can rely on our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ to sustain us

and see us through. To learn more, be sure to request or download our free study guide *You Can Have Living Faith*. Scan the code or visit ucg.org/mj26 to find it.





Growing in Hope Beyond the Moment

Amid the noise of our circumstances and anxieties, where can we find lasting hope? Scripture shows that when faith and love take root in the heart, hope grows strong. By learning to be still and listen for God's voice, we gain the confidence to follow Christ beyond life's uncertain moments.

by Robin Webber

Allow me to share a story that may reflect on our personal journey at given times even as 21st-century disciples of Jesus Christ. Many years ago, a little boy was given a priceless possession—his deceased grandfather's golden pocket watch. Oh, how he treasured it! However, one day while playing at his grandfather's ice plant factory, he lost the watch amid all the ice and sawdust. He searched and scratched, becoming frantic, but no watch! Suddenly, all hope seemed to evaporate!

It was only then that he realized what to do. He stopped scurrying around and became very still. It was when his heart stopped pounding that in the silence the watch could be heard ticking.

What might we learn here? Our Heavenly Father has given each of us a priceless, *hope*-filled gift from Above and planted it in our hearts. Yet how easy it is to fumble this gift from Above in the rush and crush of here below. We send out signals that all is lost!

Yet this gift from Above is always there to find—if we will but pause, not merely listening for the “ticking of a clock,” but the voice of God in Spirit and His Word. Words that reverberate and should echo in our hearts beyond the rumbling noise of our human nature. Simple yet profound words, like “*Be still and know that I am God*” (Psalm 46:10). Words of substance mirrored in what the little boy did (being “still” as taking action!) and granting us hope beyond the moment, as

we respond to the echoing of the spiritual voice of Christ that bids us, “*Follow Me*” (Matthew 4:19) over the roar of self.

What does hope look like?

Let's begin to develop a working definition of hope by listening with our heart to the words of God. And yes—spoiler alert!—it will take patience as we embrace and internalize the words of the psalmist: “*I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope*” (Psalm 130:5, New International Version). With that thought in mind, let's consider the words of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:13: “*And now abide faith, hope, love, these three: but the greatest of these is love.*”

Paul here lists three key components of a Christian's developing character—“the Big 3,” we might call them—that will make a difference between human despair and godly outcomes. Ultimately, they are all intertwined. Faith and love are direct fruits of God's Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22), initially seeded in the soil of our heart, that together produce the hybrid of hope, which is an essential nutrient to grow in grace and knowledge.

The connection between faith and hope is given in Hebrews 11:1: “*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*” (English Standard Version). Paul further presents the connectivity of faith and hope in Romans 8:24-25: “*For we were saved in this hope, but hope*

that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.”

The projected spiritual grip of hope

Hope in God is a projected spiritual grip beyond our immediate moments of life in knowing that what He has promised us will come about based on His love—a love given definition

Hope is not a pool left to stagnate, but rather a river that flows on the currents of faith and love. It is not an immediate fixture. It is “faith on the march.”

and personified in 1 John 4:9-10: “In this way the love of God was revealed to us, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (Modern English Version).

Having faith in the reality of God’s personal initiative of His love towards us and in turn responding to that love leads to what is spelled out in Matthew 13:16: “But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear.”

In sharing this with you, I remember the story surrounding the construction of Disney World in Florida. Walt Disney had initially constructed Disneyland in Southern California back in the 1950s. Nevertheless, he was constrained in what he could develop due to space limitation—so he dreamed of expansion elsewhere in Florida. But he died before it was built. It’s said that in the final stages of construction, one executive said to another, “It’s a shame Walt isn’t here to see this”—to which his fellow executive responded, “No, it’s here because he *did* see it!”

This small story of one man with a big vision reverberates with our spiritual travelogue of hope enumerated in Hebrews 11:13: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

Hope is faith on the march!

But, with this said, let us be aware in striving to embrace hope in times of challenge that hope is not alone in the living room of our mind! Despair in our human psyche lies just around the corner and readily embraces those same ills and times of panic to create far different outcomes from the hope that combats, overcomes and replaces our doubts and fears.

Hope is not a pool left to stagnate, but rather a river that flows on the currents of faith and love. It is not an immediate fixture. It is “*faith on the march*,” which will need exercising

that it might expand and crowd out fear as we embrace the spiritual reality of recognizing that God is the potter and we are the clay (Isaiah 64:8). He is doing a work in us (Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 2:13). And, yes, always remember the words of the One who bids us, “*Follow Me*,” that like Him we must bear a cross before we bear a crown (see Luke 14:27).

Notice how and where the apostle Paul brings the “Big 3” together in Romans 5:1-5, and how they blend into the hybrid

of hope that ultimately blossoms—yet with some challenging heart-work in between:

“Therefore, having been *justified by faith*, we have peace with God

through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. *Now hope does not disappoint*, because the *love of God* has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.”

“So heart be still”

Returning to where I began with the pounding heart of the little boy in the opening story, you know what? My heart pounds too at times, just as I’m sure yours does.

I want to share a piece of writing kept under the glass top of my office desk—so it’s never too far from me for a needed tune-up! The words, from a 1908 poem by Minnie Louise Haskins titled “God Knows” and often called “The Gate of the Year,” were read by King George VI of Great Britain in 1939 as the darkness of World War II was spreading:

“And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: ‘Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.’ And he replied: ‘Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.’ So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night. And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East. So heart be still . . . God knows. His will is best. The stretch of years which wind ahead, so dim to our imperfect vision, are clear to God. Our fears are premature; in Him, all time hath full provision.”

It’s time, yes it’s time, to be still and take the hand of God, which awaits each of us—a hand that opens wide to hope! **BT**

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WHAT TO DO ABOUT SIN

by Dan Preston

In confronting the problem of sin, there's a big difference between recognizing it as the transgression of God's law, along with our guilt and the resulting death penalty (1 John 3:4; Romans 6:23), and focusing on what to do about it.

What leads us into sin, and how can we recover?

WHY DO WE SIN?

Scripture explains that everyone has been influenced by Satan the devil, resulting in a corrupted nature hostile to God (Ephesians 2:2; Romans 8:7). This wayward nature aligns with the surrounding culture.

We're told in 1 John 2:16, "For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world." There are fleshly or carnal lusts that lead us to sin. The lust of the eyes is akin to covetousness (wanting something you shouldn't really have, like someone else's possessions, friends, or life). The pride of life could be summarized as vanity, such as thinking so highly of ourselves that we can choose what is right or wrong, and don't need God's guidance.

You know better than I do the temptations you will face each day, whether that's someone offering you drugs, the desire to look at pornography on your phone, or whatever it might be. You know what the temptations that lead to your

sins are. You need to recognize where they come from and what they lead to. "Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (James 1:14-15). While Satan might be the one throwing the temptations out there (1 Thessalonians 3:5; 1 Peter 5:8), ultimately it is *our* choice to succumb.

CAN SIN BE PREVENTED?

So, if we understand sin is so bad, and it's ultimately on us to decide whether we sin or not, why not just avoid it in the first place? That might sound like a far-fetched, unrealistic goal, but it's actually a good place to start.

No, you won't succeed in overcoming every temptation to sin you might face, but think of it like a ping pong game. If you're playing someone more experienced and skilled, does that mean when the ball is served you should just stand there and watch it go by? Of course not! You should at least try to return the serve. Likewise, we need to keep trying to resist sin.

One way to do that is to strengthen ourselves spiritually through prayer. In Matthew 7:7-11 Jesus Christ tells us: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!”

Evil in this sense means human and carnal, as compared to spiritual and perfect, as God is. The point Jesus is making is that if we ask God for good things, like help with avoiding sin, He is glad to help.

Bible study is another way to help us avoid the sickness of sin. You know you should honor your parents, right? You probably know you can find the command for that in Exodus 20. But do you know *why* you should do it? Obviously, it’s a command from God, but consider what the apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 6:1-3: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise: ‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.’”

Sure, we all know the short form “Honor your mother and father,” but Paul points out that the command is actually worded more specifically than that. He cites Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16 in more detail, pointing to further reason we should keep this command. It’s not just out of obligation that we obey, but out of respect and love that we show honor to parents. It’s those kinds of details we can easily forget if we don’t regularly open our Bibles to read and study Scripture.

RECOVERY FROM SIN

Try as we might, we all do sin and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Sometimes we know better and sometimes we are ignorant, and the consequences might vary. But in either case, we sin. The question we need to answer once we inevitably sin is: *What now?*

Jesus Christ instructed a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery to “go and sin no more” (John 8:11). There was no doubt she was guilty. The law of Moses said she should be stoned to death. But what would Jesus say? That was the question the scribes and Pharisees who brought her before Him tried to trap Him with (verses 3-6). His answer wasn’t to support this group of hypocrites in a mockery of justice. Rather, He told her to “go and sin no more.”

Did she deserve death? Yes. Do we deserve death? Yes. But that is not what God the Father and Jesus Christ *want* for us. What They want is that we *change our habits and stop sinning*. We are reminded of this in Peter’s writings as well: “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness,

but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). The Father and Jesus’ ultimate goal is not our death, but our repentance and a change from the ways that led us to sin.

AN INCREDIBLE PROMISE

Repentance is a key part of recovering from sin. It’s

something we must do after we have sinned. “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19). Repentance is more than just saying,

“My bad” or “I’m sorry.” It’s a change in your mindset that says, “*I’m not okay with doing sinful things, and I want to stop.*”

Paul wrote to people who had made such change: “For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter” (2 Corinthians 7:10-11).

Feeling bad because you got caught is not enough. Feeling bad and not ever wanting to do it again—*that* is what repentance is and what God desires. It’s with that mindset God can work to develop holy, righteous character in us.

That’s our part—what *we must do* about sin. The exciting part is that there is one more step. A step that God takes, as stated in 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” This is one of my personal favorite scriptures in the Bible. What an amazing promise and gift from our awesome God!

Everyone does indeed fall short of the glory of God in sinning. Scripture says so, and your own personal experience no doubt supports that. The main question is, how can we stop and do what’s right?

The next time you find yourself dealing with sin, take time in prayer to repent, ask God for help to understand why you sinned and what you need to do to change. Then take a moment to rejoice, knowing your God is faithful to forgive and will provide the help you need! **BT**

DIVE DEEPER



God wants to help you live as He calls you to live—to be the person He created you to be. To understand His plan for you and your part in it, be sure to request or download our free study guide *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.

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Q: Will the Holy Spirit take away my sin or addiction?

A: There is a way out of sin and addiction. God can help us to overcome with the strength of His Holy Spirit. But it will first require determination to quit and stay clean.

God wants all addicts to be free from their addictions and all sinners to be freed from their sins. He “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).

If you are struggling with an addiction or other sinful behavior you know is damaging, you need help. We become slaves to our sins (Romans 6:16). An addiction keeps you trapped in its clutches, but you can be freed from this form of slavery.

Once addiction or sinful behavior becomes ingrained, it’s difficult to change. It requires a change in the way you think. Your mind, having been corrupted, needs a transformation.

This is where God’s Spirit can help you see that your behavior is wrong and give you the strength to stop. The Spirit will not take away your addiction and sin unless you are willing to cease and start doing the right thing. The strength of God’s Spirit can help you resist wrong urges.

It will be a struggle, and at times you may feel like you’ll never be able to overcome. Even the apostle Paul struggled with thoughts and behavior contrary to his desire to think and do right. He wrote, “In me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find” (Romans 7:18). Yet God’s Holy Spirit helped Paul resist the temptation to sin (see Romans 8:2, 4).

Likewise, you can stop an addiction’s control over your life with the help of God’s Spirit. He gives that Spirit to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32). For instance, when people heard Peter’s sermon on Pentecost in Acts 2 and realized their complicity in the death of Jesus, they were cut to the heart and asked what to do (verse 37). Peter answered, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (verse 38).

To overcome an addiction, to stop sinning, requires you to likewise repent. The sinner must admit the problem is deep-seated in his mind. Then, with the help of God’s Spirit, he can change his corrupted thinking and overcome.

King David once cried out to God in acknowledging his sin, asking God to renew him within and not take away His Holy Spirit (Psalm 51:10-11). God answered his prayer for restoration, continuing to grant vital help through the Holy Spirit.

Slavery to addiction and sin can be broken by first determining to stop sinning. Then God’s Spirit can help to renew your mind. Counseling can also be of benefit in retraining our thinking. Feel free to contact us with specific questions. The truth is, only God can totally take away an addiction, but you must first be willing to stop sinning and obey Him. With God’s Spirit, you can overcome your sin or addiction. You can do as He commands in Galatians 5:16: “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”

Q: After a person repents of sin, accepts Jesus Christ as Savior in faith and is baptized, what else is needed to receive the Holy Spirit?

A: Beyond these is the need for what Scripture refers to as the laying on of hands by a minister of Jesus Christ. Acts 2:38 gives the requirement of repentance and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Other passages, such as Hebrews 11:6, note the necessity of faith in approaching God.

But that’s not all. Following baptism we see this next step. The pattern is spelled out in the basic doctrines or teachings laid out in Hebrews 6:1-2. It starts with “the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands . . .” This is clearly a fundamental practice.

Laying on of hands was used in the Old Testament period as a means of conferring a blessing, of ordination to office, of transferring responsibility and setting things apart for holy use. It continued in the New Testament as a means of Christ and His servants blessing and healing others. It was used for ordaining people to special service (Acts 6:6).

We see it employed for those newly baptized in Acts 8. After the deacon Philip baptized many people in Samaria, the apostles sent Peter and John to lay hands on these with prayer for the receiving of the Holy Spirit (verses 12-19). Though authorized to baptize, Philip was not authorized to lay on hands for the conferring of the Holy Spirit. This authority was invested in the eldership of the Church (compare 1 Timothy 4:14).

Under normal circumstances, an ordained elder of the Church will do both the baptism and the laying on of hands immediately following, as we see in Acts 19:1-6. Here the apostle Paul encountered people who had been baptized as followers of John the Baptist but without full understanding of the Christian commitment and the Holy Spirit. After counseling them, he baptized them into Christ and laid hands on them for the Holy Spirit.

Of course, it is God who gives His Spirit, not the minister. But this practice shows that God works through a human ministry and expects us to cooperate with the Church’s structure and process He has laid out.

Some use the example of the household of Cornelius in Acts 10, where God gave His Spirit prior to any laying on of hands or even baptism, to argue that these steps are unnecessary. But this was a special case to show to Peter and the other apostles that God was accepting gentile believers into the Church. He still told them they needed to go through the baptismal process (verse 48). That did not negate the regular pattern. **BT**

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To better understand how to grow in God’s ways and the steps needed to receive His powerful Spirit, be sure to request or download our free study guides *Tools for Spiritual Growth* and *What You Need to Know About Baptism*. **Scan the code or visit ucg.org/mj26 to find it.**



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New Zealand

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Mufulira, Mafken Radio 97.7 FM—Saturday, 18:15

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