



COMPASS CHECK

Helping you turn your spiritual compass toward God

A WATCHFUL & READY DISCIPLE



Personal Apologetics

Are You Ready to Give an Answer?

Organized Confusion

How Small Choices Shape a Lifetime

Your Most Fulfilling Life Is Happening Now

Don't Miss It

What Is Biblical Modesty?

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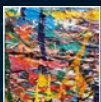
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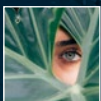
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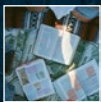
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COMPASS CHECK

Compass Check is a biblically based magazine for young people of the United Church of God, an International Association (UCGIA). Our name, *Compass Check*, refers to pointing your spiritual compass toward God. Our goal is to inspire readers to respond to the gospel message.

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COMPASS CORNER

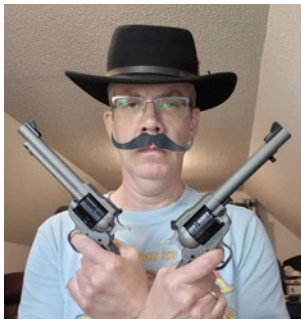
Dear Compass Checkers,

In the summer of 2019, the previous editor of *Compass Check*, Steve Nutzman, posted in our ministerial forum that he was looking for volunteers to work on *Compass Check*. I thought it over a bit and sent him a note that I'd be interested in helping if I could; just let me know what I could do. I had no idea of where that journey would wind up taking me . . .

About a year later, I became Editor of *Compass Check* and was now "running the show." I learned very quickly that there was much more to it than I had previously thought. Coming up with ideas for articles, answering questions from readers, developing writers, taking feedback from the review team, editing articles and of course, managing deadlines.

Fortunately, I had a lot of help along the way. In addition to the guidance Mr. Nutzman had given me, our Managing Editor at the time, Kourtney Kovanis, was a tremendous help. She taught me the art of helping develop a writer so that their voice came through the article, rather than me just rewriting it to sound like I wanted it to. Since then, Kourtney has moved on to a new role working for the Church and Ariana Vazquez has taken on that position and continues to do a fabulous job of helping to develop both articles and the writers themselves. Our Content Editor, Mitch Moss, showed me the ropes of how the magazine actually comes together—the layout, the design, even nuances of the review process as it related to meeting press deadlines (which I eventually got better at, sorry Mitch . . .). Matt Hernandez, our Senior Graphic Designer, always comes up with covers and illustrations that manage to convey the ideas being expressed in a visual way.

I could go on and on thanking people who have helped in the process, but I don't want this to sound like an awards show speech gone wrong. Certainly, my wife and kids deserve credit. If I wasn't roping them into helping out directly with writing or reading, they were putting up with me disappearing into my office for hours on end. Our Camp Directors and many others are a key part of *Compass Check* as well, helping make sure the articles are not only doctrinally accurate, but have the sort of tone and message that resonates with you, our teen readers. Then of course there



are all the volunteer writers who submit articles, including some of you! If not for the willingness of those authors to spend the time writing, accepting feedback and rewrites, and editing, we'd have very little to offer in each issue.

Unfortunately, as the old saying goes, all good things must end. This will be my last issue as Editor of *Compass Check*. Devin Schulz will be stepping in to take over and I am confident that he and the rest of the team will continue to produce this magazine that I love so dearly.

I won't be going away completely though. I'll still be helping out at camps, the Feast of Tabernacles and of course pastoring in the Carolinas. In addition, I've taken on a new role in the Church's public proclamation efforts. To that end, I will be assuming the role of Editor for *Beyond Today* magazine, the Church's magazine which is geared towards those just beginning to understand the biblical truths you have been raised with.

Throughout this journey, I've learned a lot. Not just about how to oversee the publication of a magazine, but about the people involved in it. The staff who help produce it are very important of course, but if no one volunteered to write articles, we'd have nothing to produce. Then, of course, there's you. If no one bothered to actually read it, what would it accomplish?

This reminded me of what the apostle Paul wrote regarding parts of the body working together. He goes through

and discusses how if we were all eyeballs, then no one could hear. If we were all feet, then who would be the hands? He concludes: "But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body" (1 Corinthians 12:18-20).

We are a body. It's easy to look at people who have a title of some kind and think of them as the head. Yet, scripture clearly states Jesus Christ is the head (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 5:23). This brings me to a very important question and the one I choose to leave you with:

What part of the body are you?

To make this a little easier, let's narrow the question. What part of *Compass Check* are you? Are you a reader? That's great! I hope the content produced here is helpful as you embark on your personal journey to the Kingdom of God.

Perhaps you might become a part of the body that writes, or maybe you already have. Have you experienced something that you learned a lot from? Try writing it down in a way that you could share that lesson with others. Then send it to compasscheck@ucg.org—we'd love to help you see what kind of writer you can be!

Perhaps one day you might be part of the team that produces *Compass Check*. All of those I mentioned before—Kourtney, Ariana, Mitch, Matt and even myself—were all teens in the Church at one time who went to camps, read magazines and decided very early in life that the pursuit of becoming a part of the family of God was a worthwhile endeavor.

Whatever part of the body you are now or might be in the future, know this one thing: You have been a part of this journey of mine and I am thankful for not only every step of it, but each of you.

Thank you.



Dan Preston
Editor of *Compass Check* magazine

Dear Compass Checkers,



Those of you who have attended one of our United Youth Camps are already familiar with the concept of “The Zone.” One of the key elements that “The Zone” promotes is willingly tackling challenges that stretch us and help us grow. For me, writing this letter and stepping into the role of editor for *Compass Check* is exactly that — a deliberate step outside my comfort zone and into a new challenge I am excited to embrace. As Mr. Preston mentioned in his letter, this issue marks a passing of the baton of service as editor of *Compass Check*.

I grew up in the Church. God has given me a loving wife of 18 years, and together we enjoy the daily adventure and challenge of raising our two wonderful boys. For the past 10 years I have served the Church as a pastor, walking alongside people through joys, sorrows and countless unexpected situations. In my nearly 40 years of life, I have faced many new responsibilities, but I have never served as an editor. So, without a doubt, this feels like unfamiliar territory.

Yet as nervous as I may be about taking on this responsibility, I find courage in two important things.

First, God faithfully promises His help in every time of distress or uncertainty. One of my wife’s favorite verses, which has encouraged our family many times, is Isaiah 41:10: “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.” Challenges are nothing new or unexpected in the Christian walk. In fact, the calling to God’s Kingdom often requires us to step out of our comfort zones and face significant trials (Acts 14:22). Rather than being a distraction or setback, God uses these very challenges to shape and strengthen us. Some of the greatest blessings in my life have come from leaning fully on Him to work through

difficulties. Only by accepting demanding tasks can we discover God-given talents we didn’t know we had, develop closer relationships with others of like mind, and experience firsthand how God provides for us in ways we could never imagine.

The second reason I am encouraged is that I am joining a highly functioning team. Over the past couple of months, I have had the privilege of working alongside the *Compass Check* team as they prepared this summer issue. I have been deeply impressed by their warmth, their welcomeness, and the excellence they bring to their roles. I am sincerely thankful for the faithful men and women who have poured their hearts into *Compass Check* since its beginning. Being able to learn from such gifted and dedicated individuals is an exciting opportunity that I do not take for granted.

Moving forward, what will change? Well, aside from the new picture of the editor in the corner, not a great deal will look different. You can continue to expect the *Compass Check* team to prayerfully assemble helpful, encouraging and thought-provoking content that is beautifully presented and delivered every three months.

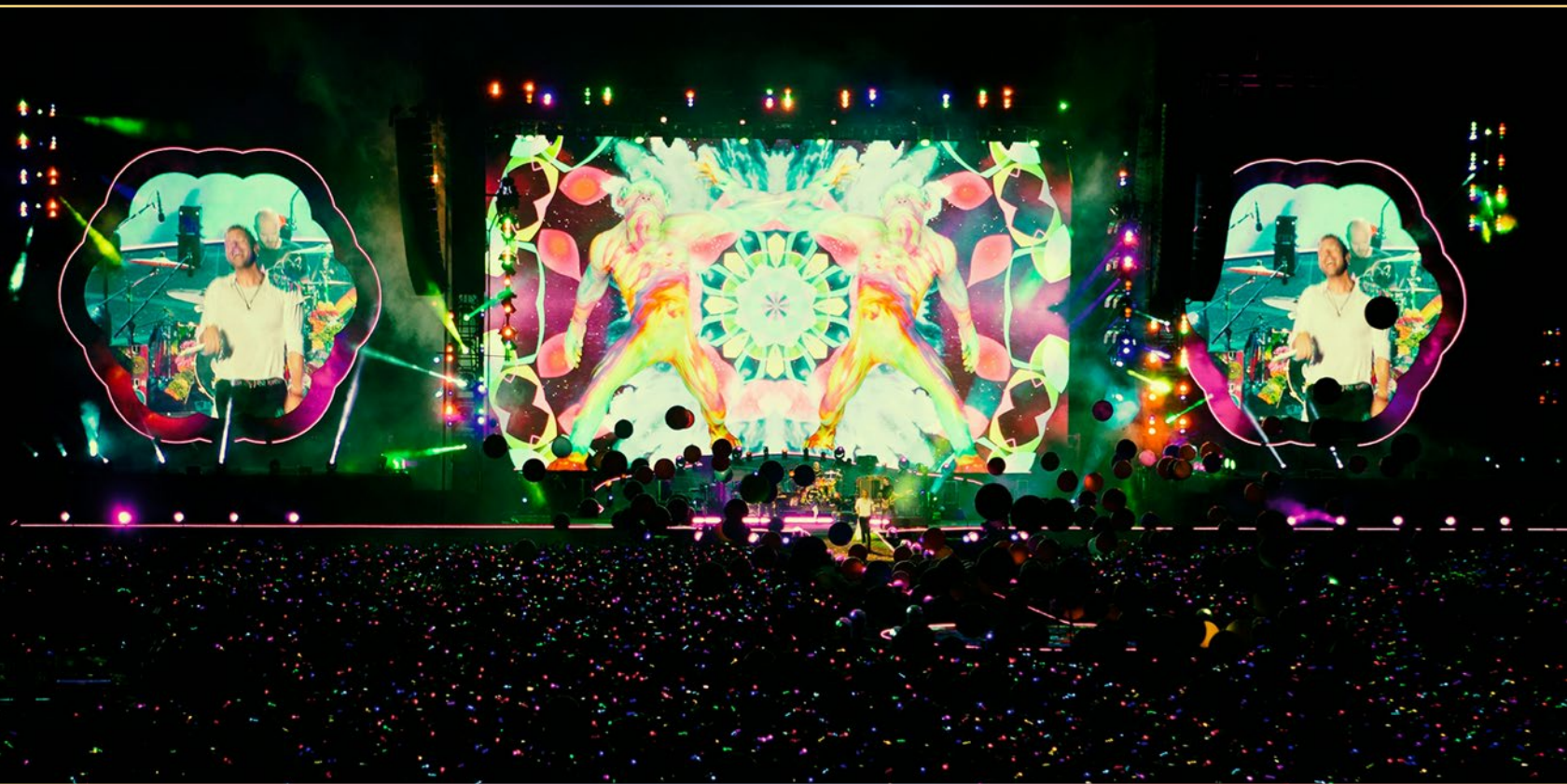
I am confident that as future writing opportunities arise, readers will gradually get to know me better. In the meantime, if you would like to reach out — whether to say hello, share an article idea, volunteer to write, or offer thoughtful feedback—please feel free to do so (compasscheck@ucg.org). Above all, I ask that you keep the entire *Compass Check* team in your prayers, asking God for His continued guidance, wisdom and blessing on all our efforts. It is a true privilege to be called by Him and to be a part of His amazing work.

Till next time,



Devin Schulz
Incoming Editor of *Compass Check* magazine

YOUR MOST FULFILLING LIFE



IS HAPPENING NOW

Don't Miss It

by David Cobb

The tickets were hard to get. Seven months of waiting followed, and at last it was time. After a half-day road trip, my wife and I parked more than a mile away, walked to the football stadium in downtown Nashville, Tennessee, and waited for hours in the sweltering July heat. Shortly after the sun went down, in the still-heavy and humid nighttime air, the long-awaited moment arrived.

The stadium lights went dark, the walk-on music started, spotlights and laser beams pulsed in rhythm. Finally, the world-famous British rock band, Coldplay, took the stage and launched into their first song, as the now electrified crowd of around 60,000 fans came alive! What surprised me most were the large number of people who missed the full impact

of that incredible moment, *because they were busy trying to capture it on their phones.*

Major miss! Bad trade. Such exceptional moments of immersive experience are few and far between. It was a good reminder that deep connections to the many fulfilling experiences life has to offer can only be formed by those who are fully engaged in the events of life, whether big or small. As this experience illustrated for me in a powerful way, there are multiple spheres of life where we can all benefit from becoming more present and less distracted.

Before we go further, it's important to define terms. The words "present" or "presence" have many uses in the English language. They are also used to describe religious concepts that originate in Buddhism and Hinduism. However, we intend only

the straightforward meaning of relationship to time—the “present” is simply life now, during the time it happens, as opposed to the past or the future.

Striving to be fully engaged in the present as we go through life strongly aligns with biblical principles and living God’s way. Not only that, it helps us to have a greater depth of enjoyment and fulfillment in life, as God designed it!

BE PRESENT IN THOUGHT

Engagement in the present begins in our minds, with healthy patterns of choosing what and what not to think about. We can also frame it as deciding where to invest our focus and attention, and likewise where to withdraw and disengage it.

It’s easy to develop unhealthy thinking patterns that focus too much on things we can’t control, whether in the past or future (which decreases fulfillment), and too little on things that we can choose in the present (which increase fulfillment). As behavioral psychologist and author Nick Trenton writes in his book *Stop Overthinking*, our perception of the things that occur in our lives “comes down to how you interpret and under-

Whether you’re experiencing beauty, relaxation, entertainment, connection, achievement or rest, allow yourself to be fully engaged in it.

stand that event, as well as how you actively engage with it, i.e., what choices you make.”

The apostle Paul was an outspoken advocate for the power of training our minds to focus on proper things. We always have the choice to direct our thoughts in the present, even in extremely difficult circumstances. He wrote, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Philippians 4:8, English Standard Version).

When we practice this mindset, patiently and with perseverance, it sets a trajectory and builds patterns that allow us to become more aware of the blessings and benefits God provides in our lives. Navigating difficulties with God’s help teaches us resilience and strength.

To help make this mindset practical for the realities that we live in, remember that it’s not healthy to simply ignore life outside of the present moment. There

are times and places to focus on positive memories or lessons learned from the past, along with goals, plans and hopes for the future. To do this productively and avoid anxiety, link these things back to the choices that you can make *today*. As Jesus said: “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matthew 6:34).

BE PRESENT IN EXPERIENCE

Returning to our memorable concert story, I do want to clarify that campaigning against mobile phones isn’t my goal. If you were wondering, yes, I definitely took a few pictures myself, and a short video during one of the songs. Preserving memories has value too, but not at the expense of missing out on the primary experience. We can all practice choosing the moments that we fully experience and the moments that we capture wisely.

Quite interestingly, even the band was quite aware of the toll that phones take on audience participation at their shows. Before playing one of their hit songs, lead singer Chris Martin invited everyone in the stadium to join them in performing it as “one big band” by keeping “phones in your pockets, hands in the air.” Nearly everyone did, and the difference was quite memorable, as 60,000 phoneless fans jumped, danced and sang along together.

The powerful, transferable lesson is to choose to be present wherever you are, and in whatever you’re doing. Whether you’re experiencing beauty, relaxation, entertainment, connection, achievement or rest, allow yourself to be fully engaged in it. Allow yourself to fully metabolize it and gain its true value. Otherwise, it will become a half-felt and quickly-forgotten experience.



Ironically, as marketing author and expert Ryan Holiday observes in his book *Stillness Is the Key*, benefiting from what we're experiencing at any given moment often requires allowing ourselves to be a bit uncomfortable: "Don't reject a boring or difficult moment because it is not exactly what you want. Don't waste a beautiful moment because you are insecure or shy. Make what you can of what you have been given. Live what can be lived."

This very much aligns with God's advice on life through the author of Ecclesiastes, who wrote, "It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils . . ." (Ecclesiastes 5:18). As he later writes, we'll miss out on that enjoyment if we aren't both present and intentional, because "All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the soul is not satisfied . . . Better is the sight of the eyes than the

Practice making choices that create meaningful connections—don't miss out on them!

wandering of desire" (6:7, 9). Put simply, it's a lot better to enjoy what's in front of you than to wish for something else!

BE PRESENT IN RELATIONSHIPS

In his book *The Paradox of Choice*, which explores the relationship between choice and fulfillment in life, professor and author Barry Schwartz writes about the investment required to develop meaningful relationships: "Being socially connected takes time . . . To form a real relationship with someone, or to develop a romantic attachment, we have to get to know the other person quite deeply. Only in Hollywood do such attachments come instantly and effortlessly. And close attachment, not [shallow connection], is what people most want and need." As he goes on to explain, maintaining a relationship with depth takes as much time and effort as forming it!

These types of relationships—lasting friendships, healthy marriages, enduring family bonds—are only possible when we choose to be fully present during the conversations, experiences and time that we share with one another. As an ultimate relationship model, Jesus described the deep and continuing relationship that He desires to have with us as "*abiding*" with Him.

To describe this, He used the example of branches on a grapevine, which are completely connected with and fully dependent on the vine that they are attached to: "I am the vine,

you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit . . ." (John 15:5). The Blue Letter Bible's online concordance shows that the word "abide" indicates remaining both present and engaged, with full commitment to developing a relationship.

We can extend the principle of abiding in our most



important relationships with God the Father and Jesus Christ. Relationships are designed to enrich our lives deeply with love, shared experience, companionship, support, teaching and learning. The more we practice genuine engagement with one another, the more of these benefits we will gain!

FULFILLMENT THROUGH ENGAGING IN NOW

Practice making choices that create meaningful connections—don't miss out on them! While there are many forces in our lives that can easily divert our attention, it's empowering to remember that distractions *do not get to choose* what we focus on! God has given us the power of choice, and we can use it, both for our own good and for the good of others. To gain the benefits of fulfillment available in life as God designed it, choose to be present in thought, experience and relationships, remaining engaged in life as it happens—you won't regret it. **CC**



David Cobb attends the Indianapolis congregation of the United Church of God. He lives and works in Columbus, Indiana, with his wife Mandie and their three children, HannahBeth, Joshua and Elijah.

A WATCHFUL & READY DISCIPLE

by Joe Neff

“But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into” (Luke 12:39).

When I read text like this, it takes me back to the years I spent in retail loss prevention. The world of theft is relentless, requiring you to always be on watch. There were the simple, obvious things to “watch” for: cars with all dark-tinted windows and temporary paper tags; jackets worn in warmer weather or anyone with a

backpack or large purse. Then there was, of course, the homeless guy riding into your store on his bike . . . that one was pretty obvious.

But there were those subtle, less obvious things to consider as well. Such as watching the path a person took, the way they pushed the shopping cart, what they were looking at and how long or short they were looking at it. The sideways glances and looks over the shoulder, then the placement of a gift card or money beside the cash register, later finding itself into a pocket.

READY FOR ACTION

Over time, I learned that watching and knowing what to look for was indeed important, but it couldn't be the entire focus. In the watching, there had to be the crucial elements of discernment and being ready for action. The type of person you were and who you became through experiences or training determined how you responded to a thief and ultimately the outcome of the investigation or situation.

You couldn't spend all your energy and time watching while being slow to take action. You had to watch long enough to discern what was actually happening. You couldn't be jumpy, looking at everyone and everything as a sign of theft. At some point, if everything is a sign, then nothing is a sign. Your work could get discredited to the point that when something was indeed going down, people might not trust your approach or your message because of your past stances.

What Jesus is saying in Luke 12:39 is more about taking an active approach rather than being only defensive or reactive. He says as much in the verse that follows, "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Luke 12:40). Among the many words within the Gospel's text, we find the command to watch and to be ready. They both happen at the same time. You can't have one without the other.

The word "watched" means to be vigilant, awake, alert and ready. Physically, yes, but it also speaks of a spiritual state of watching. Ready means standing by for action, being prepared



Among the many words within the Gospel's text, we find the command to watch and to be ready. They both happen at the same time. You can't have one without the other.

and fit for a purpose. "You watch," Jesus says, and in that watching, "you be ready."

WATCHING FOR WHAT?

The apostle Peter wrote of this state of mind when he said: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God . . ." (2 Peter 3:10-12).

Look at yourself, he is saying. Look at who and what you are.

Be watchful of your personal spiritual condition and ask yourself if there are areas that need to be corrected or strengthened within your life. These areas can become evident if we go to the Bible and truly listen to what it says. If we truly hear, then we can apply those words with great effort and prayer.

The world around us offers much to watch, much to be worried about or to consider. We should, within reason, take note of those things, but we must not allow the noise to lead us to be distracted or led down a path of confusion or conspiracy. You and I should not take our focus off what is at the core of the Christian calling, as Peter wrote, “What manner of person ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?”

DON'T BE DISTRACTED

Distraction is one of Satan's greatest tactics, and it's often used by shoplifters as well. Many shoplifters will work as teams with some of the individuals purposely trying to create a distraction. One, who looks the part of a shoplifter, will work to keep the focus and energy on themselves, while someone else actually exits the store with stolen items. Jesus warned His disciples of distraction: “Then He said to the disciples, “The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. And they will

say to you, “Look here!” or “Look there!” Do not go after them or follow them” (Luke 17:22-23).

Many things must happen before the return of Christ, and many things will be evident when that time comes. We don't know when any of that will be, and that's kind of the point of the imagery Christ uses. Each day I walked into a building, I knew that somewhere out there was a thief who would eventually enter the store. I didn't know when, but I knew it would happen. There were times I was burned out, emotionally, mentally and physically, and it was in those moments I wasn't prepared or ready for what I knew would come. The thief would come; the thief would go. Items were stolen, and I felt a sense of guilt. Why wasn't I ready for this? I knew it would happen. There were other days too. The days when I was ready, because I had watched, I had prepared myself and discerned when and how to respond, meeting the thief in the aisle or at the exit door. You will have bad days. Perhaps even bad weeks, months or even years.

To us, Jesus is calling out as He called out to the Church in Sardis: “Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore, how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you” (Revelation 3:2-3).

“Will” is a seemingly small word that holds immense significance. Jesus *will* come again, and the Kingdom of God *will* be established on this earth.



To us, Jesus is calling out as He called out to the Church in Sardis: “Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain.”

There's a helmet, the one of hope and of salvation that Paul mentioned. You and I must hold on to the hope of salvation.

Will *you* be among those who watch? Will *you* be among those who will be ready?

A SENSE OF URGENCY

Each generation of Christians who have gone before, and those that follow after, must hold fast to a sense of urgency, doing the work of preparing themselves and preparing a people. Notice the words of Paul to the Church in Thessalonica: "But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thessalonians 5:1-6). To be sober is another way of saying to be watchful; it conveys a sense of alertness and temperance in contrast to being distracted.

ACTION

Followers of The Way have not been called to be passive watchers but rather to be those who take action; to know the truth, and to make use of the truth they know. Paul puts it this way, "But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation" (1 Thessalonians 5:8).

Using familiar armor imagery of the day, Paul speaks of a breastplate and a helmet. You and I must have faith, which is belief, trust and confidence. It's not faith or confidence in your own ability, but faith in God and Jesus Christ. This faith spoken of is coupled with love. You and I must love a love that is selfless, sacrificial and unconditional. It is how we love God and how we love others by the very life we live.



Then there's a helmet, the one of hope and of salvation that Paul mentioned. You and I must hold on to the hope of salvation. Salvation speaks to being rescued from the eternal consequences of sin. "For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:9-11).

YOU BE READY, YOU BE PREPARED

For the watchful and ready disciple, there is a promise of hope. A promise of a changed life and the promise of the coming Kingdom of God. Let it be a daily prayer of yours, for God to open your eyes, your heart and your mind to be watchful and to be ready so that His work, and His will can be done. In your life and in the lives of others.

Jesus told His disciples then, and He tells His disciples now: you watch, not only the things around you, but also the things within you. "Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing" (Matthew 24:46). **CC**



Joe Neff serves as an Assistant Pastor in Eastern Washington state where he enjoys getting lost in the mountains and woods. Husband, father and pursuer of the written word.



ORGANIZED CONFUSION

How Small Choices Shape a Lifetime

As a teenager, my mom was constantly getting onto me about making my room look at least halfway respectable. I remember confidently telling her that I knew where everything was and that I had it completely under control. I called it organized confusion. She called it a pigsty. I can smile about it now—but at the time, I was convinced I was right.

The same pattern showed up in other areas of my life. When homework was assigned or a big project was due, I would wait until the last minute to get it done. My parents encouraged me not to wait so long. They told me I would avoid stress, do better work and feel more at peace. But I thought I knew better, so I did it my way.

Then came driving. I often let my gas tank run almost empty, ignoring the warning light. Sure enough, I would run out of gas and have to call friends to rescue me. One day, my next-door neighbor said something that stuck with me: “You know, it takes just as much effort to fill up your gas tank when it’s half full as it does when it’s 99% empty.” That simple statement carried more wisdom than I realized at the time.

Does any of this sound familiar?

When I look back over my life, I see a pattern: small, poor choices that turned into habits. Those habits shaped attitudes, attitudes shaped character and character shaped my future. Now, as a father and

grandfather, I’ve tried to pass that wisdom on. Sometimes my children listened, sometimes they didn’t. But sometimes we need to learn some lessons the hard way.

When it all comes down to it, life is about choices. It’s estimated that we make around 35,000 conscious decisions every single day. Some are minor—what to wear, what to eat, what to say in passing. Others are life-altering—who to marry, what career to pursue, whether to follow Christ and whether to be baptized. Making better choices as a teenager isn’t about being perfect; it’s about being intentional. The habits you build now shape your future more than you realize.

Here are three biblical principles that can help you make wiser daily decisions.

1. ACT AS IF CHRIST WERE SITTING RIGHT NEXT TO YOU

Waiting until temptation shows up to decide your next step puts you at a disadvantage. Temptation doesn’t knock on the front door; it shows up in your pocket. Social media, streaming platforms, endless scrolling—it’s all designed to captivate your attention. The question then is, what are you allowing into your mind?

When you are alone in your room, what websites are you visiting? When you’re with your friends, what are you laughing at? Would you be proud to share your browsing history with your parents? More

importantly, if Jesus Christ were sitting right next to you, would He approve?

Not everything online is bad. There is helpful, educational and inspiring content available. But scripture reminds us that Satan is called “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2). He understands influence, distraction and how to appeal to your weaknesses.

But he doesn’t show up with horns and a pitchfork. He comes disguised as something harmless, entertaining, relatable and funny. He wants you comfortable; he wants your guard down. His goal is simple: get you to make small, bad choices that form bad habits, which shape bad character.

But here’s the good news: we serve a God who has already overcome the enemy. In John 16:33, Jesus says, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” Jesus was victorious over sin and death, and He offers us His strength. The key is to invite Him into every decision. Before you click, before you speak, before you respond—pause and ask: Would I do this if Christ were physically sitting beside me? Because spiritually, He is.

2. CHOOSE YOUR FRIENDS CAREFULLY

The people you surround yourself with will either sharpen you or dull you. Scripture says in 1 Corinthians 15:33, “Do

Waiting until temptation shows up to decide your next step puts you at a disadvantage.

not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits.’” That’s not a suggestion, it’s a warning.

In high school, I had a friend who liked to gamble. He would constantly ask me if I wanted to bet on football or baseball games. At first, I said no. But the more he asked, the more exciting it seemed. Maybe I could win some easy money. It started small, but it grew very quickly. One time, I lost a bet and owed him \$100. When I told him I’d pay him when I could, he said I’d better pay him now, or else. That was the moment I realized something: he wasn’t a real friend.

There’s an old saying: “A bad apple can spoil a whole bunch of good apples, but a good apple can’t make a bad apple good.” When it comes to friendships, ask yourself: Do my friends push me closer to God or further away? Do they respect my values? Do I feel pressure to compromise around them?

If you spend enough time around someone, you will start to think like them, talk like them and behave like them. If your closest circle is filled with integrity, faith and honesty, that influence will rub off. If your circle is filled with negativity, selfishness and immorality, that influence will also rub off.

I still have a childhood friend I grew up with in Church. For over five decades, he has been like the big brother I never had. He pushed me closer to God. He respected my values. His friendship made me stronger. His friendship has been invaluable. If your current friendships are pulling you in the wrong direction, it may be time to make a courageous decision.

3. ACCEPT THAT MISTAKES HAPPEN—LEARN FROM THEM

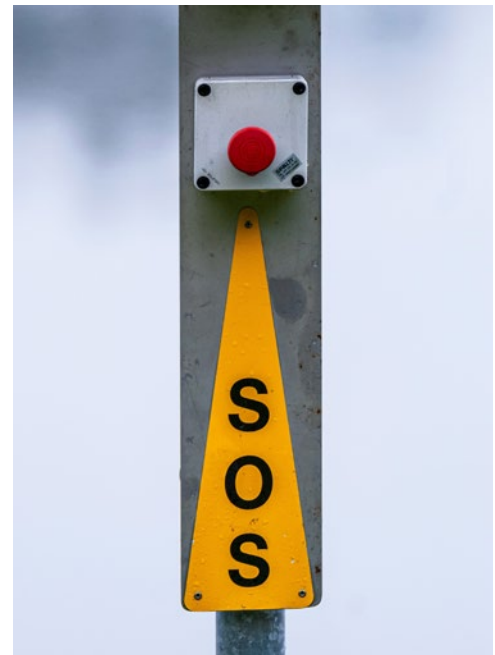
I could tell you story after story of mistakes I’ve made. Poor decisions, wrong words, missed opportunities and regrets. But mistakes don’t have to define you. What defines you is what you do after you fall.

One of my favorite hobbies is golf. Years ago, I played with a semi-pro golfer who gave me advice I’ve never forgotten. After I hit a terrible shot, I got frustrated and wanted to immediately “fix it” by swinging harder on the next one. He stopped me and said, “When you hit a bad shot, don’t hit another one. Play to your strengths. You can still score well even after a mistake.”

You’re going to hit bad shots. You’re going to say things you regret. You’re going to fail. But don’t compound one bad decision with another. If you fall, get up. In Proverbs 24:16, it says, “For a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again.” The difference between maturity and immaturity is repentance and growth.

If you scroll to something inappropriate, skip over it. If you speak harshly to someone, make it right. If your parents ask you to do something, choose obedience instead of attitude. If you’re struggling spiritually, ask God to help you choose Him.

You can still finish strong—even if you’ve hit a few bad shots.



THE ENDING: FILL THE TANK BEFORE YOU RUN EMPTY

Remember my neighbor’s wisdom about the gas tank? That lesson applies far beyond driving.

It takes less effort to:

- Clean your room regularly than tackling a disaster.
- Study consistently than cramming in a panic.
- Guard your heart early than repair it after damage.
- Build good habits now than break bad ones later.

Life doesn’t fall apart overnight; it slowly drifts through small compromises. But the opposite is also true. Strong character isn’t built in one dramatic moment. It’s built through thousands of small, intentional choices—every single day. Fill the tank before you run empty. Because one day you’ll look back and realize that the “organized confusion” you once defended was just a series of unexamined choices. You don’t have to be perfect. You don’t have to have it all figured out. You just have to decide—today—to be intentional. **CC**



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WHAT IS *Biblical Modesty?*

by Tarra McGuire

On the sixth day of creation, God made mankind in His image. After looking at everything that He made, He said it was indeed very good (Genesis 1:26-31). When He created Adam and Eve, they were naked and felt no shame (Genesis 2:25). Only after they sinned by eating of the tree God commanded them not to eat did they feel shame. They hid their nakedness by making coverings with fig leaves. Later, after they had been removed from the Garden of Eden, God showed them how to make clothing from skins to cover themselves (Genesis 3:7 and 3:21).

The Bible doesn't give us the dimensions of their clothes or tell us exactly what was covered and how much of it. If modesty could be achieved simply with the right measurements, God would have given them; He doesn't shy away from measuring when it is necessary. In fact, in the whole Bible, there is really not much on just how much of our bodies we are allowed to show, which begs the question, what exactly is Biblical modesty? Is Biblical modesty all about our appearance, or does it go deeper?

MODESTY IS NOT JUST FOR GIRLS

I should preface this by saying that, since I'm a woman, more of this article's focus will be on women. However, gentlemen, you can still apply the principles of this writing,

so don't ignore this article because "it's just for girls." As men striving to be like Christ, principles of modesty are important for you as well.

The majority of what we read about biblical modesty and handling our bodies is located in the New Testament. I believe this is due to the early Church living among the Greeks and Romans, who were deeply entrenched in sexual immorality and idolatry. They used their bodies not for God, but for pagan rituals and fulfilling lusts. Some converted Christians came from backgrounds like this (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Today's world is incredibly sexual and treats men and women as objects to fulfill each other's lusts. The New Testament writings give practical advice about modesty that is applicable today. In the Old Testament, we read more about humility than modesty, but they go hand-in-hand.

ATTENTION SEEKING AND PRIDE

The first thing most people think of when they hear "modesty" is not showing much of your body, primarily for women. While apparel is an aspect of modesty (for both men and women), this is not the root of modesty. What clothing is considered modest is, and will always be, subjective since it will change as culture, era and status change. God simply does not give us a universal rule of what is modest and what is not.

But modesty is bigger than just what we wear. Modesty is an outward display of humility—being free from vanity, pride or boastfulness about ourselves or about our abilities—and one of the ways we honor God with our bodies. When we are immodest in our dress, attitude or speech, we dishonor Him.

The world tells us we have a right to wear whatever we want, and that we should dress to feel empowered, confident, sexy and to love ourselves. This sounds fun and liberating!

The Bible says: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Revised Standard Version). The world tells us we are free to do as we please with our bodies, but the Bible tells us we are not, nor should we want to be. Independence and freedom in the world really just mean that you are still a slave to sin, and therefore, you have no hope (Romans 6:18-23 and 2 Peter 2:19).

The world views it as a point of pride to have people lust after you. We can’t control other people’s desire, but as Christians we should do what we can to not be the object of someone’s lust, “Then let us no more pass judgment on one another, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother” (Romans 14:13, RSV) There is no shame in attraction, or in being attractive, but trying to make others lust after us, or being vain and proud of how attractive you are, is sinful and shameful.

When I was a teenager, modesty was a challenge. I dressed like my friends did and got lots of compliments, and I loved that! It was easy to rationalize my clothing by comparing it to others who were wearing more revealing things, or I would buy something inappropriate and tell my mom I would wear a sweater over it, then conveniently “forget.” I would try to convince her to let me wear a bikini because it was “impossible” to find a cute but modest bathing suit, and I didn’t want to look like an old lady. I complained frequently about how hard it was to find anything both cute and modest, and I consistently picked cute over modest.

As I grew older, I saw younger girls mimic some of my behaviors, outfits and attitudes. This made me realize that I had been self-focused, not God-focused, in both my everyday life and even when coming before God at church services. I realized something as simple as an outfit could impede the good work God

I asked myself, “Why would I imitate the fashion of people whom I didn’t want to be like when I grew up?”

**MODESTY IS AN OUTWARD
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wanted to do in me because of the example I was setting for others.

Instead, I started looking at women I admired and what they wore; women whose beauty came from their mind and their deeds, not just the clothes they wore. These women still looked fashionable, beautiful and put together. But more importantly, they were gracious, kind, humble and had the right priorities in life: God and family. There was a special elegance and light in them that I wanted to emulate. When I imagined the godly woman I wanted to be when I grew up, I saw her dressing differently than I had been. I asked myself, “*Why would I imitate the fashion of people whom I didn’t want to be like when I grew up?*”

My intent back then wasn’t to be sexually desired or have others envy me, but it also wasn’t to intentionally avoid those things either. Intent matters, and God cares about our hearts. But we need to be truly honest with ourselves about what that intent is, and the why behind it.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS FOR MODESTY IN HUMILITY AND ATTENTION:

- How much time do you spend getting ready every day compared to the time spent with God?
- Do you justify wearing things considered less modest because they look nice?
- Do you actively seek compliments on your physical appearance?
- Do you consider modesty when you shop?
- If you were the most modest one in the room, what would that room look like?

MATERIAL MODESTY IS ABOUT WHETHER OR NOT WE GLORIFY GOD WITH OUR MATERIAL BLESSINGS.

MATERIAL MODESTY

In 1 Timothy 2:9-10, we read some principles that apply to both men and women, “In like manner also, [let] the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.” Braids and the pearls are not what is wrong here, but the habit of dressing ostentatiously and drawing attention to themselves. Both men and women can be guilty of this.

Homes, vacations, cars, clothes, bags, nails, shoes and food; the list can go on and on for ways that we spend our money. None of these things are bad either! God blesses people in many ways, one of which is material wealth. However, He wants to see if we use it only for ourselves, or if we will share it with others, “But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?” (1 John 3:17).

It is not wrong to look nice or to live comfortably, but if we put those things above helping people who need it, it is wrong. If we ignore the needs of our neighbor but drive a brand-new car, maybe we have an issue in our hearts.

Material modesty is not about dressing in the cheapest clothes you can find, always driving an old car, or rolling out of bed and not caring about your appearance at all. It is about whether or not we glorify God with our material blessings. Our presentation matters to God, and that includes both how we look and how we treat others. We should



not be generous to appear righteous (Matthew 6:3-4), but because we have compassion for fellow humans. God seeks humble, modest and generous people, not conceited or worldly ones.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS FOR MODESTY IN WEALTH:

- Do you care a lot about the brand you are wearing?
- Do you examine other people’s clothes and deem your own “better?”
- How much money and time do you spend on your physical appearance?
- Do you spend money and time on other people?
- Are you generous and compassionate with people who have less than you?

BE MODEST AS CHRIST IS MODEST

There are many other ways, as Christians, that we can behave modestly, but in general, conduct ourselves as if Christ were right next to us. If you think it's okay to say something in front of all your friends but would feel like it's wrong to say in front of Christ, consider why that is, and if you should still say it. Apply this principle to your virtual speech too; think carefully before you post or send something in the "public" of social media or in the "privacy" of personal messages and texts. Jesus Christ is your advocate, talking to the Father about you and defending you. Don't make His job harder by saying things you shouldn't! "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1, English Standard Version).

Specific ways we can behave modestly are building others up and being truly happy for other's successes. When it is your time for success, share it with others who have helped you get to where you are; nothing we do is completely on our own in this world. Even if the people who helped you are strangers who put some helpful research together on the internet, share the spotlight. Another way is to ask people questions and talk about them, and when someone asks you a question, make sure to ask one in return and really listen to their answer. There are many other ways to practice modesty, but a very important one that is often overlooked as part of the discussion is swearing, profanity and crudeness. These things are not acceptable, not modest, and not Christ-like, no matter how common we see and hear them



in the world. People weakly rely on these for humor, but it isn't okay as "just a joke" either. Minding our mouth is probably one of the hardest, but most important things we can do as Christians (James 3:2).

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS FOR MODESTY IN ACTIONS:

- Do you put others down for a laugh?
- Do you overshare your accomplishments to impress people?
- Do you pretend you know things to avoid looking dumb?
- Do you gossip?
- Does your overall behavior guide people to Christ or push them away?

After reflecting on these questions, I know I still have plenty to work on, and I would be surprised if anyone reading doesn't see something they can improve in their life. I hope that you take it to heart and talk about it with your friends to help each other improve as brothers and sisters in Christ. "As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend" (Proverbs 27:17). There are many more options now for clothing since we have online shopping and modesty-focused fashion influencers to help those who need a little inspiration. You can be modest and look great with more ease than ever before,

THINK CAREFULLY BEFORE YOU POST OR SEND SOMETHING IN THE "PUBLIC" OF SOCIAL MEDIA OR IN THE "PRIVACY" OF PERSONAL MESSAGES AND TEXTS.

so I urge you to take steps in that direction.

"Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God" (1 Peter 3:3-4).

Modesty is not about how much skin you show—not that you shouldn't consider that—but about your attitude and the deeper intentions behind what you do and say. When you start each day, as you get ready and put your appearance together, consider what you will think about and how you will talk to others. If there is an opportunity to put someone down for a big laugh, will you take it? Will you let your emotions rule you and lash out? Will you be patient and work hard? When you get ready each day, dress yourself in mercy and in kindness. Stand out from others not because of your clothing but because of God's light and glory that shine through you. **CC**



Tarra McGuire is a product engineer and attends church in Flint, Michigan. She loves visiting her family, especially her baby niece Ava, and spending time with her husband, Andrew.



PERSONAL APOLOGETICS

Are You Ready to Give an Answer?

Growing up in the Church of God, I often heard people quote a familiar phrase taken from 1 Peter 3:15 they would summarize as: “Be ready to give an answer for the hope that lies within you.” You may be familiar with this scripture, too.

If you’ve heard about or studied *apologetics*, you may know that the practice of apologetics comes from this scripture in 1 Peter 3:15. Contrary to how the word sounds, apologetics isn’t about apologizing for your faith—it’s about creating a logical defense or rational answer for your Christian beliefs.

When I was a teen, that scripture actually troubled me a bit. If someone asked me why I wasn’t running in the big track meet on Saturday, or where I was going for a week in the fall, I often felt a sense of pressure when I answered. I wanted to make sure I represented my faith correctly. And if they were interested in learning more about God’s way of life, I felt a responsibility to give the perfect answer that would encourage that curiosity.

That necessitated being prepared to answer any question. What were the exact historical facts that proved Christmas has pagan roots? Was it Emperor Constantine that legally “changed” the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday back in Roman times? What if someone brought up a difficult scripture I hadn’t studied and couldn’t explain? What if someone replied, “You’re overthinking it, God understands” or “Don’t you know Christians are saved by grace? You’re off the hook!” How would I respond? Would I remember the scriptures to point to?

Whether the idea of being put on the spot to answer for your beliefs is a welcome challenge or causes you a sense of anxiety, the reality is that most of us *will* be asked about our faith. The truth is, Church of God believers *do* often stand out in the world due to our different beliefs and practices. Non-religious people may ask us questions about our faith. Even most Christian denominations don’t typically keep the seventh-day Sabbath and

Holy Days and may wonder why we do. If you’ve ever felt uncomfortable answering for your different beliefs at school, at your job, or with friends, you’re not alone.

Over time, I began to view “giving an answer” a bit differently—and stopped worrying about crafting the most perfect answer and hitting all the correct scriptures or points. As I developed a deeper relationship with God and more of a passion for His Word, I was able to take a step back and just explain why my faith makes sense to me personally. Of course, that does require us to make sure we actually understand and believe what we profess to believe.

If you’re growing up in the Church, your parents or perhaps a grandparent brought you to church and taught you about this way of life—but as you mature, you’ll have to step out of your comfort zone and take ownership of your calling. Here are a few ways you can support that process and feel confident sharing your faith.

1. PROVE YOUR BELIEFS

When coupled with humility, knowledge and understanding can be empowering. If you aren’t solid on a doctrine or scripture, or you aren’t sure how to explain it, drill down and study that topic until you are satisfied. 1 Thessalonians 5:21 says to “Test all things; hold fast what is good.”

Studying things critically may initially raise more questions for you. That’s fine—and in my opinion, it’s healthy. Keep studying to answer those questions. Look up scriptures on that topic, read commentaries, search UCG.org for sermons and articles about that topic, listen to recorded Ambassador Bible College classes, and talk to your minister, elders or trusted spiritual mentors in your congregation.

Ultimately, you need to build an argument for your beliefs that satisfies *you*. There have been times in my life where I asked someone a question and didn’t feel like I got a full enough answer.

Ultimately, you need to build an argument for your beliefs that satisfies you. An explanation that satisfies someone else might not satisfy you, and that's okay.

I've learned that you can't stop there, because if you do, you'll always have doubts. An explanation that satisfies someone else might not satisfy you, and that's okay.

When you feel confident in the topic, if you're interested in going deeper, it can actually be helpful to read counter arguments and then study and research to disprove them. Read articles. Watch debates with people for and against your position and examine the scriptures they both bring up. Try to be proven wrong, and critically examine the counter arguments presented. Have (respectful) discussions with friends who don't agree with you on the topic and see what they have to say. If there are cracks in your theology, this can test and expose them, showing you where you need to grow. Compare everything you hear to what the Bible actually says. You'll be so *solid* on that topic once you've studied it, tested it, and ultimately proved it for yourself.

2. LOOK AT THE CONTINUITY OF THE BIBLE

Have you ever been asked a question about your faith that you found difficult to answer? Maybe it's about a specific scripture you haven't studied yet. Maybe someone makes a statement about the Bible or Christianity that sounds wrong, but you can't quite put your finger on why.

In times like that, take another step back and look at the continuity of the Bible—or the message as a whole. The Holy Days are a great example of this. Maybe you're talking to a teacher about leaving for the Feast and they say, "If you're a Christian, you should know that those Jewish holidays were done away with!" Now might not be the time to dive into a deep debate about the Old versus the New Covenant. Or perhaps a Sunday-keeping Christian friend brings up an isolated scripture—and out of context, it *does* almost sound like it's saying we don't need to keep the Sabbath or the Holy Days anymore. You know there must be more to it, but you haven't studied that specific scripture yet. How do you answer?

Once you've studied your Bible as a whole, you can often take a step back and give an answer from the continuity of the Bible. One simple argument from continuity might look like this: If the Israelites were commanded to keep the Passover *before* the law was officially given at Sinai—before the Old Covenant was established—then the Holy Days predate the Old Covenant and therefore can't end with the Old Covenant. Also, in the New Testament, Paul writes about keeping the Passover (1 Corinthians 11:17-34) and Days of Unleavened Bread (1 Corinthians 5:8) decades after Christ's death, showing that he was keeping these days well after the New Covenant had been established.

A point that also always comes back to me is the fact that there are prophecies in Zechariah talking about how the whole world will keep the Feast of Tabernacles (Zechariah 14:16-19), suggesting a future time where these days are still kept. We also

know that Jesus Himself kept the Holy Days!

You likely won't need to touch on all those points in a casual conversation unless they nitpick, but you can confidently state that the Holy Days are seen all throughout the Bible—not just bound to the Israelites in the wilderness or to the Jewish people. If Jesus kept the Holy Days, and apostles after His death kept the Holy Days, then it makes sense that Christians today should keep them too.

For me, that made a lot of sense as to why I still observe the Holy Days today. That approach has also helped me confidently explain why I personally do choose to keep the Holy Days, even when many other Christians in the world don't. It takes reading the Bible as a whole story to develop that understanding of biblical continuity. But it helps you avoid feeling trapped if you're caught on a specific difficult scripture.

So, when in doubt, don't isolate a scripture. Look at it within the context and storyline of the entire Bible.

3. ASK GOD FOR WISDOM AND DISCERNMENT

Above all, talk to God about all of your questions. Ask Him for wisdom, discernment and boldness. Pray before you study the Bible. View your Bible study as getting to know Him.

Psalm 145:18 says, "The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth." He wants you to get to know Him—and talking to Him as you study His Word is a great way to develop that relationship. Pause and meditate when you read His Word. Ask Him to show you what you need to learn, and ultimately how to be more like Him. God's Word, His laws, His poetry, and even how He interacts with people in the Bible all show us His character and how much He loves us.

Finally, don't give up. Figuring out your faith is a lifelong task, and the sooner we get comfortable knowing that we'll always have something to learn, the less overwhelming it might feel. So instead of worrying about whether you have an answer when put on the spot, make a commitment to dive into God's word like never before. Wrestle with it, study it, and prove it to yourself. You'll find that ultimately, God will give you your answer. **CC**



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