COMPASS CHECK

Helping you turn your spiritual compass toward God

WHEN EVIL LOOKS GOOD

THE MORAL CRISIS OF OUR TIME



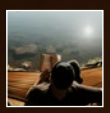
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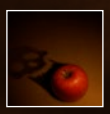
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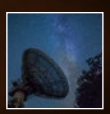
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COMPASS CHECK

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

Compass Check is published quarterly by the United Church of God, 555 Technecenter Drive, Milford, OH 45150.

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Publisher: UCG*IA* | *Council of Elders:* Scott Ashley, Aaron Dean, Jorge de Campos, Dan Dowd, Peter Eddington, Victor Kubik, Len Martin, Darris McNeely, Tim Pebworth (chairman), Gary Petty, Rex Sexton, Paul Wasilkoff

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Vol. 11, No. 2

United Youth Magazine | Fall 2025

COMPASS CORNER

Dear Compass Checkers,

As I write this letter, I am in the midst of busily planning for the Feast of Tabernacles. This year I have the opportunity to serve as the Feast Coordinator in Hawaii. While it's an exciting assignment for sure, it is a little challenging to plan an event at a place you've never seen before! Nevertheless, I am confident God will bless the efforts of all those who desire to honor and worship Him at His Feast.

In a way, planning for an event at a venue you've never been to is sort of like our journey to the Kingdom of God. We read about it, we know it's real, we look forward to it, but having never been there, we have a certain amount of trepidation of the unknown. What will it be like? Will everything be primitive, like horse and buggy days or will there be electricity and cars? What will it be like to be a spirit being? Can I just become invisible and fly in an instant and go visit other planets?

I don't have the answer to any of those questions, at least not yet. However, I know the answers exist and I will learn them in due time. The difference between getting those answers and the unknowns associated with planning a Feast site is that I can e-mail someone my questions about sound equipment, parking, stage decorations, etc. and get an answer in a few days. The answers to the questions regarding the Kingdom might take a little longer . . .

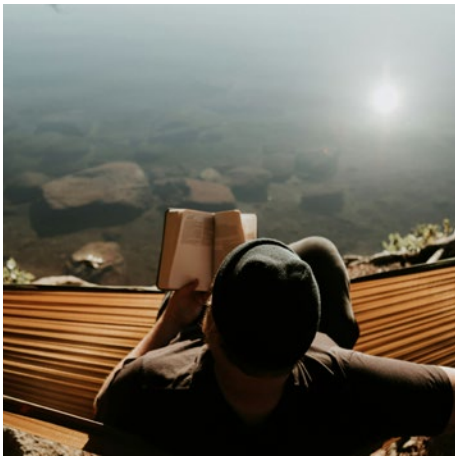
As you prepare to go keep the Feast of Tabernacles, think about some of the questions you have about the Kingdom of God. You might not get all the answers at the Feast this year, but you will no doubt hear some interesting possibilities and have opportunities to ask questions. Wherever you keep the Feast of Tabernacles this year, make the most of it by meeting new people and learning about your awesome future!



Dan Preston
Editor of Compass Check *magazine*

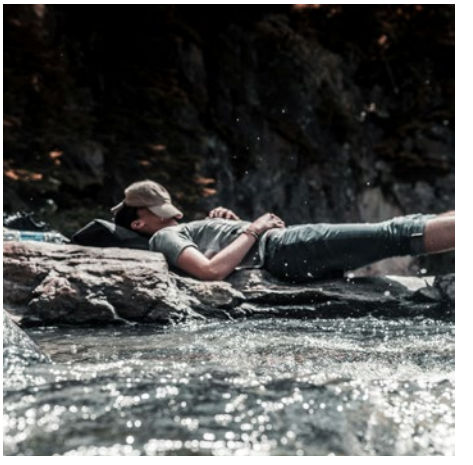






Stress Management Tips *for Christians*

by Andreya Halverson



When I was a junior in high school, our school counselor came into the classroom and gave a presentation on techniques to help manage stress. As a teen, you likely experience many times when you feel like you're under pressure. With activities going on, tests to prepare for and choices to make, these times can feel pretty overwhelming. My counselor discussed this in her presentation, and she gave a few tips for working through and coping with stress. Recently, I opened my notebook and looked at my notes from the presentation, and I immediately began to see the spiritual aspects of each tip.

LIVE IN THE MOMENT

During the week, you may have tests to study for, homework to complete or activities to go to. When you feel like you have a lot on your plate, it helps to slow down and focus on what you need to do, one thing at a time. This is sometimes referred to as mindfulness. We are instructed not to worry about tomorrow, but to draw our attention to the needs of today (Matthew 6:34). Narrowing our focus to our daily needs helps us manage our time and energy. Scripture also tells us not to be overwhelmed by every aspect of this physical life. Instead, we are to "seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (verse 33). When you feel surrounded by the demands of everyday life, don't overreact. Take it one thing at a time and strive to be pleasing to God.

One technique related to mindfulness is grounding, which involves focusing on what you experience with your five senses. Chances are, a lot of the things you see, hear, feel or smell were created by God. Creation teaches us about many of our Heavenly Father's qualities, and "even His eternal power and Godhead" (Romans 1:20). Enjoying nature and the beauty around us connects us with God, which helps take our minds off the things that make us feel stressed. Some of us may see birds when we look out our windows, which should remind us of the verse where Jesus asks, "Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God" (Luke 12:6). Christ uses the sparrows to make the point that God values His people. Take a moment each day to relax and appreciate the marvelous creation God has made for us.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR HEALTH

How much exercise do you usually get in one day? Being physically active produces endorphins, which help improve your mood and make you feel more relaxed. We need physical exercise to maintain good health, and we also need the spiritual exercise of studying and living God's way. Bible study is vital to our spiritual wellbeing because all Scripture is useful for teaching and correction (2 Timothy 3:16-17). As we go about our daily routines, we need to study God's Word and work to apply it to our



own lives. Reading our Bibles also gives us peace of mind, knowing what lies ahead for our world. Although we know there will be terrible times in the future, we must remember that the Kingdom that Christ is going to establish will have "no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying" (Revelation 21:4). Let us cling to the hope that God has revealed to us and strive to learn more about Him every day. Consider doing some simple stretching or walking while meditating on God's plan and purpose for you.

Another way to take care of our health is to make sure we're getting enough sleep each night, which reduces stress hormones in the body. We need good quality rest every night, but we also need rest from our normal routines. Coming together for services every Sabbath enables us to "stir up love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24). Keeping the Sabbath is an important way to get spiritual rest, and it's a time to build our relationship with God and show kindness to each other. Another way to find rest is to stay close to God and put everything in His hands. Jesus tells us, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Certain things may seem huge to us, but God has the power to help us and give us relief. Instead of staying up late on your phone or playing video games, give your body the sleep it needs every night.

I imagine most of you love a good laugh, and it turns out, your body does too! Laughter creates an increased intake of oxygen, soothes tension and reduces stress hormones. Laughter is associated with joy, and as King Solomon was inspired to write, "A merry heart does good, like medicine" (Proverbs 17:22). Happiness has health benefits, both physically and emotionally. It's good to find happiness in the good parts of life, but it's just as important to find joy even when things aren't going well. James instructs us, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (James 1:2-3). We should allow the obstacles in our lives to produce good qualities within us and bring us closer to God. Try surrounding yourself with people who encourage you or watch a funny movie at home.

PRAY AND GIVE THANKS

Sometimes, our thoughts can be like a spinning wheel that never stops. Whenever you feel that you have a lot on your mind, talking to someone and receiving advice is very beneficial. Since our primary source of wisdom and comfort is God, we should also go to Him in prayer with whatever we're dealing with. Paul assures us to "be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6). Instead of worrying about what we can't change, let's bring to God what He can change. Also, we should remember that "we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses" (Hebrews 4:15). Christ knows exactly what we're going through because He was once a physical human being who suffered for our benefit. Set aside time to pray to God about what you're feeling and ask for His guidance in your life.

At Thanksgiving every year, we reflect on the blessings we are most thankful for. Gratitude should be more than an annual tradition, and it should be in our thoughts every single day. A mindset of gratitude promotes good health by reducing stress. We should always acknowledge that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17). God is the one who blesses us, so we should remember to thank Him every day. It's especially important to count our blessings when faced with challenges. God's desire is that we always give thanks, no matter what our circumstances might be (1 Thessalonians 5:18). When we thank Him for every good thing in our lives, it helps us take our minds off the bad things. Consider writing down three to five blessings each day or writing someone a thank-you note.

FOCUS ON GOD AND OUR CALLING

I imagine that in one of your science

YOU'VE BEEN TAUGHT THAT WE ALWAYS NEED TO BREATHE BECAUSE OUR BODIES CAN'T STORE OXYGEN. I BELIEVE THAT THE REASON GOD MADE US THIS WAY IS SO THAT WE ARE REMINDED TO RELY ON HIM EVERY DAY.

classes, you've been taught that we always need to breathe because our bodies can't store oxygen. I believe that the reason God made us this way is so that we are reminded to rely on Him every day. God assures us, "Fear not, for I am with you" (Isaiah 41:10). We can trust Him to always be there to guide us as we strive to follow His way of life. We can also rely on Him to bring us through the challenges we face. Jeremiah wrote, "You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You" (Jeremiah 32:17). When we focus on what God can do, we worry less about the things we can't do. When you feel overwhelmed, take some slow, deep breaths, knowing that God is always there for you.

When was the last time you took a break from being on your phone? Some of the ways to manage your stress include limiting the amount of time you spend in front of a screen each day, and taking breaks from using social media. As Christians, we are warned that "evil company corrupts good habits" (1 Corinthians 15:33). If we spend too much time surrounded by negative influences, they impact our thoughts and behavior. We need to be different from those around us and follow God's way, and we are instructed, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). Our focus on developing a Christ-like mindset helps take our minds off the pressures and worries of our society. Let's take a break from the world every once in a while, and strive to be a positive example to those we interact with.

One of the things people need in their lives is a purpose; a sense of belonging. While many people search for meaning in romantic relationships or hobbies, our purpose comes from God's calling. Paul tells us that we "are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19). Because we are called into God's family, we can focus on something greater than ourselves. Besides our relationship with God, we have the opportunity to build relationships with each other. We're instructed to "rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15). Connecting with others relieves stress, and it reminds us that we are not alone in the obstacles we face. Instead of becoming too focused on daily hassles and uncertainties, let's keep in mind the bigger picture of being in God's family.

I found my school counselor's presentation to be very insightful, as she explained unique ways to manage stress. When I reviewed my notes from the presentation, I started putting some of them into practice. There are many methods for managing and coping with stress, and I hope you will find the one that works best for you. God doesn't want us to be troubled, but to trust in His plan to bring an end to all the suffering in the world. Whether you find yourself dealing with a decision to make, a deadline to meet or another challenge, remember that nothing in this life "shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39). **CC**



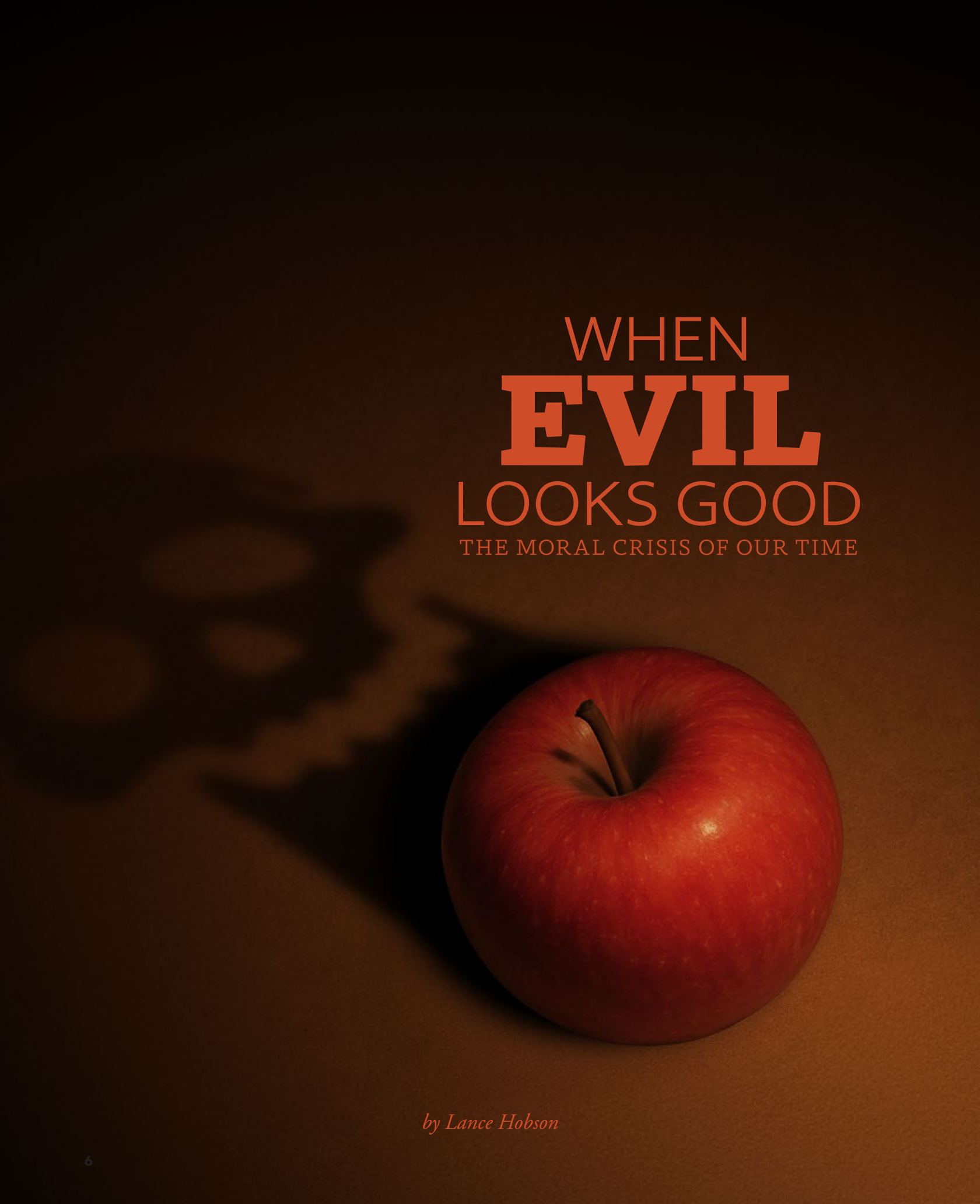
When we focus on what God can do, we worry less about the things we can't do.



Andreya Halvorsen had started attending the Cincinnati East congregation ever since she moved to the area this summer for ABC. She likes to make new friends and find new ways to serve God and His people.

WHEN EVIL LOOKS GOOD

THE MORAL CRISIS OF OUR TIME



by Lance Hobson

Satan is the greatest enemy of God and man, and he hates us passionately. This may seem like a no-brainer, and in the past, it was a well-known fact. However, in recent years, the waters have been muddied, and the general perception of evil has drastically changed. We are truly living in a world that eagerly embraces evil. In our modern world, it is more important than ever for youth and young adults to be able to accurately distinguish between good and evil.

PORTRAYALS OF GOOD AND EVIL

The portrayals of good and evil and how they interact were generally consistent throughout most of human history. The "good" characters were depicted as embodying admirable qualities such as courage, tenacity and humility. Evil was represented as selfish, cruel and absolutely irredeemable. Ultimately, good always won in the end, emphatically endorsing said admirable qualities.

These concepts are clearly seen in numerous narratives dating back to the Bible itself. One of the most famous secular examples is Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). This most famous iteration of a vampire is that of a vicious, terrifying creature of the night that hunts and stalks its innocent victims. There could be no doubt that the titular character, Dracula, was pure evil and completely incorrigible. The flip side is also true. For example, characters such as Ward Cleaver from *Leave it to Beaver* and Jim Anderson from *Father Knows Best* were once celebrated as paragons of manhood—wise, strong and loving fathers who were the heads of their households. A clear line in the sand could be discerned between the forces of good and evil. These ideas have been turned on their heads in recent years.

THIS NEW MORALLY AMBIGUOUS CHARACTER TYPE IS PORTRAYED AS INCREDIBLY COMPLEX AND MISUNDERSTOOD—BLURRING THE LONG-ESTABLISHED LINES WHICH CLEARLY SEPARATED GOOD FROM EVIL.

THE RISE OF THE ANTIHERO

In modern, mainstream media, the viewer is frequently introduced to a relatively new archetype of protagonist: one who does not live in the light or the darkness but dances in shades of grey. This new morally ambiguous character type is portrayed as incredibly complex and misunderstood—blurring the long-established lines which clearly separated good from evil. Enter the antihero. As *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* puts it, the *antihero* is "a protagonist or notable figure who is conspicuously lacking in heroic qualities."

Let's fast forward approximately 110 years from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to the early 2000s. The new millennium brought with it an influx of supernatural-themed shows which depicted a very different kind of vampire. This new type of vampire was a far cry from the cruel and outright villainous creature portrayed in the past. Instead

Matt Hernandez



As the "prince of the power of the air," Satan has cleverly engineered the world we live in (Ephesians 2:2), and unknowingly, the whole world is under his sway.

of being viewed as an awful villain, vampires now became protagonists which perfectly manifested the popular antihero archetypes. They even became romanticized as legitimate *love interests* for other main characters—often involving a sensational love triangle. This popular storyline can be seen in movies and TV series such as the *Twilight* series and *The Vampire Diaries*, among numerous other examples.

The same phenomenon can be seen in mainstream media's depiction of men—particularly fathers—as bumbling, often unemployed oafs who can do nothing right and who pale in comparison to their illustrious breadwinning wives. Today, the characteristics of the ideal father are derided and mocked as "toxic masculinity."

COMPROMISED MORALS

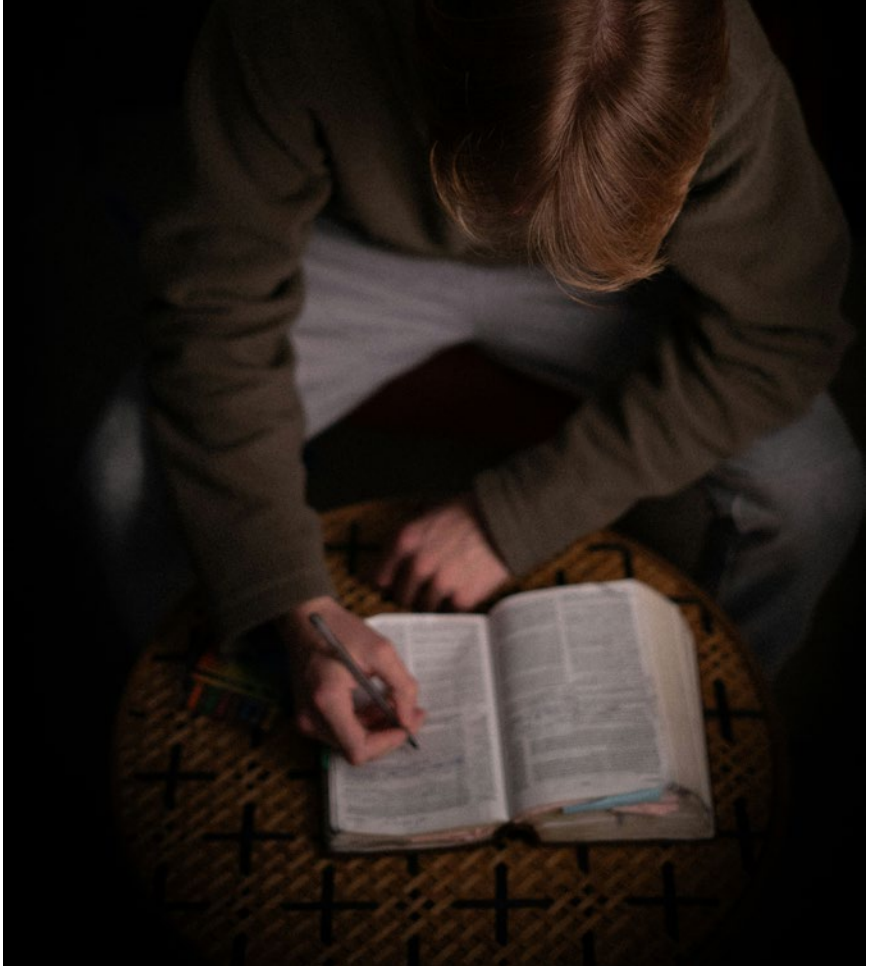
What is the effect of being bombarded with this message? A conscience that becomes *desensitized* to evil, and a mindset that evil is not always bad. The subtle implication is that things which have been characteristically viewed as evil throughout man's history have simply been misunderstood—"evil" things aren't really evil at all, but actually have redeemable aspects and qualities.

We can clearly see the pervasiveness of this inability to distinguish good from evil in society as more people "call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness" (Isaiah 5:20). The searing of the conscience results in an inability to recognize evil or distinguish it from good, yet this ability is essential for spiritual growth! As the author of Hebrews explains, Christians mature spiritually as they train their senses "by reason of use . . . to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14).

DO NOT BE DECEIVED!

Is there harm in consuming this type of entertainment? We might scoff at this notion, believing we are fully aware that these are fictional accounts. But the Bible warns us that we should not be deceived into thinking we can regularly be exposed to evil and not be influenced by it. On His last night on earth, Jesus prayed that His disciples would be "in the world" but "not of the world" (John 17:11, 14-16). He understood that it was entirely possible for His true disciples to be influenced by the world around them, and the Scriptures have many examples of this for our admonition. One powerful example is the story of Abraham's nephew, Lot, in Genesis 19.

Lot and his family were so desensitized to and familiar with the evil around them in Sodom that they had to be forcibly prompted *by angels* to leave Sodom in order to escape its pending destruction. Earlier, Lot had gone so far as to offer his daughters to the violent mob—an indication of just how far his morals had been compromised by constant exposure to evil. And although God regarded Lot as a righteous man who was greatly distressed by all the evil around him (2 Peter 2:6-8), the



lesson for us is clear: "Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits'" (1 Corinthians 15:33). This principle doesn't only apply to the company of people in real life, but also to the books we read, the video games we play and the TV and movies we choose to watch.

THE PRINCE OF THE POWER OF THE AIR

As the "prince of the power of the air," Satan has cleverly engineered the world we live in (Ephesians 2:2), and unknowingly, the whole world is under his sway. Because he knows about *mankind's incredible potential* to become sons and daughters of God—because he knows that human beings who take on the nature of the Father and Son will one day be literally *born* into the family of God and will even "judge angels" (1 Corinthians 6:3)—Satan's ultimate goal and desire is that each individual will reject God's love and mercy and will be destroyed (1 Peter 5:8, Ephesians 6:11-13).

Being aware of the consequences of his actions and knowing he only has a "short time" remaining, Satan hopes to destroy as many relationships as he possibly can between humanity and their Creator (Revelation 12:9-12, Revelation 20:7-10). One of the subtle ways he does this is by gradually desensitizing us to evil so that we don't recognize or view him as evil (Genesis 3:1). In the same way that modern entertainment portrays villains in a new light, Satan's goal is to portray himself as the misunderstood antihero in the Bible's narrative so God's reputation will be slandered and His character called into question.

Christians mature spiritually as they train their senses "by reason of use . . . to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14).

WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

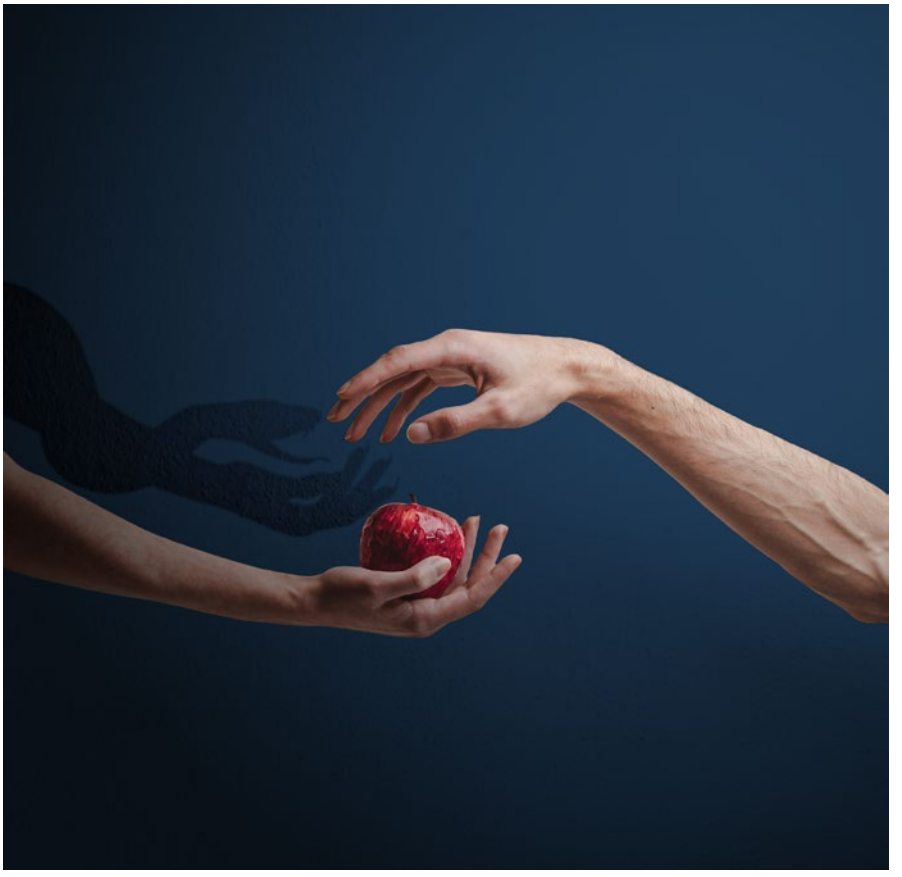
So, what should we do to avoid being influenced by evil and having our morality compromised? Let's look at four actions God prescribes to resist the influence of evil. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it is a fundamental starting point.

1. ASK GOD FOR DISCERNMENT

The first thing we should do is pray and ask God to teach and help us develop our senses to discern good and evil. Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, set this example by requesting wisdom above all else (1 Kings 3:5-12). This advice is found throughout the Bible, and God tells us that wisdom should be sought after diligently (Proverbs 4:7). Fortunately, James was inspired to assert that God *will* grant us wisdom if we ask Him for it (James 1:5).

2. STUDY THE BIBLE

After asking for wisdom and discernment, the next step is to study the Bible and seek God's response. In the Scriptures, God makes clear distinctions between good and evil using a variety of techniques, including direct commands, instructional stories and even poetry. Prayer is how we talk to God, and God talks to us through the Bible—His inspired, written Word—to teach us



how to interact with others and how to be more like Him. Paul reminded the young pastor, Timothy, of this in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, saying: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

3. REJECT EVERY FORM OF EVIL

Once we have asked God to grant us discernment and have pored over the Scriptures for the insights we seek, we have to put knowledge and understanding into practice. Jesus emphasized this point frequently throughout His earthly ministry, at one point saying that "everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand," (Matthew 7:26).

How do we apply what we learn in the Scriptures to avoid exposure to evil? We need to make informed decisions regarding what media we consume. For example, the prophet Isaiah teaches us that a righteous man is one "who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, and shuts his eyes from seeing evil" (Isaiah 33:15). Applying this bit of wisdom immediately rules out all movies and TV shows in the horror and action genres with excessive violence.

Ingesting violent media results in a desensitization to torture and brutal killing. When we learn of such horrific events in the news, we are unbothered by the loss of life, yet life is sacred and a gift from God. This kind of callousness has the potential to harden our hearts to the point that we may even consider murder as a justifiable solution to dealing with a troublesome individual, and there have been many cases of civilian shootings inspired by violent video games.

4. CULTIVATE GOOD HABITS

One of the powerful lessons we learn during the Feast of Unleavened Bread is that the most effective way to stop a bad habit is to replace it with a good habit. Many people who try stopping bad habits but do not replace them with good habits find themselves with a lot more free time and consequently, more opportunities to relapse. How they use their free time is the deciding factor in whether the individual will backslide again.

What should sinful forms of entertainment be replaced with? They should be replaced with "whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy" (Philippians 4:8). Paul summarizes this statement, saying a Christian should "meditate on these things." Some suggestions include reading good books, working out, playing board games with friends and family, or taking a cooking or dancing class.

Knowing that God "commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17:30-31), let's be sure to be found "redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:16).

Remember that there is no overlap between good and evil. We live in a "post-truth" society that has blurred the line separating the two. We are greatly influenced by the world around us. For this reason, it is essential that we pray to God and study the Bible to be thoroughly equipped to accurately differentiate between good and evil. These practices will make it easier to recognize and eliminate the most subtle of negative and evil influences in our lives. The time is short and humanity is racing toward the end of this age. Make the choice to be on the right side of history; choose life! **CC**



Lance Hobson is a second-generation Church of God member from South Africa. He's an avid reader who enjoys trying new things, spending time with family and friends, and dominating board games with a suspiciously flexible interpretation of the rules.

Fausto Baru/ iStock / Getty Images Plus

Affirming Faith Through SCIENCE



by William Bradford

My mom reaches for the computer and clicks on the video as I sit attentively in anticipation. An image flashes onto the screen; it's a new photograph taken by the James Webb Space Telescope. I stare in wonder at the shining array of glowing dots that compose our universe. A sage-looking astronomer now occupies the screen and explains that each of the thousands of dots in the image represents individual galaxies[1]. He expounds further that each galaxy contains hundreds of millions of stars, and each galaxy stretches across anywhere from hundreds to several hundred thousand to more than a million light-years.

This blows my mind. The astronomer begins to explain in detail how the images reveal the existence of dark energy. As I listen, he explains that the pictures reveal that dark energy makes up nearly 70 percent of the universe[2]. Dark energy holds together the fabric of the universe while simultaneously sending billions of stars and planets careening off into the dark energy void. The astronomer then admits that no one knows what dark energy is made from, what it looks like, or how it works. Dark energy, the astronomer says, is completely invisible. Scientists have only proven its existence through convoluted mathematical calculations. The longer I watch the video, the more my curiosity builds about the science of dark energy. Why am I so curious about such a nebulous scientific topic? Because I believe in God!

After watching the video, I'm compelled to reflect on what these new scientific discoveries mean for Christians. I can't help but see the similarities between the scientific description of dark energy and our understanding of a God who holds together the fabric of the universe and actively directs it. This is why I find things like the James Webb Space Telescope and dark energy so interesting. I view science, which is the study of the nature and behavior of the natural world around us, as something that reveals details about God, and that is so exciting!

Today, however, many have linked the idea of Christianity with a distrust of science. In fact, according to a study by psychologists Jonathan McPhetres and Miron Zuckerman, it is true that Christians have "less scientific literacy," and "more negative attitudes towards science."[3] How sad! I believe this comes from the feeling among some that the ability of science to answer questions about our natural world and trust in God are mutually exclusive.

It need not be this way! It is true that some things we understand about God do not align with modern scientific propositions, but this is no reason to reject all scientific thinking and distrust science as a whole. When a contradiction between God's Word and modern scientific concepts seemingly appears, some

Christians may try to ignore the presented scientific concepts because it makes them uncomfortable. How can we defend our rightly held beliefs when they may seemingly conflict with science without understanding the opposing viewpoint? A discrepancy between our deeply held beliefs and current scientific premises should motivate us to dig more deeply into the details of the science presented to see what is really going on. Being unable to have an educated defense of our beliefs when they seemingly contradict a scientific claim is a disservice to ourselves and to our reputation as Church members.

While a slim minority of our beliefs seem to conflict with some scientific constructs, what about all our beliefs that align with modern science? For example, Job 36:27-28 explains the process by which clouds "distill" water from vapor and drop it upon the earth in the form of rain, which aligns with the modern-day scientific understanding of precipitation. Additionally, the scientific idea of a single "Big Bang," which may have created the universe, aligns with the description of God creating the heavens and the earth in the beginning (Genesis 1:1).

The Bible even accurately references scientific phenomena that weren't widely understood until long after the time of writing. For example, in Leviticus 13, God gives instructions on how to deal with people with leprosy. He instructs them to be sequestered or quarantined away from the rest of the group. This reveals a scientifically accurate understanding of germ theory and the spread of infectious disease. This is so fascinating because modern science didn't officially discover germ theory until the mid-1800s! While the Bible is not a science textbook, these clear examples of scientifically accurate understanding from the Bible should strengthen our faith in God and are a reason for Church members to seek to understand science, rather than avoiding the topic.

The fact that God created the universe and everything that science seeks to understand makes me more interested in science than the average person. As Christians, we should use our faith as an inspiration to learn about science. It's time that believing in God and being Christian are no longer synonymous with disliking science or denying it outright. Our faith in God should be strengthened when our beliefs align with science. When they don't, we should keep our beliefs but be motivated to dig into the scientific theories to better be able to defend our beliefs in light of current scientific perspectives. **CC**

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NASA



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THREE COGNITIVE BIASES *That Stunt Spiritual Growth*

by Brianna Foster

What color socks did you put on today? Maybe you grabbed the first pair you saw in your drawer. Or perhaps you set out your outfit for the next day the night before. Either way, you probably didn't think much about it.

Our brains are fantastic at creating mental shortcuts, which help us make decisions quickly. We were designed that way on purpose! Can you imagine how exhausting it would be if you had to carefully consider what flavor of toothpaste to use every single morning?

But our brains don't just create shortcuts for little things. Without even realizing it, we also make big assumptions and snap judgments that can stunt our spiritual growth. These mental shortcuts are called cognitive biases—and they make it almost impossible for us to see the truth about ourselves clearly.

Scripture tells us that our natural thinking doesn't align with God's truth (Romans 8:7), which is why we need His help to see ourselves—and Him—more clearly.

WHAT IS COGNITIVE BIAS?

A cognitive bias is a systematic error in thinking, which happens when we subconsciously interpret the world around us in a way that confirms what we *already* believe—even if that belief isn't fully accurate.

Because we can only process so much information each day, our brains simplify things by making assumptions that feel familiar and comfortable. The problem is, those assumptions may not be rooted in truth.

Because we can only process so much information each day, our brains simplify things by making assumptions that feel familiar and comfortable. The problem is, those assumptions may not be rooted in truth.



The reality is that everyone is affected by cognitive bias at some point. It doesn't mean we're foolish or hopeless. It just means we're human. The good news? With God's help, we can learn to recognize when our thinking is being influenced by bias—and let Him reshape our minds. But first, we have to become aware of how it shows up.

So, let's look at three of the most common cognitive biases, how they sneak into our spiritual lives, and what we can do to challenge them.

1. CONFIRMATION BIAS

This is one of the most well-known cognitive biases—and for good reason. Confirmation bias is what happens when we tend to only notice, believe and accept information that supports what we already believe. At the same time, we tend to ignore or push away anything that challenges those beliefs—often without even realizing it.

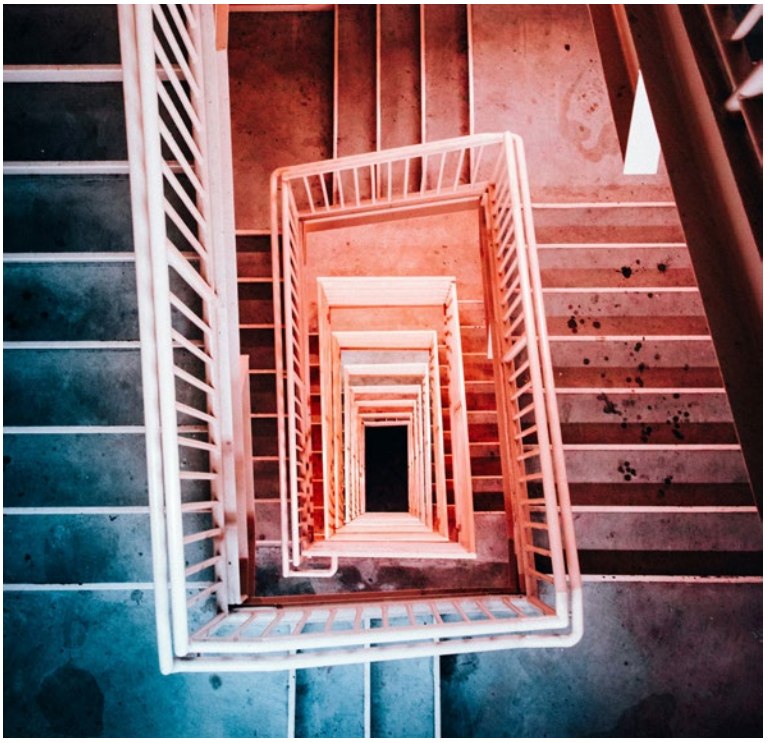
In our spiritual lives, confirmation bias keeps us stuck. It hinders us from growing in our understanding of Scripture, and it can even prevent us from accepting the gentle correction that leads to repentance.

One place this shows up is in how we respond to preaching—especially when the message becomes uncomfortably corrective.

Have you ever listened to a sermon and thought something like, "Wow, this feels a little harsh," or "The minister just doesn't understand what I'm dealing with"? Those thoughts are a normal reaction from the carnal mind—but they are also signs of confirmation bias in action.

If our default belief is "I'm a good person," then any message that challenges that—even lovingly—feels like a threat.

We know that Jesus dealt with this very



same phenomenon in His time, as He says in Matthew 13:15 , "Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed." They had the most loving teacher possible, but their bias didn't let them hear what Jesus was telling them.

The truth is, the minister isn't creating new rules or judging us personally. He's simply teaching God's Word. And if God's Word is asking us to change, it's not because God hates us or doesn't understand us—it's because He loves us too much to leave us where we are.

Interestingly, this bias is so common that it often leads right into—and reinforces—the next two.

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2. THE FUNDAMENTAL ATTRIBUTION ERROR

This bias is all about how we explain behavior—both our own and other people's.

The fundamental attribution error happens when we give ourselves the benefit of the doubt—like saying, "I was just having a rough day"—but then we judge others' actions as a reflection of their character—like thinking, "They're just rude or lazy." In a spiritual setting, this might sound like:

"Yeah, I've missed church a couple of weeks in a row, but I've had a lot going on with school. God knows my heart."

But then:

"That other family is always late to services. It's so distracting. They're clearly not taking church seriously."

Do you see the pattern?

We excuse our own slip-ups while magnifying others' mistakes. But when we do that, we quietly shift the focus off of our own need for growth—and we end up comparing ourselves to others rather than measuring ourselves by God's standards.

The apostle Paul dealt with this same bias in the first century Church. He wrote, "But they are only comparing themselves with each other, using themselves as the standard of measurement. How ignorant!" (2 Corinthians 10:12, New Living Translation)

The result? Spiritual growth slows down or even stops, because we're no longer looking inward. Instead of asking God to work on *us*, we start mentally listing all the ways other people need to change.

The bias blind spot reminds us how easy it is to spot flaws in someone else's thinking while completely overlooking our own.



3. THE BIAS BLIND SPOT

Here's the twist: even once we know about cognitive biases, we're still most likely to see them in other people—not ourselves.

This is known as the bias blind spot. It's when we believe we're thinking clearly and objectively . . . while everyone else is being biased or unreasonable.

You might be reading this list and thinking, "Oh yeah, I know someone who does that!"—and that's a totally human reaction.

But this bias reminds us how easy it is to spot flaws in someone else's thinking while completely overlooking our own. We all like to think we're rational, level-headed people. And sometimes we are! But we also all have blind spots—and only God can reveal them. After all, without God, "the human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?" (Jeremiah 17:9, NLT)

SO, WHAT NOW?

Recognizing these biases isn't about shaming ourselves or others. It's about becoming aware of how our minds work so that we can invite God to do what only He can do—renew us from the inside out.

Our human nature leans toward self-protection, self-justification and comparison. But through His Spirit, God gives us the power to think differently, to see clearly and to grow into the people He's calling us to be.

Ask God to search your heart and gently uncover any bias that's getting in the way of truth.

You're not expected to be perfect today. But if you keep your eyes open to yourself, you can "let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:4).

Don't be afraid to ask God to show you what you can't yet see—He promises to help you, strengthen you and walk with you every step of the way. Lean into His guidance and take the next step forward, knowing that every time you choose truth over comfort, you're growing into the person He created you to be. **CC**

Article adapted from sermon by Roderick Foster, "Excuses We Make to Avoid Change."



Brianna Foster attends the San Antonio and Austin, Texas, congregations. She is a copywriter and course creator with a passion for sharing knowledge in clear and practical ways.

How We Got To Now:
THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

by Eric Mohr

Why do we celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles when so many mainstream Christians don't? How do we know that it pictures the Millennium, or the 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ over the earth after His second coming (see Revelation 20:4) and a time of restoration and abundance (see Acts 3:19-21)? Christians and their belief that the Feast of Tabernacles symbolizes the coming Millennium actually go back more than 1,700 years. But there's also been confusion around the meaning of these days throughout history.

Early Jewish Beliefs
200 BCE-100 CE

- A Jewish text from before 200 B.C.E. indicated an earth abundant with righteousness and blessings.
- The concept of the coming Kingdom of God was significant in Jewish literature around the first century C.E.

Early Teachings of Papias
ca. 100 CE

- Papias, an early church father and elder in Hierapolis, compiled sayings attributed to Jesus shortly after John's writing of Revelation.
- One of Papias's attributed sayings describes an abundance of blessings in God's Kingdom (although this saying is not genuinely from Jesus).

Early Catholic Views
ca. 200-300 CE

- In 150 C.E., Justin Martyr strongly believed in the Millennium, even saying that Christians who reject the resurrection are not genuine Christians.
- He emphasized a future resurrection and a 1,000-year reign in a glorified Jerusalem as prophesied by Ezekiel and Isaiah.

Later Anti-Millennium Views
ca. 200-300 CE

- By the early third century, opposition to the Millennium began, notably from Marcion, an early Christian theologian, who rejected a literal interpretation of Revelation 20.
- By the fourth century, belief in the Millennium faced significant criticism, with Eusebius portraying millenarians like Papias unfavorably.

Tabernacles and the Millennium
ca. 300 CE

- However, Methodius—a Catholic theologian who died in 311—interpreted the Feast of Tabernacles as symbolizing resurrection and the spiritual celebration of the Millennium.
- He linked the festival's timing in the seventh month to the significance of the seventh millennium (the 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ).

The Armstrongs and the Feast
ca. 1930 ce

- Obeying God's word in 1927, Herbert W. and Loma Armstrong kept the Feast of Tabernacles alone for seven years.
- Then, starting the Radio Church of God in 1934, they kept it 12 more years, still not understanding its full meaning.
- In 1945, Mr. Armstrong realized that the Feast pictured the Millennium.

The Feast of Tabernacles Today
2025

- ***The United Church of God*** continues to teach that the Feast of Tabernacles is symbolic of the coming Millennium.
- Jesus Christ, after His second coming, will reign as the King of kings over all nations from Jerusalem (Ezekiel 40-47, Zechariah 14, Revelation 19 and 20).

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Notes On *The Way*



TEX HANSON

Product consultant for Southwest Airlines

CC: How were you called into the Way?

TH: My dad came into the Church when they had my oldest sister, who's about 10 years older than me. However, my mom was Catholic. And it was really an interesting experience growing up, having those two perspectives. It wasn't until probably in my teen years that God started to work with me and open my mind to His Way being the only true way. A big piece of that was the relationships that I built with friends in my local church and regional area, especially as I started going to camps. As I continued to progress through my teen years, I definitely felt God was opening my mind to more of an understanding of what I'd been taught from the time that I was young.

What is your line of work?

I'm a product consultant for Southwest Airlines. I've been in that role for almost 10 years, and I manage technology projects for our frontline folks.

Those are the people that work at the airport on the ground (loading and unloading bags from the airplane, as well as checking you in and scanning you onto the plane. Those people also do weight and balance for our airplanes.

Specifically, I'm a product owner of the software that we use for our weight and balance. When people scan everybody onto the airplane, they then take all the numbers of who they scanned, all the bag and cargo information from down below, as well as all the fuel information, they run that through our system, and send that off to the pilots.

What drew you to working in the airline industry?

Early on, I was very interested in aviation. I had a sister and two brothers-in-law that went to school to become airline pilots. So, watching her I really got interested and knew I wanted to do something with aviation. I was pretty sure I wanted to become a pilot.

The one thing that made me pause about becoming a pilot was watching my sister go through the very beginnings of her career, and as a pilot you kind of are at the mercy of whatever schedule you get [even on the Sabbath]. I know that there are folks that have been able to work around that, but that discouraged me from going down that path. But I knew that I still wanted to be in the aviation industry.

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

Growing up in Minnesota, we had a program called PSEO (which was post-secondary enrollment option), which allowed you to take college courses through Minnesota at a community college, and Minnesota would pay for the credit. I was able to do that my junior and senior years of high school about half the time, so I was able to graduate from high school with about 40 credits going into my degree, which was really awesome, because I was able to cut off a year of college.

I ended up finding a degree that was in airport management. That's a business aviation degree. So, half my schooling was in the business school, and half my schooling was in the aviation school.

What has been your career path?

During the middle of my schooling a sister and brother-in-law that both worked for Southwest told me about some internship programs that Southwest had. I ended up putting in for a few internships with Southwest and getting one. I came down to Texas, stayed with my sister, and worked at Southwest for the summer, and that was a really cool experience.

At the end of that internship they asked me if I wanted to come back again for another internship the next year, which would be after I graduated in May. I was a bit hesitant because I was thinking, 'I've got one year left of school, I want to get a job after I graduate and don't really want to go back to being an intern and not making a whole lot of money.' But I prayed about it, and ended up coming to the conclusion I could

come back and do another internship and, if nothing else, it would give me a little bit more experience and give me some time to try and find a job.

After I graduated and started my second internship, about halfway through the summer they ended up having a position open up on the team that I was interning on and I was able to put in for that. It helped me out quite a bit that I had two internships worth of experience working on this team. So I ended up getting hired on into that position, and started from there to work for Southwest.

My whole career has been at Southwest. They've been a really good company to work for. It's definitely been a blessing to be where I'm at now.

What are the elements of your job that you enjoy the most?

I think the biggest thing that really brings me a lot of joy is working with our ground folks. There are close to 30,000 people that work at the airports on the ground for Southwest, all across country. Specifically for the scanning products and the weight and balance products that I work on, it touches almost 20,000 people.

So being able to be a voice for them and to be able to make enhancements and changes in the products that will impact them in a positive way, that's what really motivates me. It's knowing that these people are [in]their daily life using these tools, and I can either make it challenging because we have issues, or I can fix those and make it better for them. That's what brings a lot of joy to me.

It's really cool when we do go out to the airports working on projects and get their feedback and see them light up when we say, "Oh, hey, yeah, we're about to make that change." And they're just filled with joy. That "oh, yes, that would make my life so much easier." That's what I like about my job.

Of course there are always elements of a job that we find more challenging. So, what are some of those for you?

There are times where we have issues, and either we have some type of outage, or we have some type of defect that comes up and it causes pain for the frontline user, and it can happen at any time.

Something happens in the middle of the night, or it might be in the middle of the day when we're going through our normal day. And all of a sudden, we have to stop everything and get on a technology call to try and figure out what's going on and how it's impacting our frontline folks. Then coordinating the communication out to them of what is the problem, what we're doing to fix it, and what a workaround might be.

So those happen, thankfully, not regularly. But when they do happen it is definitely a challenge to the job.

Sounds like a fun challenge. In your work have you ever encountered a situation where you faced a moral dilemma, and if so, how have you handled it?

There is a 24/7 type operation, with an airline the size of Southwest and so that has come up in the past with the Sabbath being a challenge at times. But thankfully, I have a really understanding team, they know what I believe, and my stance on the Sabbath so it's never been that big of an issue.

When we do have big deployments where maybe we have a command-center type thing set up for a certain amount of time, I think all the relationships that I have had with my coworkers have really helped in that area. It's never really been that big of a challenge to say, "Hey? I can't do this, can you cover me for this?" or "Hey, I can take Saturday night, if you can take Saturday morning."

Have you ever made a job or career change? And if so, was it intentional?

Although I haven't really had a career change or even a job change from Southwest, I started as an intern in our regulatory compliance program, working on manuals, procedures and stuff for our frontline folks working on FAA regulatory things. And when I got hired, I was in that position for about a year and a half.

Although I enjoyed that work, it wasn't nearly as fulfilling as what I feel like I'm doing now. But I had the opportunity to work on some little projects with the team that I'm now on and they ended up having a position open up on their team that I was able to put in for, and was able to move over onto that team. So, although not a career change, it was still a position change in the company..

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

I think probably everybody says it, but finding something that you're passionate about is definitely the biggest thing. But I would put an asterisk on that; find something that you're passionate about, but don't be stuck on one thing and be open to doors that God might be opening for you. I think, another thing [is] being open to changing your mind, and not turning down those opportunities.

Definitely talking with people that have similar interests, or people that you know are in a certain line of work. I think, talking with them and getting their take on what they do and what they like and what they don't like about it, can shed a lot of light on what you might like and not like about it.

Tex, thanks so much for your time today!

COMPASS CHECK
United Youth Magazine

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

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