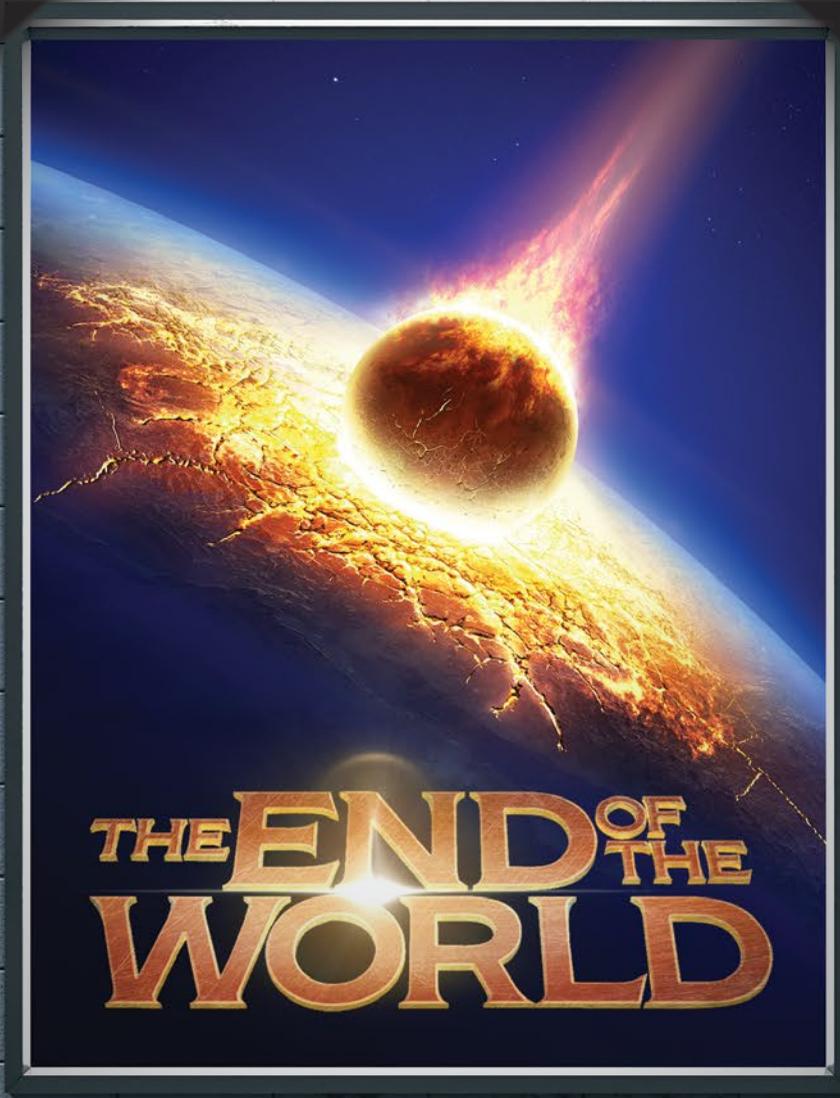




COMPASS CHECK

Helping you turn your spiritual compass toward God



**WILL IT REALLY HAPPEN?
SHOULD YOU BE WORRIED?**

How Can I
Talk to God?

Pre-Feast Issue

Guilty
or Forgiven?

United Youth Magazine | Fall 2018

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COMPASS CORNER



Dear Compass Checkers,

You're at a "crossroads"—a point at which a critical decision must be made that will have far-reaching consequences. What will you do? You can't avoid it or go around it. You can ignore it, but you'll eventually have to face it.

My crossroads came while attending a college homecoming football game. It was a beautiful fall day and I was watching the game with some college friends. But I was not happy. In fact, I was tormented about being there. Why? It was on God's Sabbath day—Saturday afternoon—and I knew I was violating the Sabbath.

Directly in front of me I had a life-changing choice to make: Was I going to heed what I was reading in the Bible about the Sabbath and about God's way of life, or was I going to ignore it and take the path of "doing my own thing"?

I abruptly told my friends, "I'm going back to the dorm." They stared at me and one of them asked why. I said something like, "I just want to." So I exited the football stadium and went back to my dorm. It was lonely there since everyone was at the game. But it was definitely the right choice. Now I could observe the Sabbath properly and have peace with myself.

As far as I knew there were no other students at college who observed the Sabbath, so my Sabbaths were lonely, but this allowed me to have a lot of one-on-one time with God. I went to the library to study the Bible and church booklets so I could get away from the noise in my dorm. Eventually I asked for a minister to visit me at college, and I began to attend Sabbath services (in Spokane, Washington). I was baptized the next year after turning 19.

Have you ever been at a crossroads in your life? Yes, these big decisions face all of us.

SUCCESSFULLY FACING CROSSROADS

Here are three biblical ways of successfully dealing with big or small decisions.

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*, describes youth aged 12-18 pointing their spiritual compass toward God.

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The goal of *Compass Check* is to inspire Church youth, ages 12-18, to respond to the gospel message.

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• **TAKE THE “GOOD WAY”**

Notice this verse in the book of Jeremiah, which refers to “ancient paths”: “This is what the LORD says: ‘Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.’ But you said, ‘We will not walk in it’” (Jeremiah 6:16, New International Version).

“Ancient paths” refer to God’s righteous way of God—the “good way”—which are found in the Ten Commandments and the other laws of God in the Bible. God introduced His laws—His “ancient paths”—originally to Adam and Eve. He has preserved His way of life in the Bible for us to follow in our daily lives.

• **LIGHT YOUR PATH**

Notice in Psalm 119:105: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

The “word” is the Holy Bible. Read it, learn from it and follow it. God gives a treasure trove of practical ways of dealing with life in the pages of His Bible.

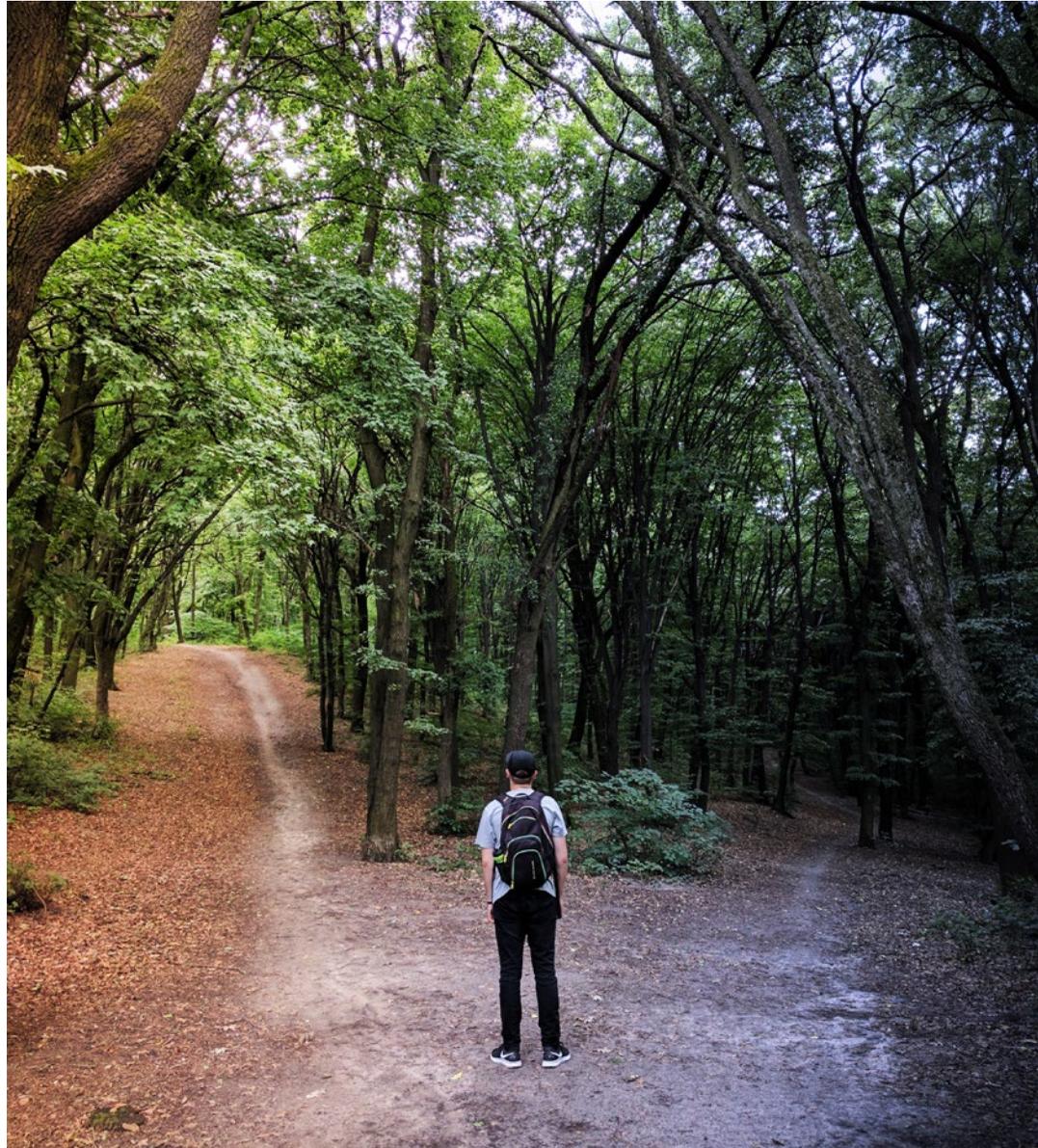
• **SEEK GOD’S WILL**

This follow-up principle is from Proverbs 16:3: “Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed” (NIV). When we sincerely ask God in believing prayer for His will to be done, and we are taking the “good way” of life in following Him, God will make His will known to us.

In Proverbs 16:9 we read: “In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.” We have our own will to contend with (“his heart”), but ultimately we need to let God determine our steps.

God knows us all so well. Notice in Psalm 139:3: “You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.” Now verses 5-6: “You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain” (NIV).

When we come to a crossroads in life (and they come up frequently), realize that God knows your deepest concerns, and as you turn your will over to Him, He will guide you to



the right path. The loving God has truly laid His hand upon us!

Enjoy this pre-Feast issue of *Compass Check* magazine, and I hope you have a very profitable Feast of Tabernacles.

Until next time, your camp friend,



Steve Nutzman

Steve Nutzman, Compass Check editor, is a church pastor in Idaho, Oregon and Utah, and is the United Youth Camps national coordinator. compasscheck@ucg.org

Dear Readers

My college experience resulted in me tackling three majors (that's a long story). I studied English, journalism and music. Many people whom I talk to about this assume that an English degree and a journalism degree would have a lot of overlap or similar classes. But actually they were quite different. One of the reasons why is that in the English major classes I was primarily consuming and the journalism classes involved more producing.

What I mean by that is a typical English class required reading a piece of classic literature, learning its relevance, significance and learning how to dissect it or analyze it. I was usually consuming something that someone else created, and trying to understand what it is and why it's important. Homework included reading assignments and essays explaining my analysis. In contrast, a typical journalism class involved learning how to write a news article or interview someone, and the homework required me to then go write a piece of news or talk to a stranger. I was producing something new.

I thought a lot about this difference, and found over time that the consuming-type assignments were somewhat easier, but the assignments that required me to produce ended up being more rewarding. I try to remind myself of this, especially now, as there are near limitless things to consume, what with the Internet, Netflix and smartphones. It's extremely easy to almost always be consuming. But God gave every human incredible power to create, and I don't think He wants that to go to waste.

God gave humans the ability to invent, design and envision. Exodus 35:35 says, "He has filled them with skill to do all kinds of work as engravers, designers, embroiderers in blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen, and weavers—all of them skilled workers and designers" (New International Version throughout). And this is just a sliver of the possibilities our minds are capable of. Producing can mean artistic projects,



but it can also include much more, like making a video, teaching someone a skill, cooking, working on a relationship or even just giving encouragement (Romans 12:8).

Often, the most difficult part of producing is just getting started. At the marketing agency where I work, I often hear this phrase: "Don't get it right, get it written." It's

easy to get in your own way, overthinking things or worrying that what you're producing isn't perfect. But at some point you just have to jump in and try something. If what you create doesn't turn out perfect (and I know from experience, it probably won't), then it'll be a great learning experience.

Of course, consuming has its place. Consuming God's Word is how we hear from God, understand ourselves and develop discernment to make wise life decisions. But most things are better with balance, and being mindful of the balance between producing and consuming can make life more rewarding and productive. (At least it has for me.)

God gave us the ability to make new things because it's one of His attributes, and we're made in His image. Paul wrote, "You are God's field, God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:9). And elsewhere he adds, "For we are God's handiwork" (Ephesians 2:10). God didn't just make everything at the beginning of the world. He continues to work and create using us as materials. He's reforming and refining each of us individually. And He's working with us collectively as His Church and, eventually, to form His family.

So take a page out of God's book (figuratively, of course) and start creating.

Your friend,



Kourtney Kovanis

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THE SONGS WE SING

and How They Influence Our Lives

by Lorelei Nettles



People across time have loved music, and although the harmonies have changed, the general messages have not. Some may think the content of today's music is worse, but although it may use more descriptive language, music has always described the evils of the time. Racism, religion and sexual issues have always been expressed through music. Each generation loves to listen. Music is in our cars and on our phones. We listen through headphones or while hanging around the house. We even shop to music—specially selected songs or radio stations are often played in stores. I for one have a hard time not dancing down the aisles or lingering in the store when a good song comes on! And the stores know that. They understand we will

shop longer and buy more if we are in tune with the music they are playing. What we listen to influences our lives more than we may think. We need to be aware of the subconscious effect music can have on our attitudes, because it can have a positive or negative effect upon us.

Most of us have had the experience of hearing a song from the past and having an emotional reaction. It may make us happy, sad or even upset. Sometimes it is due to the words of a song and sometimes it is because of the memories it stirs up. For example, a song might be played when you are with a lot of friends having a great time. Later, the song comes on the radio and it instantly brings back the memory of that special day.¹

I had this kind of experience during my first Feast of Tabernacles. It was the first service on the first day. I had previously sung the hymn “God Speaks to Us” at regular Sabbath services and loved the words. But now I was with about 1,000 other people, and there were musical accompanists playing along. When the music began and the horns started blasting, I began to choke up—as I started to sing the words, I wept. It was all so beautiful and touching to me. God is awesome, and we were keeping His Feast and singing His praises (Psalm 95:1). Perhaps you have been at a wedding, the Feast or something similar, when suddenly someone begins to sing a popular song from camp, and within seconds everyone gathers together and is singing in unison. I know I have. Music can stir us up and bring us together!

There are some religions that actually ban their members from listening to most music and prohibit dancing. I remember watching a TV program that followed a family who believed this way. Their very small child opened a music box in a store and a lovely tune began to play. He instinctively started to sway his body. No one had taught him to dance;



it came naturally to him. Of course, he was promptly reprimanded for his actions. It made me sad to think anyone thought dancing was wrong. We know that King David danced for joy, with the trumpets blaring, while bringing the ark of God back to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:14). He also spent much of his time under King Saul playing lovely music. We know too that the angels sing praises to God, and Scripture says when Christ returns they will all “sing a new song” (Job 38:7; Revelation 14:3).

Classical music has long been touted as helping young children be better learners. A Stanford University study claims that the quiet spaces between music are a time of great clarity for concentrating and processing information.² Various other studies show that while some music has a very calming effect, other varieties can make us tense and upset. I never really liked classical music as a teen; it seemed boring to me. But I discovered that when I am stressed, it calms me. It really is an amazing thing to experience, to feel your body relax and your mind calm. Try it sometime—it might surprise you too.

The U.S. National Medical Library posted an article in its *Frontiers in Psychology* website about a double-blind study showing how playing instrumental music during surgery lowers cortisol levels. In other words, it makes people less stressed during surgery.³ Other studies show that music can improve the lives of those with dementia.⁴ Learning to play an instrument also can let them express their emotions, and it creates opportunities for socialization. The action of singing, especially in a group, seems to help people relax and feel more comfortable. There are many positives that come from good music and songs.

WHEN MUSIC IS NOT A POSITIVE INFLUENCE

There is a downside to music, however. As I mentioned, some music can make us sad, tense or even angry. Sadness is not necessarily a bad thing, but it can be. A song that moves us to tears because it is so touching or brings back loving memories is a wonderful

thing, but a song that makes us feel depressed can be a danger. Music that makes us angry or hateful towards others can also be a real problem. As God’s children, we must all be careful about what we allow our minds to ponder.

I did not grow up in the Church, so I did not pay much attention to what I listened to. I liked pop music, but with friends I listened to whatever they were listening to. After coming into the Church, however, I would sometimes hear the beginning of a song and think, “Oh this is one of my favorites!” Then as I sang along to the lyrics I really began to hear the words to the song, and I would realize it was not a great song at all. Sometimes the lyrics were about committing adultery, fooling around or some other evil. Evidently, I had not really listened to the words before, or I just had not paid attention. I was shocked at how often I had to change the channel or delete a song from my old playlist.

I just heard on the news recently the theory that any kind of music is calming and good for us, but this has proven to be wrong again and again. I was watching a TV program a while back about children who commit murder. I was surprised by how many said they were influenced by the music they were listening to. Other destructive behavior has also been blamed on music by criminals who’ve been arrested. Some music has lyrics that talk about beating up women, racial crimes, drug use or hating God. (This doesn’t mean that every person who listens to a certain kind of music is going to commit a crime. But we should consider God in every part of our lives, including the music and media we consume.)

Our Creator loves to hear us sing songs of praise to Him! There are many songs we can sing and listen to that make us want to dance, sing or feel calm and uplifted. I have certainly changed my listening habits. Sometimes something slips by when I am not paying attention, but once I catch it, I correct myself. I try to remember Philippians 4:8, which reads, “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (New International Version). **CC**



Lorelei Nettles has always enjoyed writing, her real love being writing for the Church’s publications. Lorelei and her family currently live in the suburbs of Phoenix, Arizona. lolelei.nettles@gmail.com

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GUILTY *or Forgiven?*

by Gayle Hoefker

Jackie was overcome with guilt. Have you been there? Are you there now? Listen to her story and see what unfolds.

Jackie was lying on her bed. It was too much to get up to do anything else. She felt miserable. Everything reminded her of her recent past. She couldn't stop thinking about what she could've had, if not for the downward spiral she had experienced. It's been three months since that fateful night, and she still has trouble getting back to the right path of life she was on before.

It had all started with a dare from a friend: sneak out of the house after her parents went to bed and wander around the neighborhood. It was harmless enough, but it didn't stop there. Soon it involved other friends, staying out later, not getting her homework done, cheating on tests, a borrowed car and some stolen liquor from a friend's house.

This was getting out of control. She would stop after Friday night—she knew she shouldn't be out on the Sabbath, but just one more time—that would be it! But then her friend was pulled over by the police who took them to the station and called her parents.

REPENTANCE

She told the whole story to her parents. They were not happy with her deception, lying, disobedience, stealing and drinking. They were disappointed, but they were willing to forgive her and help her get back to where she should be.

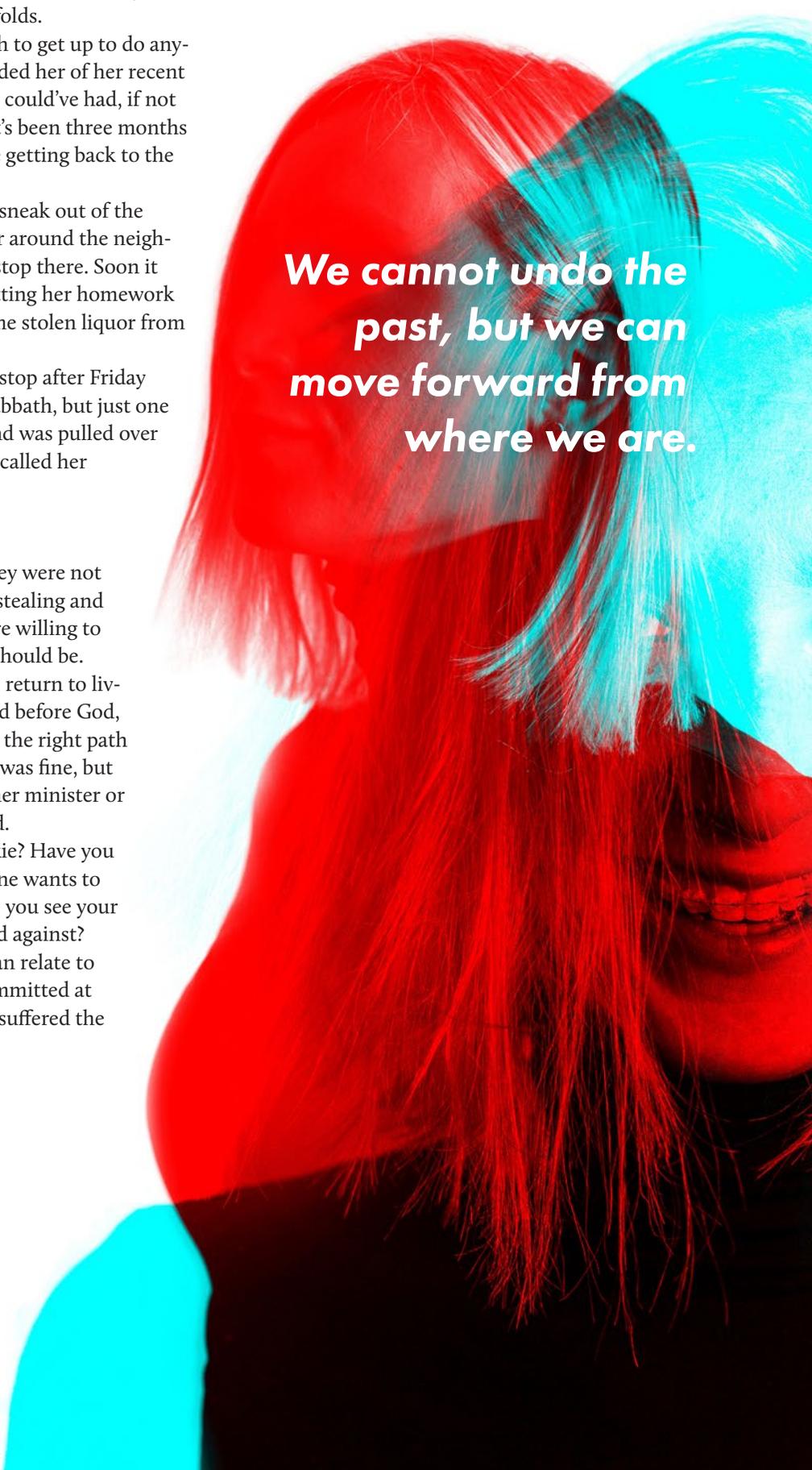
Since then, Jackie had made the decision to return to living her life according to God's way. She repented before God, and she felt that He was helping her walk along the right path (1 John 1:9). On the outside, it appeared that all was fine, but Jackie didn't feel like her friends, her teachers, her minister or her parents really believed that she had changed.

Have you been in a situation similar to Jackie? Have you committed sins and repented, but feel like no one wants to forget about them? Do you feel guilty each time you see your teacher, minister, boss or whoever you've sinned against? Jackie's story is fictional, but I think everyone can relate to doing something you know is wrong. I have committed at least one of the sins that Jackie committed and suffered the guilt and resulting fallout.

FORGIVENESS

How do we move past a sin? How do we move on and live a better life? How do we build trust with those who keep reminding us of our past? Has anyone in the Bible faced these same circumstances? How did they move on?

The story of the Prodigal Son found in Luke 15:11-32 is a well-known biblical story about a young man who left the way of life he grew up in, and after a while he repented of



**We cannot undo the
past, but we can
move forward from
where we are.**



his wrong living and returned home to his father. Would his father and the rest of his family accept him when he returned? Would the community accept him? Take some time to read (or re-read) the story and familiarize yourself with it.

You'll recall that the son spent his whole inheritance on wasteful and sinful living (Luke 15:13). What an embarrassment to his father! The son went to a citizen of the city—not of his own faith—and found work feeding pigs (verse 15). This was a degrading job for a Jew. He had sunk to about as low as he could go. He was famished enough that he considered eating the pig's food. "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you'" (Luke 15:17-18, New International Version).

The son realized his mistake, repented before God and returned home. He asked forgiveness from his father. His father willingly forgave him and threw a party because his son had repented (verse 24). The son was embarrassed to return, but with the strength of God, he was able to do it. His father showed the right attitude and forgave him. The father was willing to move forward from this moment. This is how it should end, but that doesn't always happen.

Later in the story, the older son returned and found a party given for this delinquent brother. He was jealous that a party was given for his brother who had made so many mistakes. He wanted to bring up the old sins and not forgive his brother for the total disrespect for their father, family and community. The father, however, chastised his older son for his attitude. He would treat both sons as dear and cherished (verse 32).

When you commit a sin, repent before God, and start going the right way, God wipes away that sin. He chooses to no longer bring it to mind (Psalm 103:12). We as Christians should do the same thing for others. We shouldn't hold sins constantly over people's heads and keep bringing them up. But as humans, we struggle to truly forgive and forget. Are you guilty of doing this?

HAVING PEACE AND BUILDING TRUST

What do we do when it's others who don't want to forget our sins? Yes, it is difficult when people can only remember us as that "punk kid

who was always causing trouble." But we cannot change other people. We can only change ourselves.

First, keep your mind focused on God, and not on other people. God promises that peace will come to those who focus on Him (Isaiah 26:3). In addition, pray to God and ask Him to give you peace; He promises to give us peace that is beyond what we can even comprehend (Philippians 4:6-7). When we are at one with God, we won't care as much about what others are saying or thinking.

Second, focus on what you can do to regain people's trust. Repentance makes us stronger. It helps us to strive harder to do the right thing. Don't let your sin separate you from God or your church family. Prove that you have changed. Do activities and works of service that show you are focused on doing the right thing. David was a man like this.

David did not always do what was right. He committed adultery. He had Uriah killed. He was a weak father and allowed terrible sins in his family to go unpunished (2 Samuel 13:25), but David had a heart that wanted to do what was right (Acts 13:22). When confronted with his sin with Bathsheba, he repented (2 Samuel 12:13). At the end of his life, David talked about how he tried to rule as a king: "He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God" (2 Samuel 23:3).

There is another biblical person you have probably heard about—Rahab the harlot! Check out her story in Joshua 2. Even though there are many positive qualities Rahab exhibited after she was a harlot, this is how we often refer to her. How did Rahab handle this stigma? Rahab put her trust in God for deliverance (Joshua 2:11-12). Her action of saving the spies showed that she had turned from her former life as a resident of Jericho (James 2:25).

Did Rahab's past keep her from being a great person? Not at all! Rahab became part of the Israelite community, married and had children. Many years later, King David was born from her descendants (Matthew 1:5-6). Following this, Jesus Christ was born in the same family line. Obviously, God did not hold Rahab's past over her head. Forgiven by God, she moved on.

Sin has consequences. Some of those consequences follow us longer than others do. We cannot undo the past, but we can move forward from where we are. Ask God to help you stay positively focused on the future and to help others see your true repentance by your actions. God hears the prayers of all who reach out to Him (1 John 5:14-15). **CC**



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HOW CAN I TALK TO GOD?

THE GREAT CREATOR GOD—WHO MADE EVERYTHING AND IS CALLING YOU TO BE A PART OF HIS FAMILY FOREVER—IS EAGER AND ANXIOUS FOR YOU TO TALK TO HIM!

If you are going to be one of His sons or daughters forever, then it is important for you to learn how to communicate with your Heavenly Father.

God communicates with us through the Bible. Every word of Scripture is “breathed by God” and inspired for us (2 Timothy 3:16). As we read and study God’s Word, we need to understand

that it is a personal message for each of us. However, communication is a two-way street. God also wants us to talk to Him. Prayer is personal, intimate communication with the supreme Father of the universe.

God wants you to tell Him—as you would a close friend—how you feel, what you need and what you think. You can do this through heartfelt prayer. Prayer is our part of the two-way conversation with God. God speaks

to us through the Bible, and we speak to Him through prayer. In this way we get to know God, and He comes to know us. The Bible shows us how this process works.

Here are some basic principles to guide you in prayer:

1. KNOW THAT GOD DELIGHTS IN THE PRAYERS OF THOSE WHO SEEK TO PLEASE HIM AND DO HIS WILL

Proverbs 15:8 tells us: “The prayer of the upright is His delight.” Your Heavenly Father wants you to pray to Him and is delighted when you do! He is always available and wants to listen to you.

2. BE CONFIDENT THAT GOD HEARS YOUR PRAYERS

1 John 5:14 tells us, “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”

Our Savior and Elder Brother, Jesus Christ, who spoke often to His Heavenly Father, had absolute *confidence* that God always heard His prayers. In John 11:42, He said to our Father, “I know that You always hear Me.”

3. PRAY IN A PRIVATE PLACE

In Matthew 6:6, Jesus told His disciples, “When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.” It is important to pray in a private place—perhaps in a bedroom, a spare room, or even a closet. This will make it easier to concentrate and avoid distraction, and you will know that your prayers are heard. Private time with God is very important, and will become even more so as the years pass.

4. SET ASIDE A REGULAR TIME TO PRAY

For many people, the morning is best—before your school day or work day gets started. Jesus Christ spent the first part of His day in prayer, before anything else could interrupt Him. Notice Mark 1:35: “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place, and there He prayed.” The prophet Daniel had a well-known schedule of praying three times a day: “Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days” (Daniel 6:10). Even the threat of death did not cause Daniel to change his prayer habit!

5. FOLLOW THE GUIDELINE PRAYER THAT JESUS GAVE US

Notice how Jesus began His

“The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth.”

sample prayer: “Our Father in Heaven” (Matthew 6:9). Jesus instructed us to pray to the Father in His name (John 16:23). Give honor to God and acknowledge His greatness and the blessings He has given to us. Pray for God’s Kingdom to come to this earth. Next comes the hard part—seeking God’s will. God’s will for you is to be a part of His family (John 6:40). But it also includes being patient and continuing to live according to His laws and commandments. Romans 2:7 tells us we can have the promise of “eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality.” Ask God in your daily prayers for help, to supply your daily needs and for the needs of others. When praying, acknowledge your shortcomings and ask for forgiveness. We must also learn to forgive others who might have offended us. In Luke’s account of the example prayer, he concludes this way: “And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Luke 11:4). We should pray for help in avoiding sin each day and in learning how to forgive others.

6. READ THE BIBLE OUT LOUD AS YOU PRAY, DISCUSSING THE CONCEPTS AND MEANING OF EACH VERSE

This can be an effective tool when

learning to communicate with your Creator. Start with the Psalms, reading perhaps 10 or 12 verses each day as you conclude your prayer. The psalms address every human emotion we experience—the highs of joy, the depths of despair and everything in between. God shows us how to deal with every aspect of life in this wonderful book of prayers and songs! Many also use the book of Proverbs as a guide. There are 31 chapters in Proverbs—enough to read one each day of the month. The wisdom you will learn by reading Proverbs over and over is beyond measure. Reading it out loud as you pray and asking God to help you to absorb this wisdom will result in an incredible benefit for you, both as a person and as a member of God’s family.

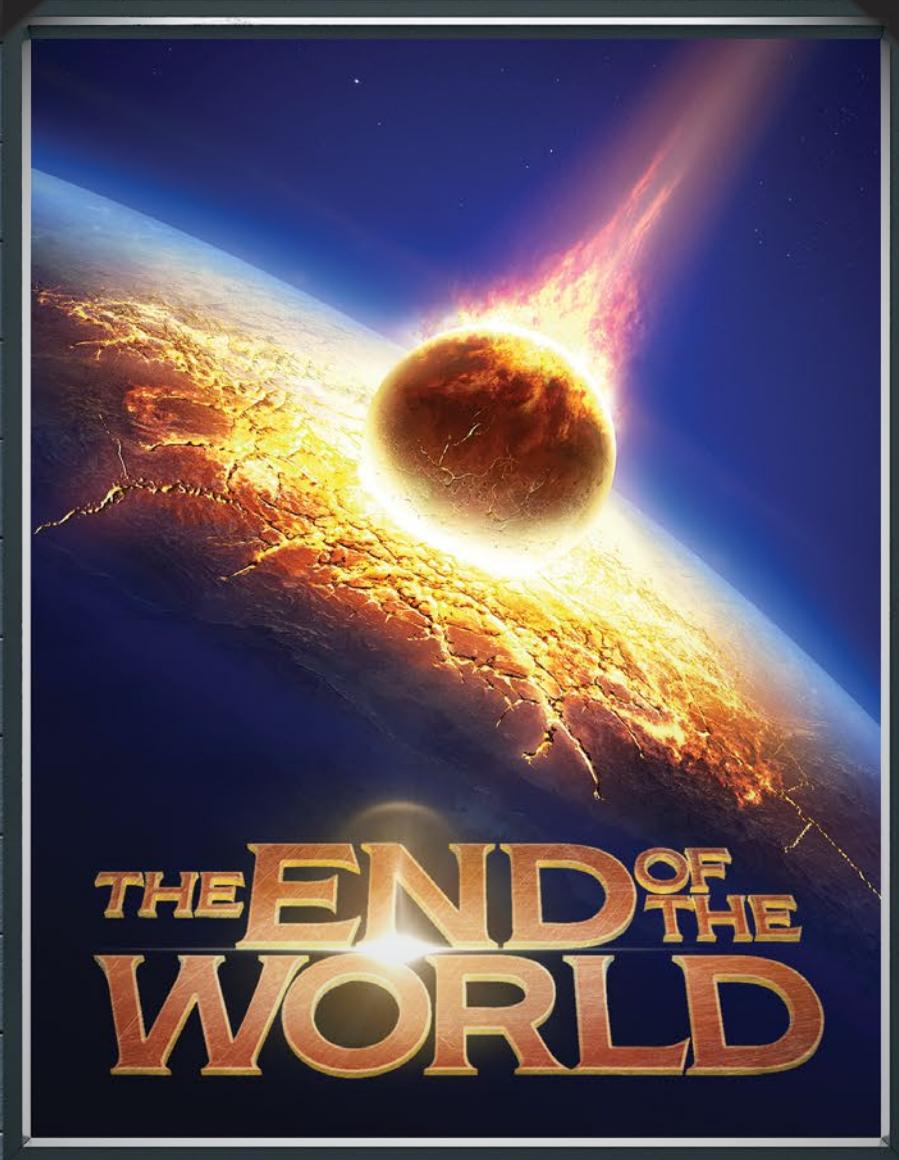
The prayers of Daniel are an excellent outline of how to communicate with God, as are the prayers of Paul, Nehemiah and others. Read them as if they were your own and apply them to the circumstances you face now. You will be amazed at how you can relate to them!

7. NEVER BE AFRAID TO PRAY, AND ALWAYS REMEMBER THE GOD WE SERVE WANTS TO HEAR YOUR PRAYERS

God describes Himself to us this way: “Merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Exodus 34:6-7). And Psalm 145:18 says: “The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth.” **CC**



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**WILL IT REALLY HAPPEN?
SHOULD YOU BE WORRIED?**

by Steve Nutzman

Predictions abound about massive worldwide upheaval and the end of the world. They are found in popular sci-fi movies and books, religious figures proclaim it and Internet sites are filled with theories about the complete annihilation of the human race in the near future.

In this fall issue of *Compass Check* magazine, which is our pre-Feast issue, let's address this vital question for all of us: Will the world end, or is there a better one coming?

FIRST, SOME BAD NEWS

Jesus' disciples asked Him the question we are addressing in this article. Specifically, they asked Jesus in Matthew 24:3: "... And what will be the sign of Your coming, and the end of the age?" This was in the context of events just prior to His return to the earth. But note that they referred to this as "the end of the age" and not "the end of the world," as some have incorrectly translated this.

This is key to our understanding. The disciples were asking about the end of "this present evil age" (see Galatians 1:4). So Jesus told them: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24:7-8).

Elsewhere the Bible details those other "sorrows." The book of Revelation describes many worldwide events that are coming, including cosmic disturbances such as the darkening of the sun and moon and the plummeting of meteors from the sky (Revelation 6:12-13); colossal environmental disasters impacting vegetation (Revelation 8:7), sea life (verse 8) and the atmosphere (verse 12); and the most powerful, destructive earthquake in the history of mankind (Revelation 16:18). We're talking about a pretty big deal here!

But why do these end-time events have to take place? Mankind is stubborn and generally does not want Almighty God to rule their lives. This stubbornness started about 6,000 years ago in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were told by God to not eat of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Instead of obeying God and trusting in Him, they chose to follow Satan and their human nature. Simply put, they rebelled against God and thought they knew better than God! (You can review

the beginning of the "bad news" in Genesis 2:16-17, 3:1-19.)

God cannot bless rebellion and sin. Sin is the breaking of His holy laws as we find in 1 John 3:4: "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness."

Take war, for example, and the sixth commandment in Exodus 20:13: "You shall not murder." In the following quote we read about the devastating loss of human life to war. It is tragic!

"At least 108 million people were killed in wars in the twentieth century. Estimates for the total number killed in wars throughout all of human history range from 150 million to 1 billion. Of the past 3,400 years, humans have been entirely at peace for 268 of them, or 8 percent of recorded history" (*The New York Times*, July 6, 2003).

The Bible shows that in the end-time, war will once again be on the rise. When will mankind learn that war does not bring peace?

So far, it looks like the end-of-the-world folks are pretty close to the mark. Will mankind survive all this upheaval? Humanly, we can't.

NOW, THE GOOD NEWS

The Bible reveals that mankind would be entirely wiped off the face of the earth except for the sudden and universe-changing rescue by Jesus Christ! Jesus gave the disciples (and us too) hope and assurance: "And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved [alive]; but for the elect's sake [the sake of those God is working with today] those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:22).

Tragically, even when God the Father sends Jesus Christ to this earth to rescue us from total destruction, mankind will fight the Son of God. Notice in Revelation 19:19: "And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army." This shows how totally deceived our world will become during the dark close of this age.

The return of Jesus Christ to rescue planet earth is pictured in the meaning of the first fall Festival, the Feast of Trumpets. Jesus' return initiates the resurrection of the saints of God who have died in the faith or who are alive when He returns. You can read this in Matthew 24:30-31: "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they

will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

SATAN BOUND

Satan’s influence over humanity will then be ended for an entire 1,000 years, which is the meaning of the Day of Atonement. Satan will be bound and thrust into the bottomless pit, which pictures a place of restraint, where he and the demons cannot influence humanity.

This is found in Revelation 20:1-3: “Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.”

A BETTER WORLD COMING

God gives us confidence to know that the world won’t end in the way that many predict. With the upheaval surrounding Christ’s return and the changes He will then bring, *the world as we know it will come to an end at that future time—though the earth itself and humankind will survive*. This is wonderful news!

So what happens after Jesus intervenes to set things straight and prevent life on earth from being destroyed? Our planet will be in rough shape. But God has a plan for everything, and His plan for what follows after Christ’s return is amazing and beautiful. The meaning of the Feast of Tabernacles pictures this time.

Jesus Christ will rule the world from Jerusalem and be our loving King (Isaiah 2:2, 9:7, 11:1-5). War will be a relic of the past (Isaiah 2:4, 11:9). God will miraculously transform major portions of the world so mankind can inhabit these areas (Isaiah 35:1). The law of God will be taught to all people around the world (Isaiah 2:3), and God’s Holy Spirit will be available to everyone so repentance can take place (Isaiah 25:7-9; Ezekiel 36:26-27, 31). Even the wild nature of animals will be removed (Isaiah 11:6-8). God will remove the veil of spiritual blindness so all people can learn about Him (2 Corinthians 3:13-18; Isaiah 2:2-3).

Those individuals whom God the Father has drawn during this physical life to have a relationship with Him and His Son, and who have been faithful in this calling, will be blessed with eternal spirit life in the Kingdom of God. “. . . And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4).

The Bible shows that there are some very difficult and dangerous times ahead—“some bad news.” Thankfully, we also know that in His goodness and mercy God won’t allow mankind to be destroyed, but will send Jesus Christ back to earth to intervene—“the good news.” God tells us in Revelation 20 that those in the “first resurrection” will be “blessed and holy” (Revelation 20:6).

So now that we know what to expect from the future, what should we do about it? We need to put this knowledge into action. When you and I personally come to the point in our lives that we don’t want to live any longer by our own rules or the ways of this world, and instead submit to God, accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Master and repent of our sins, then we may be baptized and, with

The ultimate “place of refuge” is in your personal relationship with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ.

the laying on of hands, receive God’s Holy Spirit. (Search “The Holy Spirit: God’s Power at Work” at ucg.org.) This, too, is really good news.

GOD IS OUR PLACE OF REFUGE

The ultimate “place of refuge” is in your personal relationship with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. We read this in Psalm 9:9-10: “The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And those who know Your name will put their trust in You; for You, LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You.”

God gives us understanding of what’s coming to give us peace and to prepare us for things to come. God gives us peace, a calmness and hope in our lives. We don’t need to worry about the future of the world. God is in charge of all things and His love for humanity will not be thwarted by Satan or mankind. God reigns supreme.

Prophecy gives us knowledge of future events so we can draw closer to God. So don’t worry about the end of the world. Instead, look forward to the far better world to come! **CC**



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THE GREAT TRIBULATION & GOD'S PROTECTION

As a teen I began to read Bible verses that describe the Great Tribulation. I had never heard this term before. Then as I began to receive literature from God's Church, I learned that the Great Tribulation is how Jesus described the worst time of global suffering—ever. It will drag humanity to the very brink of extinction.

When I first began to learn about this, I naturally was fearful about the future. The Bible describes a future time when the modern American and British-descended peoples, among other nations, will go through a time of severe testing because of their national sins.

Notice what Jesus Christ said of this 3½ year period: "If those days had not been cut short [by God from running their course], no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:22, New International Version). This verse not only shows that the Great Tribulation will be terrible, but it points to the time we are living in now as the end time. Why is this? Because only since the invention of today's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons has it been possible for mankind to utterly destroy itself.

The prophesied suffering is heartbreaking to contemplate, but God will allow it for mankind's long-term good. God as a loving Father disciplines His disobedient children. God's desire is for all mankind to eventually repent and become part of His family and Kingdom. God knows that sin hurts, and desires that all humanity live in peace and joy.

Years ago I was concerned about my family, church friends and yes, about me. How would any of us ever come through this 3½-year period

of war, famine, disease and even national captivity? You can read part of this prophecy in Matthew 24:21: "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be." Also notice verse 9: "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake."

But as I continued to better understand the scriptures, instead of fearing the troubled times ahead, God gave me more faith in Him. I began to realize more and more how much He loves all of God's people and all of mankind. And I came to realize that God will protect the faithful.

Notice this in Revelation 12:13-16: "When the dragon [Satan] saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman [God's Church] who had given birth to the male child. The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle [miraculous intervention], so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time [3½ years], out of the serpent's reach. Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth" (NIV).

This shows that God miraculously delivers His elect from destruction from Satan during the 3½-year Great Tribulation. While not all will be protected during the tribulation period (Revelation 12:17), most of His followers will be protected by God during this time.

Revelation 3:10 also addresses

God's protection during this time: "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth."

This shows that our lives are in God's powerful hands. No matter when the Great Tribulation may come, we need to heed the words of Jesus Christ in Matthew 24:46-47: "Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods." We need to live each day following our God Who loves us very much.

During good times and bad times, we know God will take our hand and watch over us. The key is to turn our lives more and more over to God and allow Him to direct our steps as found in Proverbs 3:5-8: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones" (NIV).

So over the years, since first reading about the Great Tribulation, I have learned to put my faith in God, and He has taken my fear away and replaced it with faith in Him. I now have peace, thanks to Him.

All prophecy is ultimately a message of hope. God is in control and He is the God of love. As we turn our lives over to Him, there is nothing to fear because, as Jesus said, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

For further reading, search "Bible Prophecy and You: The Great Tribulation" at ucg.org.

—Steve Nutzman



LET GO

The Active Work of Letting God Change You

"I SHOULD REALLY SAY SOMETHING."

You've just seen something that you know isn't right. You try to ignore it and turn away. But your heart is burning within you. You want to speak up, but something restrains you: fear. Fear of embarrassment, fear of the reaction you may provoke, fear of misreading the situation. "Who am I to even say something?" The moments tick by. You see your opportunity to act starting to slip away. You try to mentally rehearse what you could say. Your heart is pounding as you work up the courage to confront the situation. You look around, wondering if anybody else knows what is going on. "Surely there's somebody else more qualified than me to intervene here."

But there isn't. Nobody else is aware, or if they are, they're just as conflicted as you are. This is your moment to act and yours alone. Will you speak up? Or will you let the moment pass?

Fill in the blanks. You've been in this type of situation before—it could be that someone is gossiping about someone you know; it could be that you have learned information that will hurt someone you know, but they are unaware as of yet; it could be that someone is being bullied, or someone is getting ready to start a fight; it could be one of your friends pocketing something at the store; it could be a boy and a girl from church slipping away alone together at a party. Fill in the blanks.

When we talk about how God works with us, the first thing that comes to mind is how we repent of and work to overcome sins and problems (my last article in the summer issue of *Compass Check* gave

tips for how to do that: "How Do You Overcome Recurring Sins?").

Yet being a Christian does not mean that your sole focus is to *stop sinning*, but to allow God to gradually *change* you. The way this is stated in Scripture, however, can sound passive: "Yield to the Holy Spirit;" "submit to God's will;" "let this mind be in you." That passive tone can be puzzling—what does it look like to yield to God's will? Does that mean I just sort of wait around for Him to do something?

It is these types of situations—when our hearts burn within us, when we feel a strong urge to act, to say, *to do something*—that help to break through the passive tone. What it looks like to "let this mind be in you" (Philippians 2:5) is to let go of your natural human mindset and learn the mindset of Jesus Christ. The more you do so, the more God can use you as a powerful tool in service of the good news of His Kingdom.

And although it is when you choose to be baptized that God's Spirit literally comes to live inside of you, know that until then, He is involved in your life and is revealing His will to you. Read on to learn how.

SLAVE TO SIN, OR SLAVE TO RIGHTEOUSNESS?

The presumption of Scripture is that we are doing works—bearing fruit. There is no neutral state of being. Paul put it this way: "Don't you

realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living” (Romans 6:16, New Living Translation).

Paul puts it in such black-and-white terms because we can easily fool ourselves into thinking that the way we are living life is fine when it isn't. We often live on a kind of auto-pilot, where we aren't necessarily choosing sin, but we aren't really choosing righteousness either. Sometimes we even subconsciously think we're okay by comparing ourselves to some much worse standard (“I don't sleep around/shoplift/blaspheme God/etc., so I'm not *that* bad.”)

But the net result of living that way, in the long term, *is* sin if we don't let Christ's mind be in us. In one parable, Jesus illustrated how God gives us resources and hopes that we will use them for good (Matthew 25:14-30). The resources we are given take the form of natural abilities, knowledge, intelligence, money, physical health and more. In the parable, one servant didn't use the resources he was given (represented by a “talent” of precious metal, worth about 20 years of wages), saying, “I was afraid and went out and hid your [money] in the ground.” The master's response is chilling: “You wicked and lazy servant . . . cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness” (Matthew 25:25-30). Yikes.

COME TO ME, ALL WHO ARE WEARY

The good news is that our calling, to be Jesus' disciple, comes with a beautiful promise: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

I had never understood this saying very well, because I never really understood or thought through the metaphor of a yoke. Allow me to explain it: a yoke is a strong wooden beam that a farmer places across the back of two oxen to link them together. He or she harnesses them both to the plow, and the yoke allows the two animals to pull

together in unison, which amplifies their combined strength. But the farmer is always careful to match two oxen of relatively similar strength. If one is significantly stronger than the other, he will strain against the yoke while the weaker one strains to keep up—each ox's strength is wasted and they become tired more quickly.

Jesus' word picture has two built-in assumptions: First, that we are always walking forward (doing works, living life), and second, that we are under a yoke of some kind. The yoke of Jesus Christ is easy, lighter and less burdensome in implicit contrast to another yoke: the yoke of the sins of this world—the things that we turn away from when we choose to live God's way of life. The works of the flesh: fornication, drunkenness, hatred, jealousy, selfish ambition, bitterness, etc. (Galatians 5:19-21). These are the yoke of the ruler of this world, Satan. He will gladly hook you up, and the more you strain to keep up with him, the sicker, the weaker, and the less fulfilled you will be.

By comparison, Jesus Christ says His burden, His yoke, His pace is easy. This does not mean He is espousing an unproductive or somehow lazy way of life (see above parable); rather, He is espousing a way of life focused on serving God and others out of genuine love. The result of living God's way is a more fulfilling, joyful, productive life. Those who spend their time serving others are happier and more full of life than those focused on themselves.

HOW TO DISCERN GOD'S WILL

How do you train yourself to know what's right and wrong, and to learn to hear God's will? The answers are simple: study the Bible and pray to Him often. Basic, right? But as humans, sometimes we can let our communication channels with God become neglected. Then when we're in a crisis, suddenly we're praying to God and expecting to open the Bible and see something like “Choose to forgive Kathleen for that mean comment she made at lunch on Tuesday,” or whatever.

But it turns out that small, everyday decisions add up to huge, life-changing trends—we just can't see how until later in life. By choosing to ask God for guidance every day in prayer and reading His Word, you are training your brain to think more like Him and to discern His will in your life. When those crisis moments come, responding in a way that reflects God's will instead of your own will come more naturally.

The result is a peace of mind and a life of rich reward (John 10:10). It is helping others, focusing on their needs out of the abundance of your own love for them as children of God. **CC**



Mitchell Moss is the lead designer of Compass Check. He and his ultra-lovely wife Dana live in Nashville, Tennessee. He loves photography, design and menswear. mitch_moss@ucg.org

The Four Corners



My Island Home

HELLO FAMILY!

My name is Oraina Campbell, and I am a member of the United Church of God attending the Kingston, Jamaica, congregation. Let me tell you a bit about my life in Jamaica and the Church there. The congregation I attend is in Jamaica's capital, Kingston. We have approximately 55 people and steadily counting, with lots of vibrant young people.

The cool, quiet hills of St. Catherine, Jamaica, where I was born and raised caused me to have a fantastic life. I grew up in a home filled with joyful chatter where siblings were friends and teamwork was the order of the day. Our mother, Merlene, raised us never to envy or covet anyone's belongings but to be content and thankful with the blessings each day brought. My mother, who took on the titles of both mother and father, raised us with discipline and a great deal of affection. She was dedicated to the wellbeing of all her children and ensured that we were constantly engulfed with genuine love and support.



From left to right: me, my oldest sister Oninie, my mother Merlene, and other sister Olivia at the Feast of Tabernacles some years ago.

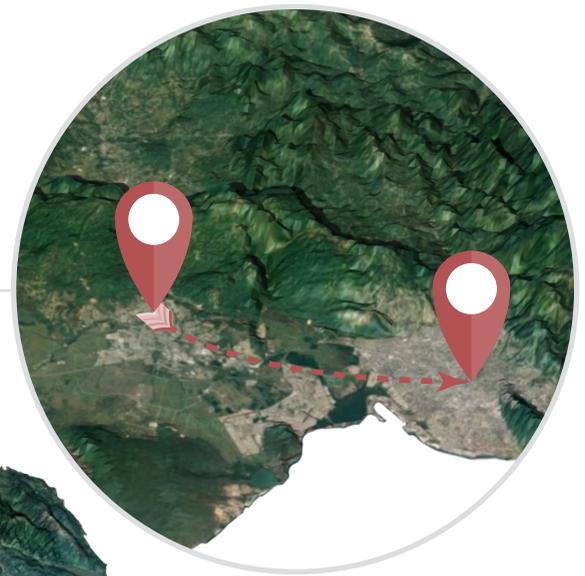
Jamaica, my homeland, rich in vegetation and kissed by the sun, is filled with a diverse ethnic population of approximately 2.7 million people, a multiculturalism that makes our country so beautiful. Our differences in race gave birth to our motto, which proudly states, "Out of many, one people." Our beautiful island gracefully rests in

the Caribbean Sea and spans 4,244 square miles, making it the third largest island in the Caribbean. It is one of five islands in the Greater Antilles, along with Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Cayman Islands. Jamaica is divided into three counties—Cornwall, Middlesex and Surrey—and 14 parishes, each with its own capital city.

My mother and I live in St. Catherine. Our capital is Spanish Town, which was founded in 1534 and was the first capital of Jamaica. It was the primary business hub of the island for more than three centuries and thereby commands respect in light of all its historical achievements. Today it is famed for the many monuments it brandishes which welcome walking tourists to a concentrated tour.

GETTING TO CHURCH IN JAMAICA

There are three UCG congregations in Jamaica: Kingston, Ocho Rios and Montego Bay. My family travels almost two hours to the nearest one in Kingston.





Escorted by overgrown vegetation on both sides, we walk from home for about 10 minutes on our lonely road, then through some bushes on a dirt track. After going through the bush we get to the highway.



Another 15 minute walk on the highway takes us across a huge bridge overlooking the magnificent Rio Cobre River. Then we arrive in a community called Angels where we can get a taxi in the twinkle of an eye. The taxi takes us to a bus station in Spanish Town, where we catch our bus into Kingston.



However, when we get to the bus terminus in Kingston, our journey has not ended. We then take another bus to arrive in New Kingston and to our congregation.

Our seating capacity is 60 and we're usually close to that most Sabbaths. We have lots of young people, ranging from newborn to 23 and in college. Our deacon, Anthony Coore, is a very educated man. After services, we have food and beautiful fellowship. Then we end the Sabbath with our weekly Bible study, which always ends in riveting discussions. We are such a close-knit congregation that our visitors and guests always remark how they can sense that from us.

Our minister, Chuck Smith, is the pastor for all the congregations in the Caribbean. No doubt pastoring this vast region is difficult, and so he has several assistants. Two of them—members Stan Braumuller and Jeff Lockhart—reside in America so they can't

be with us in person every week, but they do visit from time to time. We are blessed to have them, and we pray for their presence to result in the growing of our congregation in both quantity and quality.

All in all, Jamaica is home! A flood zone of history, great people, vibrant culture and fine cuisine. You are welcome to visit anytime! Maybe we'll see you next Feast of Tabernacles! **CC**



Oraina Campbell attends church in Kingston, Jamaica and likes writing, particularly Christian literature, because it's a way to express her love for God. She is 20 years old and plans on becoming a registered nurse to exercise her care and compassion for people.

COMPASS CHECK

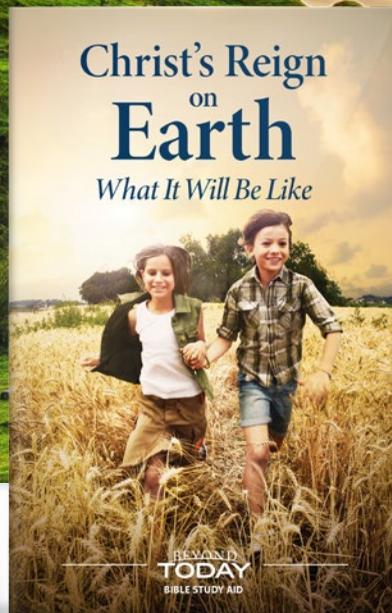
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