



COMPASS CHECK

Helping you turn your spiritual compass toward God



BROKEN HOME UNBROKEN FAITH

Will This Be Your Best Feast Ever?

Without Compromise

Are You Reaching Your Potential?

Notes on the Way

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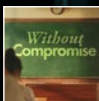
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COMPASS CHECK

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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Publisher: UCGIA | **Council of Elders:** Scott Ashley, Aaron Dean, Jorge de Campos, Peter Eddington, Andy Lee, Ben Light, Len Martin, Darris McNeely, Tim Pebworth (chairman), Gary Petty, Rex Sexton, Paul Wasilkoff

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Vol. 12, No. 2

United Youth Magazine | Fall 2026

COMPASS CORNER

Dear Compass Checkers,

When I was a boy, I dreaded the end of summer. No matter how much I tried, the summer seemed to fly by, and I had to go back to school. School was not overly traumatic for me as it is for some. It did come with the usual stress, boredom and exhaustion, along with a few bright spots. Overall, the whole process was just not enjoyable for me.

One thing that always helped ease the transition from the freedom of summer to the challenges of the school year was knowing that, not long after school started, I would be preparing to leave for God's Feast of Tabernacles. No matter how much pressure, responsibility or drama would build up, there was relief coming. The Feasts of God were always something that I greatly looked forward to. Although my keeping of them has matured over the decades, they are still the highlight of the year. God, in His ultimate wisdom, knows what we need and appointed these Days for our benefit.

The Fall edition of *Compass Check* will likely reach you just before you leave for God's Feasts. Hopefully, we can all truly set aside the things going on in our lives and use God's Feast to reset our focus. There will be a long winter waiting for us when we get back. The pressures of school, work and family life are still going to be at home. If we give our full attention to learning about God and His way during Trumpets, Atonement, Tabernacles and the Eighth Day, we will be better prepared to handle the strain of everyday life.

My prayer is that this edition of *Compass Check* will be helpful both in preparing us for God's Feasts and in helping us with the challenges that face us when we return.

May you all have an uplifting and spiritually edifying festival season!



Devin Schulz

Editor of Compass Check magazine

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WHOSE FEASTS ARE THESE?

These are God's feasts – not ours, not our parents' or our church's! "The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts" (Leviticus 23:2). God wants to share His feasts with us. He expects us to go to the Feast each year—to rejoice, to give offerings and to observe the holy convocations.

Remember the example of Moses when he came to the burning bush? God spoke to him from the bush and told him to take his shoes off because the ground he was standing on was holy. This is just one example showing that God's presence is what makes something holy. That's right, God is attending the Feast with us every year! Make this the best Feast ever by going for the right reasons.

I heard someone say one time that they had the best Feast ever. I said "Oh yeah, why was that?" They began to go on for the next 30 minutes about all the golfing they did, the places they went to, the restaurants they ate in, the spa, the shopping. I think at the very end of the conversation they mentioned that they met some people at services. It sounded more like a vacation than a feast about God and His plan for humanity.

While there is nothing wrong with having a good time, we need to make sure that the primary focus of the Feast is to worship God. With services every day, we get to hear over two months of messages in a week's time. We are blessed to hear some of the best sermons, and we are in a concentrated area of like-minded brethren. So where should our minds be?

If we attend the Feast only for physical benefits and personal enjoyment, then we've missed the bigger purpose.

God's people save ten percent of their family's financial increase each year to attend the Feast in one of the places God has chosen to place His name. "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21).

We must ask ourselves, where is my heart? At the beach, the pool, sightseeing or spending time with friends? Are we focused on learning more about God and applying what we hear each day to our life now and back home? The answer to those questions can make all the difference.

MAKE THE FEAST ABOUT OTHERS

The worst Feast I have ever had was when I only thought about myself. It was all about going sightseeing, or to the arcade, or dirtbike riding or just what I wanted to do. I told myself after that Feast that I never wanted to do that again. How about when doing those things, I could include others who don't have that much second tithe to do those activities?

"Give freely and become more wealthy; be stingy and lose everything. The generous will prosper; those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed" (Proverbs 11:24-25, New Living Translation). Jesus taught that it is more blessed to give than to receive, and we should apply that to our Feast this year. If you want to have the best Feast ever, then make someone else's Feast their best Feast ever.

You can do that by inviting someone to lunch or dinner, buying someone a coffee or a gelato and taking time to get to know someone who is hanging around by themselves. The Feast passes by incredibly fast. Look for opportunities to serve.

You might volunteer as an usher or greeter, help at the information table, assist elderly members, and help families with young children. You will get out of the Feast what you put into it!



*If you want to have the best Feast ever,
then make someone else's Feast
their best Feast ever.*

BE RESPONSIBLE

Did you have a part-time job this year or were you paid for certain things your parents asked you to accomplish? Did you save your own second tithe? God commands us to save 10 percent of our money and then spend it to rejoice at the Feast. "And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires" (Deuteronomy 14:26).

We must be responsible with our money and our time. I don't know about you, but getting to spend 10 percent of our increase from all year in just eight days adds up to a lot of money.

Most people do not have unlimited resources. "If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities. And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven? And if you are not faithful with other people's things, why should you be trusted with things of your own?" (Luke 16:10-12, NLT).

God expects us to go to the Feast and have a good time, but He also expects us to be responsible and not overdo it. The Feast is an exciting time where we get to meet new people and rekindle old friendships. We need to be careful not to "burn the candle at both ends," as they say. Remember, we are going to the Feast to learn about God, not to see how late we can stay up and not be able to stay awake in church the next morning!

This year I will be responsible by managing my feast funds wisely, getting adequate rest, balancing recreation with spiritual priorities, and making decisions that honor God.



REJOICE

The word rejoice in the Hebrew means to brighten up, be cheerful, joyful, glad and to be merry. The dictionary definition means to feel joy or great delight. It's a word to describe great happiness and delight over something. "And you shall rejoice in your feast" (Deuteronomy 16:14). This is a command! Imagine that. God expects us to go to His Feast with great joy and delight. Go with the biggest smile on your face, knowing how blessed you are to know the truth! Rejoice this Feast, both in the physical and more importantly the spiritual.

If we want to have the best Feast ever, we need to:

- Go to the Feast of Tabernacles for the right reasons.
- Make it someone else's best Feast ever.
- Be responsible with our time and resources.
- Rejoice before God.

This will be the best Feast ever! **CC**



Sal Cimino Jr. lives in Tampa, Florida, and attends UCG with his wife, Tina. He is the proud father of three grown children and cherishes every moment he can spend with his four grandchildren.

ARE YOU REACHING YOUR POTENTIAL?



by Devin Schulz

Have you ever scrolled through social media or looked around at school and thought that everyone else seems to be crushing it? People all around seem to be athletic, getting good grades, doing something cool or just looking happier than you feel. Maybe you find yourself asking, “Am I reaching my potential? Or just watching everyone reach theirs?”

Comparison can be an automatic reaction for many people.

We see highlight reels and start questioning our own worth or whether we’re missing out on something important. But here’s some good news: God values your potential even more than you do. In fact, His entire plan is centered on bringing every person to the supreme potential that He designed from the beginning.

The key to reaching your full potential lies in understanding why you were created.

YOU WERE MADE WITH PURPOSE

Genesis 2:7 reveals something powerful: “And the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.”

For the rest of creation, God simply spoke and it came to be. But for humans, He personally formed us, like a careful artist shaping something special, and breathed life into us. That shows intimate involvement and care.

You are not mass-produced nor an accidental afterthought. You are the pinnacle of God’s physical creation. Each person is fearfully and wonderfully made with a unique personality, talents and appearance. Each person also has potential to grow, learn, build relationships, enjoy God’s creation and pursue their own objectives.

Being led by God’s Spirit leads to gaining everything that truly matters, including sharing in Christ’s glory as heirs.

However, there is an even greater purpose at the heart of this truth. Genesis 1:26-27 says God made mankind in His image and likeness. Revelation 21:7 shows what that ultimately means, “Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children” (New International Version). Your full potential is to become a child of God. This means being born into His eternal family as an immortal spirit being. That’s why you were made in His image—so that we can be His offspring.

DON’T CHASE WHAT CAN’T FULFILL

Living in this physical world makes it easy to chase physical things that seem to bring meaning but will actually leave you unfulfilled. God compares those pursuits to having a broken water source.

Jeremiah 2:13 describes the mistake of forsaking God, Who is called the spring of living water, and digging broken cisterns, or reservoirs, which cannot hold water. For us, that might look like pouring all our energy into building an online image, chasing athletic achievements or pursuing perfect grades as our main source of worth. These things can appear as if they will make us feel complete. In reality, they deliver diminishing returns. Like pouring water into a broken well, the benefits are short-lived.

In contrast, in Isaiah 55:1-3 God invites thirsty people to

come to real waters and to receive lasting fulfilment. Jesus connected this to the Holy Spirit, the only source of true, lasting satisfaction (John 7:37-38). The lesson is clear. Emphasizing only the physical and our own desires leaves us coming up short. Being led by God’s Spirit leads to gaining everything that truly matters, including sharing in Christ’s glory as heirs (Romans 8:14-18).

God is not opposed to you enjoying and succeeding in physical endeavors. School, friendships, sports, hobbies, future career or fun are all things He created for our enjoyment! He gave His Word to equip us for success in each of those areas of life (1 Timothy 4:8; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Following God’s instructions while being led by His Spirit gives you the tools to reach your full potential in all of life, not just the spiritual parts.

PRACTICAL STEPS TO REACH YOUR POTENTIAL

Understanding why you were created reveals our true potential. But how do you actually live it out as a teen? Here are eight biblical principles that can help you grow into the person God designed you to be.

1. MAKE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD YOUR TOP PRIORITY

Jesus told His followers to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). This means making time with God through prayer, personal Bible study, meditation and living His way. This is the foundation everything else is built on. Your daily choices, what you interact with online, who you hang out with, how you spend your time and money, and whether you keep God’s laws, reveal what you truly value. These decisions have eternal consequences, but they also shape the quality of your life right now. When God is first, other priorities fall into better perspective.



2. SEEK GOD EARLY

“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth. . .” (Ecclesiastes 12:1, NIV). Building a relationship with God while you’re young creates positive habits that can last your whole life. It also helps you avoid painful regrets from bad choices that become much harder to undo later. The earlier you start, the more fully you can enjoy the blessings and the growth God wants to give you.

3. CREATE A CLEAR PICTURE OF THE PERSON YOU WANT TO BECOME

Proverbs 23:7 says, “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.” Spend time imagining the kind of man or woman you want to be. Not just the career you want but what kind of person you want to be. Do you want to be wise, kind, self-controlled, courageous or faithful? Maybe you want to be known as someone who encourages others instead of tearing them down? Read about godly virtues in Scripture. Write down those characteristics you want to be a part of your life. Then begin taking small steps toward that vision.

Excellence isn't about doing things perfectly. It's about giving our best effort because it honors God and builds real character in you

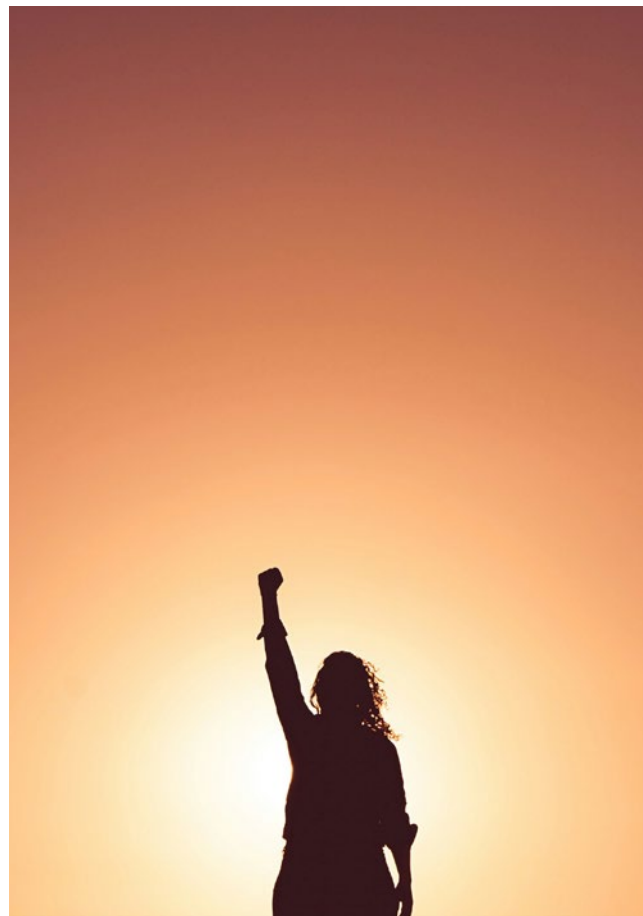
4. DEFINE YOUR GOALS AND MAKE A PRACTICAL PLAN

Proverbs 24:27 and 27:12 both stress the wisdom of planning ahead and preparing. Don’t just drift through high school or summer hoping things work out. Take time to write down specific goals in key areas: spiritual growth (daily prayer/Bible time), academics, physical health, helpful skills, relationships and character traits you want to develop. Break big goals into small, doable steps for this week or month. Planning isn’t unspiritual! It’s wise stewardship of the life and opportunities God gave you.

5. GUARD WHAT GOES INTO YOUR HEART AND MIND

Your thoughts and attitude will determine the type of person you become. Unsurprisingly, they’re under constant attack from all directions. If you have God’s plan for us in the forefront of your mind, you must be diligent to guard your heart above all else (Proverbs 4:23). Be intentional about what you consume

throughout the day. Whether it be social media, music, shows, movies or the influence of friends, ask, “Does this align with what God says is true and good?” If not, don’t allow it to influence you. When you are bombarded by negative thoughts, counter them with Scripture and prayer. Remind yourself of unchangeable truths. God exists, you were created for His purpose, and the Bible is His guide for your life.



6. STAY HUMBLE, NO MATTER HOW TALENTED OR SUCCESSFUL YOU BECOME

The book of Proverbs is packed with warnings about pride (Proverbs 22:4; 16:19-20; 18:12; 29:23). Pride limits your walk with God, relationships, education and future success. A proud spirit makes you unteachable and eventually leads to failure. Humble people are observant, teachable, respectful and quick to admit when they’re wrong or don’t know something. They keep learning and growing. Humility is the necessary attitude for real, lasting success and favor with both God and people. It’s also one of the most powerful qualities you can develop now.



7. STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE IN WHATEVER YOU DO

Ecclesiastes 9:10 tells us, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might” (NIV). God doesn’t want half-hearted effort or constant distraction. Whether it’s homework, sports practice, music, chores at home or serving in your congregation, bring your best focus and energy. Excellence isn’t about doing things perfectly. It’s about giving our best effort because it honors God and builds real character in you. Laziness and mediocrity cheat you out of growth and the satisfaction that comes from doing things well.

8. FOLLOW THROUGH ON YOUR COMMITMENTS

Jesus said in Luke 9:62 that no one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God. In the Christian life, there’s a forward direction with no turning back. When you make a commitment, whether to God, yourself, a friend or an employer, stick with it. Even if it means missing out on something fun or having to do something difficult. Keeping your word, even when it costs something (Psalm 15:4), builds integrity and trains you for bigger responsibilities God will give you later.

THE HOLY SPIRIT: THE POWER THAT MAKES IT POSSIBLE

You might be thinking, “This all sounds great, but I’m still struggling with feelings of inadequacy.” That’s normal! It’s also exactly why God offers something far better than our own willpower to help us grow: His Spirit.

When someone repents, believes the gospel, is baptized and has hands laid on them, they receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). The Holy Spirit is the very essence of God’s perfect nature working in you. It helps you understand the Bible, resist temptation, produce the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), and actually overcome the pulls of human nature.

God’s Spirit leading you is the vital component to reach our full potential. With it, real growth, overcoming and transformation become possible. Through God’s Spirit you can have that intimate relationship with our Creator. Those who are led by God’s Spirit now will one day be resurrected and changed from a physical to a spirit being. That’s the fulfillment of why you were created, and it is also the incredible gift God is offering you.

So... are you reaching your potential?

The world’s standard of potential is flashy and loud. It’s also temporary. It leaves people chasing the next thing because, despite the good it brings, it was never designed to satisfy our deepest needs.

God’s version is different. It is real, satisfying, and will last forever. You were created in His image with the capacity to become His literal child. He has given you His Word as a clear guide and He is offering you His Holy Spirit as the real way to meaning and fulfillment. The eight steps above are the practical way you can cooperate with God as He develops you into the incredible person He designed you to be.

Start (or continue) pursuing your real potential today. Talk to God about it in prayer. Open His Word and let it shape your thinking. Have a conversation with your parents or someone at Church about your goals. Take one small, faithful step in the right direction. He’s right there helping you through His Spirit every step of the way.

You were made for way more than temporary success. You were made for eternity in God’s family. With His help, you can reach that potential. **CC**



Devin Schulz is a pastor for United Church of God. He lives in Iowa with his wife and two boys. They serve God’s people in Iowa and Nebraska.



BROKEN HOME UNBROKEN FAITH

HOW FAITH SURVIVES IN A SPLIT-HOME CHILDHOOD

by Amber Duran

I'll never forget the first Bible study I ever did on my own.

I was in fourth or fifth grade, and my parents had been divorced since I was 4 years old. During one of our weekly Wednesday night visits, my dad sat me down and began to say some not-so-nice things about my church.

"Your church is a cult," he said, and proceeded to toss a book about cults into my elementary-school lap, which included a section about the Worldwide Church of God. I timidly shrugged and replied, "I just believe what the Bible says." I had no idea how to talk to my unbelieving father about what I believed, nor did I ever think I would have to defend my faith to my own dad. But there I was, doing just that.

I was sweating, my stomach churned and I was on the verge of tears. I went home, pulled out my Bible and found every reference I could on divorce. I remember reading Malachi 2:16 and connecting deeply with it: "For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence." The truth of that scripture resounded in my heart—this was violence. What once was whole was now in pieces.

The painful separation of my family made me wonder: How was I supposed to be happy? How could I ever be successful? Would I ever be able to rear a family of my own some day?

LIFE WITH AN UNBELIEVING PARENT

I'm what some call a fourth-generation Christian. God started weaving His truth into my family's story all the way back in the days of my great-grandmother, when she began to listen to Herbert W. Armstrong on the radio.

My mother met my father in high school, and they were married just before her first son was born. She was called and baptized into God's Church, while my father, who was raised Catholic, never really practiced any religion of his own. My mother raised my two brothers and I in the faith, but because my father never shared my mother's faith, there was a natural disconnect between them.

I have very little memory of the years my parents were together. Because they split when I was so young, the separation and divorce feel like my first memory of them both—I don't really remember any part of my childhood when both my parents were in the home together.



The truth of that scripture resounded in my heart—this was violence. What once was whole was now in pieces.

Unfortunately, my parents' divorce was not very amicable and that put my brothers and me in uncomfortable positions far too often. Many times, we were forced to choose which parent we wanted to spend time with, and how often. I can remember the intense inner turmoil and the extreme guilt I felt if I wanted to go with my dad, because then that meant I was leaving my mom alone. The hurt she felt was always plain on her face and in her tears. There was no right choice, but a choice had to be made nonetheless.

Sometimes my dad would take us over a weekend. When this happened, we would have to make personal choices about the Sabbath and how to keep it holy, even when we were encouraged to play video games or go to the mall or a waterpark. As respectfully and quietly as possible, we navigated those waters.

I don't believe that my parents put me in these positions maliciously. I never believed their divorce was my fault, but that didn't make life any easier, and I had to grow up quickly. Even if my parents had chosen to remain together, there would always have been some degree of strain or separation between them, because they didn't agree about God's truth.

GOD'S FAMILY DESIGN

These are issues God never wanted children (or adults) to face, and I share my story with the goal of offering hope and encouragement to you if you're going through a similar situation. Instead, the Eternal designed marriage to be a lifelong covenant between a husband and wife, and He established the family unit to depict the spiritual family He is in the process of building! Although Scripture recognizes limited circumstances in which separation or divorce may become necessary or permissible, those exceptions do not change God's original design for marriage

From the beginning, God created us in His image and said, "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:27-28). He engineered marriage to stand as a sacred covenant, where two become one (Genesis 2:24). The marital relationship between a husband and his wife is intended to represent the loving relationship between Jesus Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5:31-32). Children from this union—when viewed how God views them—are considered a blessing, a "heritage from the LORD... a reward" (Psalm 127:3)!

Matthew 19:6 says, "What God has joined together, let not man separate," and in verse 8, Jesus makes clear that He had only permitted divorce as a concession for "the hardness of [their] hearts."



Although God's intended family design wasn't what I experienced growing up, that didn't mean He was going to abandon me, and, similarly, He won't desert you. In Hebrews 13:5 we are reminded that the Almighty will not leave or forsake us; He will not abandon those He is calling. He can provide care, guidance and meaningful spiritual family relationships through His Church. It's as if He extends His hand to us as a loving Father does, and says, I'll show you the way. Follow me, child. For me, this way led directly to His Church.

I lived with my mother and had once-a-week visits at my dad's house after school. I saw my school and Church friends more than I saw my own father, which is odd to think about.

When I would read my Bible or hear sermons at services about God being a Father and wanting to build a family, I paid attention. I needed a family. My brothers needed a family. And we not only found that in God, but in the Church that He gave us.

We found fathers and mothers in our local congregation—men and women with families of their own who took the time to build relationships with us and fulfilled aspects of family for us that we never had. Fathers would take my brothers out hunting or teach them new skills. Mothers would check in to see how I was doing and would take me under their wing. It is truly a treasured gift that God gives to us through the assembly that He calls. To this day, the Church is my family. When members of the Church seek opportunities to practice Galatians 6:10, doing "good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith," beautiful things happen for a child like me, who found a healthy family life at Church.

When things felt especially hard through the years, Scripture reminded me that difficult times aren't without purpose. In fact, trials and challenges produce wonderful things!

"That the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7).

For me and many others, too, that refinement process began at a young age. And even though it's a painful thing to recollect or reflect on, that pain produced something greater in me: "... tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Romans 5:3-4).

Everything I needed for a good life was found in God's Word and His guidance. I owe my life and success all to God.

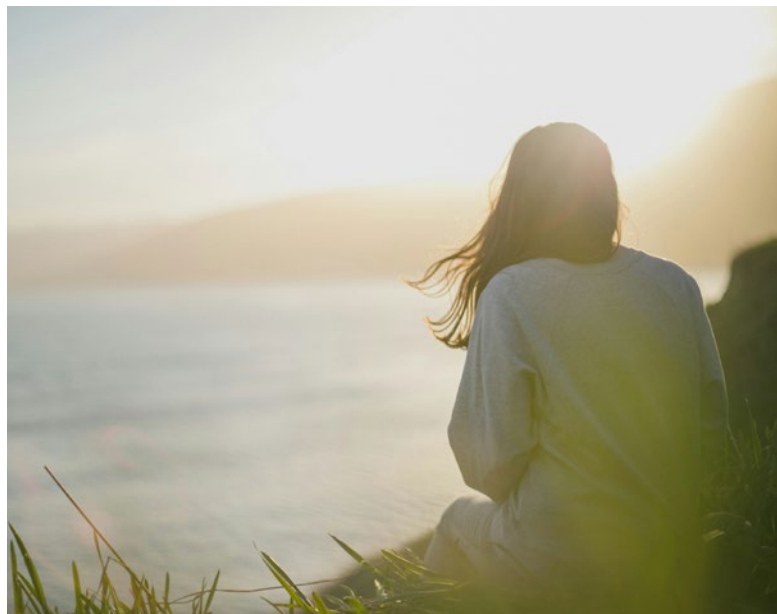
Once you've chosen to release bitterness and maintain a forgiving heart—not just saying the words because it's what you're supposed to do, but deeply and inwardly letting go of the hurt—there's no greater relief!

A HIGHER CALLING

Mankind's track record shows us that earthly families will have problems. Every person makes mistakes (Romans 3:23), and some are worse than others. However, when we learn to forgive at a young age, it can provide us with an incredibly liberating and peace-giving experience. Even when someone has not asked for forgiveness, we can choose to release bitterness, refuse to seek revenge and maintain a heart that is ready to forgive. Reconciliation and the restoration of trust, however, require genuine repentance and demonstrated change. In Colossians 3:13, Paul speaks plainly to the Church of God, reminding them that Christ's disciples are responsible for "bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do."

In my Christian walk, I've come to learn that I love God's law. Many will claim that it's a burden that keeps us from doing fun things like going out with friends on the Sabbath or playing sports or participating in tournaments during the Sabbath. But, trust me when I say, those things do not matter as much as you might think they do—they're so fleeting! And they're nothing in comparison to the peace and the joy that obeying God brings to you.

Once you've chosen to release bitterness and maintain a forgiving heart—not just saying the words because it's what you're supposed to do, but deeply and inwardly letting go of the hurt—there's no greater relief! A very real weight is lifted from your shoulders. You can begin to heal even when reconciliation or restored trust is not yet possible.



I deeply love both my father and mother. I love my stepmother. And my children love them, too. They are my family. I've grown up in God's way and chose to commit my life fully to that way in 2011 when I was baptized. I've been married to my wonderful husband for almost 16 years, and we share the same faith. As is discussed in Amos 3:3 and 2 Corinthians 6:14-17, I am enjoying the wonderful fruits of being "equally yoked" with my husband. We are blessed to have two beautiful children learning this way, too. I learned how a family should operate through God's Word, and I follow His lead.

Every family is different; every divorce is different. For my parents, the divorce wasn't amicable, though for some it may be. Some families endure much greater turmoil than I. However, one thing is constant, unchanging, timeless—it's God's love, faithfulness and commitment toward us (Joshua 1:9; Hebrews 13:8). We can rely on Him, depend on Him, trust in Him.

So, regardless of your circumstances or the challenges in your family situation, remember to lean on the One who is our Creator, who formed us in the womb, knows us completely and loves us deeply (Psalm 139:13-16). Whether you live under one roof or two, you are always at home with God. **CC**



Amber Duran lives in Loveland, OH, with her two boys and husband, Andy, who pastors the Cincinnati East and North congregations. She also works as an associate editor for Beyond Today magazine.



We all expect that we would never compromise our beliefs when tested. But the reality is that we may not know exactly how we will respond until we are placed in a situation that truly tests us. I recently had an experience that caused me to reflect on this.

AN UNEXPECTED TEST AT SCHOOL

For the past three years, I have taught high school math. When I went to school to become a teacher, I imagined myself standing in a classroom, teaching a subject. I had no idea how many other responsibilities and complex situations would come with the job.

One of those responsibilities was attending meetings about students receiving special education services. This past school year, I was preparing for one of those meetings involving a student who identified as transgender.

I knew the subject of gender and pronouns might come up—and, to be totally transparent, I was nervous.

As a Christian teaching in a public school, I wanted to treat every student and family with kindness and respect. At the same time, I did not want fear or pressure to lead me to act against my conscience.

I had thought about situations like this before I began teaching. But thinking through something in theory is very different from facing it in real life—especially when your relationships, reputation or job might be affected.

Before the meeting, I carefully typed out the report I needed to give about the student's progress. I wanted to make sure I communicated clearly and respectfully without becoming distracted by the issue or misrepresenting myself. The meeting passed without incident.

But afterward, I kept thinking about how anxious I had been.

I wanted to treat every student and family with kindness and respect. At the same time, I did not want fear or pressure to lead me to act against my conscience.

A HARD LESSON ABOUT COURAGE

The deeper issue was not whether I had selected every word perfectly. It was that I had allowed fear of making a mistake or offending someone to consume so much of my attention.

I had convictions. I had thought about the situation ahead of time. But when the test actually came, I discovered that knowing what you believe and confidently living by it are not always the same thing.

Questions about how to apply biblical principles in complex situations deserve prayer, careful thought, and conversations with parents, pastors, and other mature Christians. As we reach conscientious conclusions grounded in biblical principles, we should not allow fear to control us. We should be prepared to act with both conviction and compassion.



My experience is not presented to prescribe one response to every question involving pronouns, but to emphasize that our decisions should be guided by biblical principles, conscience, compassion and faith rather than fear.

Later that day, when I reflected on the meeting, I wished I had entered it with greater confidence—not confidence in myself, but confidence that God could help me respond wisely, courageously, and kindly.

That evening, I began thinking about people throughout the Bible who were willing to remain faithful to God even when doing so could bring serious consequences.

LOOKING TO BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

One powerful example is that of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego in Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar commanded everyone to bow before the golden image he had erected. Anyone who refused would be thrown into a fiery furnace.

Daniel's three friends did not respond with unnecessary disrespect or hostility. But neither did they allow fear of the consequences to dictate their actions. They respectfully told the king that God was able to deliver them. Then they added:

“But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up” (Daniel 3:18).

That is one of the most powerful declarations of courage in the Bible. They knew God could rescue them, but their obedience did not hinge on receiving the outcome they wanted. Even if God allowed them to face the earthly consequences, they would not knowingly disobey Him.

Their test involved more than social pressure, embarrassment or the possibility of losing a job. Their lives were at stake. Yet they remained faithful.

The Bible records many other examples of courage:

- Esther risked her life by appearing before the king to plead for her people.
- Peter and John stood before the Sanhedrin and refused to stop preaching in the name of Jesus Christ.
- Jesus Christ, our perfect example, always upheld and proclaimed His Father's truth, refusing to yield to social pressure.

These individuals did not merely act defiantly or seek confrontation. They faithfully obeyed God regardless of the pressure they faced.



Biblical courage is the willingness to remain faithful to God while continuing to treat others with dignity, patience and love.

COURAGE WITH COMPASSION

Believers today live in a world where pressure to compromise can take many forms. We may fear offending someone, damaging a relationship, harming our reputation, or losing an opportunity. In some circumstances, we may even worry about losing a job.

But courage does not mean being harsh, argumentative or deliberately offensive. Biblical courage is the willingness to remain faithful to God while continuing to treat others with dignity, patience and love.

Some situations involve explicit commands from God. Others require us to prayerfully apply biblical principles to complex circumstances that Scripture does not address directly. We must be careful not to elevate every personal conclusion to the status of a biblical command. At the same time, once we have carefully



We must be careful not to elevate every personal conclusion to the status of a biblical command.

examined a matter and reached a conclusion grounded in Scripture, we should not abandon our conscience merely because of pressure.

It can be easy to become so focused on avoiding discomfort that fear begins to govern our decisions. We may start reasoning away clear biblical standards or staying silent when we should speak. We may also become so determined to defend our position that we fail to show the compassion and grace expected of a follower of Jesus Christ.

Neither response properly represents God.

We should never be blunt or offensive merely to prove we are bold. Our goal is not to win a confrontation, embarrass anyone or demonstrate our own strength. We should speak with grace, act with humility and genuinely care about the people involved.

At times, even the truth expressed with

love may offend someone. We cannot always prevent that. But we can make certain that the offense comes from the truth itself—not from an unkind attitude, careless language or a desire to provoke.

In a world that often pressures us to conform, we need the courage to remain faithful without becoming combative, self-righteous or insensitive.

STANDING FIRM WITHOUT FEAR

It can be easy to feel apologetic, embarrassed or timid when you are the only one standing up for your faith or when you are navigating a difficult situation at school or work.

In those moments, we should remember the examples God has preserved for us in Scripture. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego did not know exactly what God would allow to happen, but they knew whom they served.

Their courage did not come from confidence in themselves. It came from confidence in God.

That was the lesson I needed to learn from my experience. I did not need to enter the meeting prepared for a confrontation. I needed to enter it trusting God to help me act with wisdom, integrity and kindness.

God has given us the extraordinary opportunity to know Him and to live according to His way. Difficult situations will sometimes test our convictions. They may reveal fears and weaknesses we did not realize we possessed.

When that happens, we should not become discouraged. Instead, we can pray for greater faith, prepare carefully and trust God to help us respond with courage and compassion.

Whatever pressures we face, we can remain faithful without fear, truthful without harshness and courageous without compromising. **CC**



Josh Vazquez serves as a ministerial trainee in Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York. He lives in Connecticut with his wife, Ariana, and son, Joshua, and enjoys travel, hiking, reading, basketball, and volleyball.

Notes On The Way



AIDAN MCGUIRE
Commercial Electrician

For Aidan McGuire, becoming a commercial electrician began with a summer job helping a family friend. That early experience grew into a career that keeps him active, challenges him mentally and has taught him the value of patience and persistence. Now nearing the end of a four-year apprenticeship, Aidan shares what it takes to enter the electrical trade—and why young Christians must stay grounded in their values when workplace pressures arise.

Compass Check: How were you called to The Way?

Aidan McGuire: I was born into it. I'm a fifth generation Christian on my mom's side, so it's been in my family for a while. I am baptized now. There's been no specific moment that jumps out, but I guess it's just God's timing. He just made it right for me to make that decision. I grew up in The Way, that's all I've ever known, and that's what I know is true, so I'm going to stick with it.

What is your line of work?

I'm an electrician, a commercial electrician.

What drew you to this field?

In high school, during the summers, I would go work with a family friend who had their own residential electrical business. They offered me a spot because they needed the extra help, and I fell in love with what they did there, so that's how I got my foot into the door of the electrical world and just moved up from there.

So you kind of ended up with an informal internship?

Pretty much, yes.

What sort of training or education did you get to prepare for your career?

When I left the residential work [after high school], I went to apply for the union, and I actually knew some people who were already working in the union. I asked them to write me letters of recommendation, and, fortunately, they did. Then I got a one-on-one interview, and the interview went well.

Alongside that, though, I did have to [separately] apply for the [union's] apprenticeship. I couldn't just walk in as a worker, I had to apply, then apply for the apprenticeship portion of it. One interview got me into the union, the second interview got me into the apprenticeship.

They only take applications for the school once a year. Well, they interview and take the applications every month,

but then they only have one class, which starts once a year. So, when I interviewed the first time, I was too close to the starting point of the apprenticeship class. So I actually had to wait a year; which I worked for the union for a year, I just wasn't in the apprenticeship class.

So, for those first months where you were working for them, but hadn't yet applied and gotten into the apprenticeship program, what did your work experience look like at that time?

A lot of it was more just labor work. Right, moving things, getting people their parts and tools that they needed. That was most of it.

And, how long did it take to go through that apprenticeship program?

The apprenticeship in its entirety is four years. I am just coming up to the end of the apprenticeship now.

In the apprenticeship program, it sounds like you work directly with another electrician, or directly under them. But in the future, will you move out on your own?

Yeah, after I finish the apprenticeship, I'll take my state licensing test. And once I have that test, I am allowed to work alone, whether that's at a job site or whether it's totally by myself. As an apprentice, I do need the supervised hours, so I work under somebody as an apprentice. Once I'm out of that stage I can move on and work alone, and I'll have much more freedom to work where I want.

Interviews showcasing a diverse range of experiences and career stories, with helpful notes on the way of life as a Christian.

Okay, so you applied to the union, you were accepted, and then they put you into their four-year apprenticeship program, and then after that—so, soon here – you’ll take your state licensure exams, and then after that you will be fully licensed?

Yes, that’s correct.

What elements of your work do you enjoy?

The main thing that drew me to it was working with my hands. Sitting at a computer all day didn’t interest me, so I like the movement, the physicality of it [being an electrician]. I’m always walking around on my feet, working with things in front of me, you know, visually. That’s probably my favorite part of it. I love that part. Keeps me mobile. And there are intricacies with it that I enjoy. It’s not just physical, so it keeps me mentally sharp, as well. But my favorite part is being able to stay moving.

What are some of the elements of your job that are a challenge?

Of the job itself, there’s really nothing that I don’t like doing. There’s certain aspects of electrical work that aren’t my favorite. I like doing the smaller intricate parts of it, like controlling electronics, etc. The part I don’t like is doing the big stuff. There’s a lot of big power, big pipe that we have to put up. That’s not my favorite.

My least favorite part, though, is some of the people. Some of the people can be a little rough to be around, but God’s Spirit helps me through that.

You mentioned a difference between, the big scale, and smaller things. Could you describe that a little bit more, the difference between those?

There’s different systems in the electrical realm. There’s a lighting system, there’s power, there’s controls, there’s fire alarm. I currently am doing controls, which

would be something like, card readers for a locked part of the building where instead of a key, you have access cards. That’s what I would do; that’d be the small stuff. But bringing stuff from the main electrical room out into the rest of the building that takes a lot of big wire. You know, long distances. That’s the portion of it I don’t like. Yeah, it’s just, what part of the building do you want to work on?

In your work have you ever encountered a situation where you faced a moral dilemma? And if so, can you describe a situation and how you handled it?

In one situation, I was working on a night shift, started at 4 p.m. and worked till 2 a.m. Every day, two coworkers would go out to a bar, to a restaurant, wherever. And every day they asked me to go. It’s pretty easy to say no, but it’s tempting sometimes when you’re faced with it every day.

So, I think you’re implying that they would come back, perhaps, inebriated?

Sometimes, not all the time, but it was a lot of leaving work for an hour and a half. We have our scheduled 15 minutes

[rest] and our half hour [meal]. But when you’re gone for an hour and a half to two hours, that’s when it doesn’t look good. And then they were still getting paid for that time, and it caused a lot of issues on the job site. But when you don’t go, it doesn’t affect you.

Have you ever made a job or career change? If so, was it intentional? And what did you do to pivot to something different?

I have not, other than residential electrician to commercial electrician. After my time in the residential world, I knew I wanted to go to commercial. It was just more interesting to me.

What advice would you give someone in high school or junior high about pursuing a career that is personally fulfilling?

I would say it’s important to pursue it, because you won’t lose that love and that passion you had for it, if it’s something that’s so fulfilling to you.

The other part is don’t expect that you’ll have that fulfilling career right away. So hold on to that idea of whatever position, whatever job you want, but don’t expect it immediately. I’ve seen firsthand where people expect it, and it can be a little tough.

Is there any advice you would give someone who wants to do the same kind of work that you do?

It would be, don’t succumb to the peer pressure. There’s a lot of different types of people in the trades, in the construction world. Some are a good influence, some are a bad influence. I would say, don’t let that get you, don’t let them change where you came from, or who you are, because it’s hard to get back to where you were if you start to slip into some of their ways.



COMPASS CHECK

United Youth Magazine

United Church of God
P.O. Box 541027
Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
United Church of God
an International Association

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2026