



COMPASS CHECK

Helping you turn your spiritual compass toward God

C O V I D - 1 9
IS THIS THE END OF THE AGE?

3 Steps to a Braver,
More Confident You

Know No Doubt

Angels: Serving God
and Mankind

Church Teens Across the Globe: United in
Service, United in Trials, United in Spirit

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COMPASS CHECK

Compass Check is a biblically based magazine for young people of the United Church of God, an International Association (UCGIA). Our name, *Compass Check*, 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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COMPASS CORNER

Dear Compass Checkers,

I'd like to begin this Compass Corner by saying a *big* thank you to Steve Nutzman who faithfully served as the editor of *Compass Check* since its beginning. In addition, I'd like to thank him for giving me the opportunity to follow in his footsteps and pick up where he left off. Thanks Steve!

As a teenager, you've probably been asked a million times, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" The question can get old fast, but it's a good one to ask yourself. For me, I wanted to be a stunt car driver until I was about eight. At that point I decided I wanted to be an engineer and I never looked back.

From that point forward, everything I did (education wise) was to work toward becoming an engineer. I graduated high school and went to engineering school. My favorite hobby during that time (and now) was working on cars. As I did, I always tried to ask myself questions like, "How was this part made? Why was it designed this way? How could it be made better?" In short, before even technically becoming an engineer, I tried to *think* like one.

Of course, the funny part is that after enjoying 20 years in engineering, I wound up leaving that field. God had different plans for me. As a result of those changes, I



now enjoy the privilege of working on *Compass Check* and writing to you!

So why did I leave engineering? Well, the short answer is that I was called to serve in the ministry. The longer answer has do with how I was raised to think.

You see, before I began to start thinking like an engineer in order to become an engineer, I was raised to try and think like Jesus Christ. Philippians 2:5 says, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” My parents knew and understood this principle could be applied at a young age. They worked to instill values in me that made me ask questions about different situations in life, much like I asked questions about cars. When I found myself or saw someone else going through a hard situation in their life, I would ask, “How did this happen? Why did it happen? What could I/they have done to keep

it from happening?”

These are good questions to ask yourself whenever you face a challenge, whether it be physically, mentally, socially or spiritually. And even though you might not have even thought of baptism yet, they are questions that will begin to help you think like a baptized member of the body of Christ.

I am very thankful for the opportunity to work on *Compass Check*, and with all the amazing staff. I am thankful for the opportunity to write to you each issue. And I pray that with each issue of *Compass Check*, you can learn to ask the right questions, discern the right answers and develop your mind to think like Jesus Christ!



Dan Preston, Compass Check editor, pastors in North and South Carolina, enjoys UYC Camps, the outdoors and getting dirt under his fingernails in the garden and garage.

3 STEPS TO A BRAVER, MORE CONFIDENT YOU



brave /brāv/ *adj.* **SYN** bold, courageous, daring, lionhearted, valorous, undaunted, spirited, gallant.

There are many words to describe bravery. But what does it actually mean? When I think of bravery, I typically think of having no fears, or being fearless. But recently I took a literature class with the theme “being brave.” In that class I learned that actually, in order to have true bravery, fear must be present. Bravery happens when someone looks at his or her weaknesses, breaks them down and uses what’s left to build a new strength. 1 Corinthians 16:13 says, “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.” Bravery is a powerful tool that helps us accomplish more than we ever could without it.

What is the opposite of bravery? The opposite of being brave is when you try to hide your weaknesses, but by doing so nurture and protect them, building them up. The problem with this is that the more you build up your weaknesses, the harder it becomes to tear them down.

Everyone is guilty of acting cowardly—even the bravest-seeming person. I know I have acted cowardly many times. Sometimes when I am with other young people and they don’t treat me or someone else quite the way they should, I stay silent instead of speaking up because I just don’t want to be put on the spot. Often in these situations, I end up either stepping away or, if it’s about me, laughing about it and calling myself a dork. However, afterwards I always feel bad and wish I had stood up for myself or whoever was being ridiculed. It never pays to be cowardly.

Can just anybody learn to be brave? I learned from my teacher that bravery is not a special gift given to only some people—anyone can learn to be brave. You don’t have to be especially strong or smart. You don’t have to spend years of college trying to learn everything about it.

It can be found in the smallest child, the loneliest outsider, the most broken heart—you just have to search it out.

My class on bravery inspired me to think more about how to grow in this area. I came up with these three steps for developing bravery:

1. IDENTIFY YOUR WEAKNESSES

It’s easy to hide your weaknesses or pretend they don’t exist. But fears are like weeds. If you don’t address them immediately, they grow until they are too big to remove as easily. Be completely honest with yourself.

2. BREAK THEM DOWN

Ask yourself, why is this a problem for me? This is a good time to get help from people who know you well. Just talking to someone who is a good listener may help you puzzle through your feelings, even if they just listen and don’t say anything! Parents, older siblings or a school guidance counselor are all good places to start.

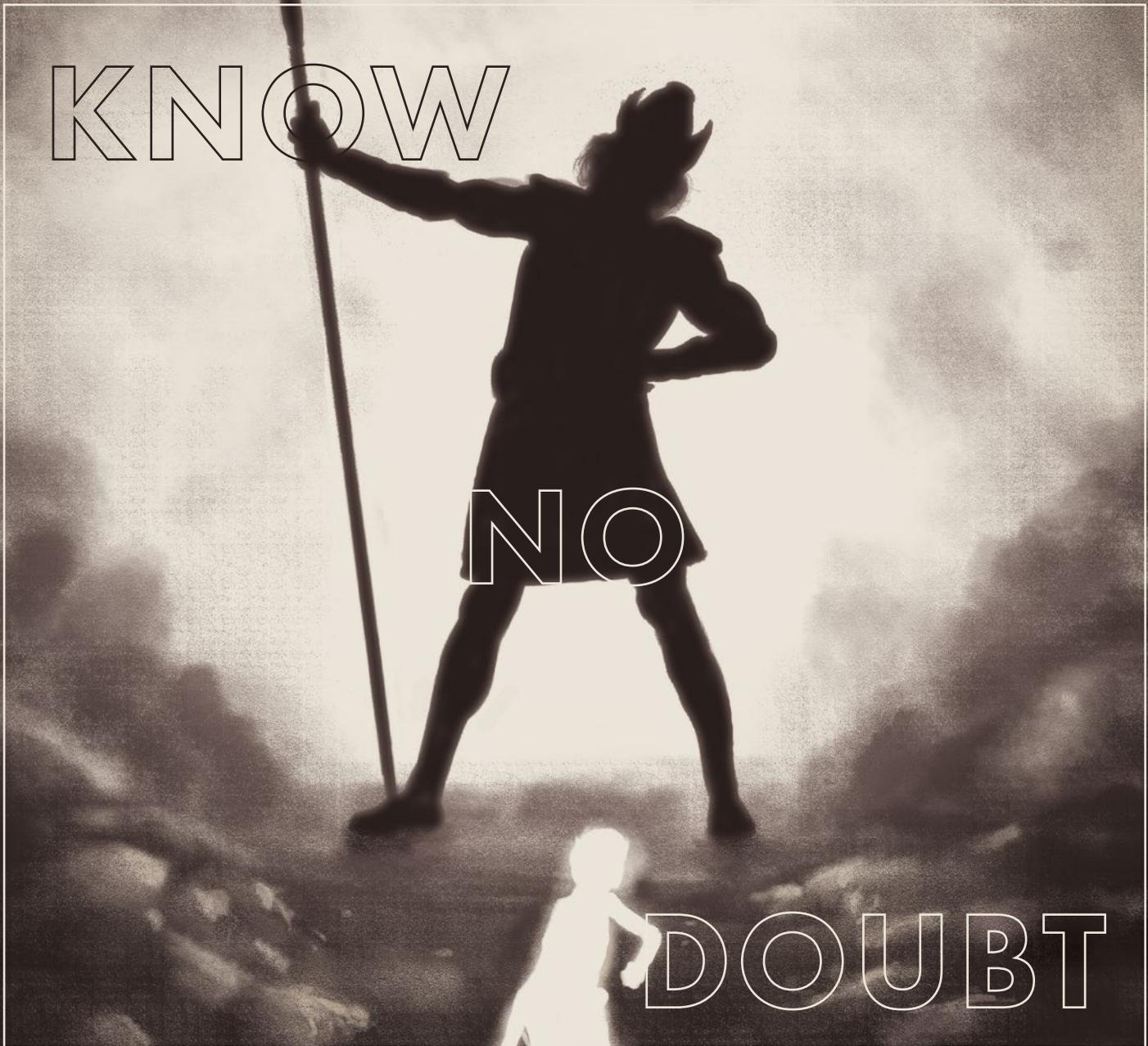
3. WITH GOD’S HELP, LEARN AND BUILD NEW STRENGTH OUT OF THEM

If you’re afraid of speaking in public, the first step would be to ask yourself why this scares you. Then you could look up the verses in the Bible that talk about courage, faith and being a light. A topical index is great for doing this. Then, instead of thinking about what could go wrong, think about all the things that could go right. Throughout the process, pray to God for help to overcome your fears.

Matthew 17:20 says, “. . . if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.” God will help you. God wants to help you. Think about how brave you can be with the Creator of the entire universe on your side! **CC**



Melody Porter is 13 years old. She lives in Cincinnati, Ohio, and loves to read and write, along with singing and drawing.



By Barry Korthuis

How do we dispel doubts in our personal lives? The example of a former king is insightful.

We've all had doubts—about ourselves, others, the future, maybe even God. We all face obstacles that seem impossible to overcome.

What about the familiar biblical story of David and Goliath? Did doubt play a part in it too?

The scene is set in 1 Samuel 17 with the Philistines on one hill and the Israelite army commanded by King Saul on the other, only a valley separating them. Tensions were high as the Israelites faced a giant problem.

The Philistines had sent out their champion, Goliath of

Gath, to challenge the Israelites. The Israelites were expected to send out their own champion, who would fight Goliath to the death. Goliath bellowed out that the people of the losing side would become the servants of the winning side. Israel had a lot to lose.

Finding someone to face Goliath wasn't easy. The man was huge, standing "six cubits and a span" (1 Samuel 17:4), which was likely more than 9 feet tall. He might well have weighed around 700 pounds. Given the descriptions of his armor, Goliath was also strong. His armor probably weighed between

125 and 150 pounds, and his spear between 35 and 65 pounds.

Adding to his impressive size and strength, Goliath must have been fierce. He had trained in fighting since his youth, becoming a virtual human war machine. And he was determined to take the life of anyone who dared to challenge him.

For 40 days, the giant taunted Israel every morning and evening. His words struck great fear in the hearts of Saul and his army. So why didn't Saul or one of his soldiers engage Goliath? After all, Saul was also a tall man (1 Samuel 10:23) with battle experience. More importantly, the Bible tells us God was with Saul when Israel defeated the invading Ammonites and was proclaimed king (1 Samuel 11).

Saul's reluctance to engage Goliath was due, at least in part, to his disobedience that separated him from God. Against God's instruction, Saul spared King Agag of the Amalekites and kept the spoils of war. As a result, the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and God allowed a distressing spirit to replace it (1 Samuel 16:14). When God is pushed out of a person's mind, doubt enters. Doubts that are allowed to settle in can quickly build into debilitating fear.

ENTER THE SMALL GUY

Not knowing of the stalemate between Goliath and the Israelite army, young David was sent by his father to bring food to his older brothers and to return with any news. While there, he heard Goliath's daily challenge firsthand and saw that the fearful men of Israel had lost their faith in God.

David ignored the doubters around him and boldly volunteered to fight the giant. When questioned by Saul, David explained that he had complete trust in God and confidence that God would give him the victory.

TRUE ARMOR

The key to David's confidence was using the proper armor. Instead of using Saul's armor, David chose a sling and a handful of stones, knowing this was all he needed.

When David was earlier anointed the future king of Israel, God's Spirit came upon him (1 Samuel 16:13). He had also experienced God's help when he killed both a lion and a bear to protect his sheep. David was confident that God would likewise help him fight Goliath.

David's confidence was in God's protection and not in his own ability. Ephesians 6 describes the armor of God, and verse 10 specifically tells us to "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."

When the fateful moment arrived, David ran quickly toward Goliath. Without doubt or hesitation, he killed Goliath with the first stone from the sling, sending the Philistine army running. He gave full credit to God and recognized the battle was the Lord's.

**GOD'S SPIRIT MADE THE
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN
SAUL'S DOUBTS AND
DAVID'S CONFIDENCE.**

ANALYZING THE VICTORY

God's Spirit made the difference between Saul's doubts and David's confidence. After Saul rejected God's word and disobeyed Him, God no longer guided his actions. Without God's Spirit helping him, he couldn't get past the situation from a human perspective. And neither can we.

God's Spirit is not "a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7). And God is willing to give His Spirit to all who truly repent and are baptized (Acts 2:38). God's Spirit can work *with* us prior to baptism; it is just that after we are baptized His Spirit resides *within* us. So we're never too young to begin obeying God and allowing His Spirit to inspire us and help us live His way of life.

Living in doubt is painful. Doubts lead to anxiety, paranoia, restlessness and the wrong kind of fear.

FACING YOUR GIANTS

God's miraculous help for His people did not end when David overcame Goliath. God is willing to help you overcome your problems too.

We all face a very real adversary, Satan the devil, who uses doubt as a tool to sabotage our relationship with God. Satan wants us to be uncertain. He wants us to disbelieve God—to lose confidence in Him. Satan wants us to hold on to our doubts and live in a paralyzing state of fear. But God has something else in mind for us: setting aside our doubts and challenging our giants.

David isn't the only one who prevailed over huge obstacles. The Bible is filled with stories of deliverance of those who trusted in God's ways and living power. By seeking God's help, we can also overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles. When we obey God and put our confidence in Him, there will be no place for doubt! **CC**



Barry Korthuis is an elder serving in the greater Denver area. He and his wife Sandy currently reside in Castle Rock, and he works as an Operating Partner for a private equity management company.

ΔΙΔΑΧΑΙΣΤΟΙΚΙ
UNDERSTANDING
ΠΑΡΑΦΕΡΕΣΘΕΚΑ
PROPHESY
ΒΑΙΟΥΣΘΕΤΗΝΚΑΡ
ΔΙΑΝΟΥΒΡΩΜΑΙΝ
ΕΝ ΟΙΣΟΥΚΑΙΦΕ

PART IV

WHY WERE YOU BORN?



by Rex Sexton

Did you ever ask yourself, “Why was I born?” Most people live out their entire lives never knowing the answer to this most important of all questions!

The third major theme of prophecy in God’s Word is how and why God deals with individuals and what He has planned for them. This is the most incredible and wonderful understanding in the entire world!

Why did God create people? Do they have a purpose? A future? Is “this life” all there is? Evolutionary theory teaches that there is no Creator. That life is an accident and therefore we have no purpose or reason to exist. Evolution—the idea that life came from nothing and means nothing—is a deceitful theory that many people today accept.

We previously looked at Bible prophecy concerning the world empires, the promises to Abraham and the Davidic covenant. The world-ruling empires are important to understand. From their beginning to their end they are foretold in God’s Word. Also, it is not possible to understand current, past or future events without understanding the incredible and detailed promises that God gave to Abraham and David. They have come to pass in previous times and even today before our eyes. But what about you? What about individuals? What does God have planned for your future?

YOU’RE INVITED!

We have all at one time received an invitation to attend a wedding, graduation or other event. God also invites—or calls—people to be a part of His family forever. A simple party invitation is easy for us to understand, but most people do not understand how God invites those whom He wants to be in His Church and eventually live forever with Him!



Jesus used the example of being invited to a wedding to help us understand how we are called. In Matthew 22:2-3 He said, “The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who made a marriage for his son. And he sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding...” Quite plainly, God’s calling is an invitation. In fact, it is an invitation to a real wedding! When the apostle John was exiled on the Island of Patmos he saw a vision of this future event and recorded it for us: “Then he said to me, ‘Write: “Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!”’ And he said to me, “These are the true sayings of God”’ (Revelation 19:9). The wedding supper of Jesus Christ and His bride—the resurrected saints of God—will take place shortly after the resurrection. You are called to that wedding.

How does the calling from God happen? Jesus taught His disciples that God the Father begins the process and selects individuals to call. Consider these profound words in John 6:44, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.” So The Father begins the calling for the purpose of giving eternal life to the

one being called. The person being called then is drawn to the teachings of Jesus and has his or her mind opened to understand truth. Jesus was very clear about this just a few verses later: “It is the Spirit [which] gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63).

INVITED, BUT TO WHAT?

The Kingdom of God is a mystery to most of humanity. When the disciples asked Jesus why He spoke in parables, He replied, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given” (Matthew 13:11). Think about how awesome it is that you have been given the ability to understand the greatest mysteries of all time! But how does this work—how does God give understanding to some and not to others?

The answer is by the Spirit of God opening your mind to see what the majority of people cannot. The inability to understand Scripture is likened to a veil over one’s eyes. Paul wrote, “Their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken

away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart” (2 Corinthians 3: 14-15). How is that veil taken away? Only by God’s calling.

As David wrote, “Blessed is the man You choose, and cause to approach You, that he may dwell in Your courts” (Psalm 65:4). Speaking of how we learn spiritual truth, Paul said, “God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10-11).

God calls and opens our minds to understand; our response should be to turn to God so the veil can be removed and we can understand the great questions of life. Paul stated it very simply, “...when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away” (2 Corinthians 3:16).

Speaking of the Holy Spirit that would be sent after Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension back to heaven, He said, “the Helper, the Holy Spirit, [which] the Father will send in My name, [it] will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26). As we learn more about God’s coming Kingdom, His Commandments and the forgiveness made possible by Jesus Christ, we are led to repentance and baptism. It is through the goodness of God that we come to this point (Romans 2:4).

After the ceremony of baptism we receive God’s Spirit within us by the laying on of hands and prayers of the ministry (Acts 8:18; 2 Timothy 1:6). Although you may not have been baptized and have the Holy Spirit in you at this time in your life, you are surrounded with many members of God’s Church who do, and are willing to help you grow in your understanding!

THE GREAT PURPOSE OF LIFE—WHY YOU WERE BORN—IS TO BE IN GOD’S FAMILY WITH JESUS CHRIST AND LIVE FOREVER AS PART OF THE NEW JERUSALEM!

THEN WHAT?

From that point forward we have a tremendous responsibility to continue to grow in knowledge and develop character like God’s. We are to use God’s Spirit to overcome sin in our life (Romans 8:13) and live according to the requirements of righteousness in God’s Word (Romans 8:4). Thankfully we are not alone—we are promised help in the face of temptation. The Holy Spirit provides the help needed by dwelling in the individual believers. Paul taught us to be strong in the face of temptation, “. . . God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

The life of a Christian is compared to a journey or pilgrimage. Three times in the Bible we are called “pilgrims,” meaning that we are in the process of going to a new country. Speaking of those who have been faithful followers of their calling in past centuries we are told, “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. Now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them” (Hebrews 11:13-16).

When Jesus was resurrected He became the “firstborn of many

brethren” (Romans 8:29)—meaning that those in the coming first resurrection will be His brethren—members of the family of God. If we have God’s Spirit within us, in His eyes we are already considered His children and in line for an inheritance. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God . . . and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together” (Romans 8:14-17).

The great purpose of life—why you were born—is to be in God’s family with Jesus Christ and live forever as part of the New Jerusalem!

UNTIL THEN

Between now and then we must live a life of overcoming. John warns us to resist “the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16). Jesus warned about “the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches” (Mark 4:19). Our daily goal is to draw closer to God and resist the devil so he will flee from us (James 4:7-8). Doing so gives our life meaning and purpose.

The final reward for heeding our calling and living to please God is beyond anything we can imagine. It is summed up in this incredible promise given to us by Jesus Christ Himself “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Revelation 3:20-21).

Your future includes sharing the throne of the universe with Jesus Christ. That is why you were born! **CC**

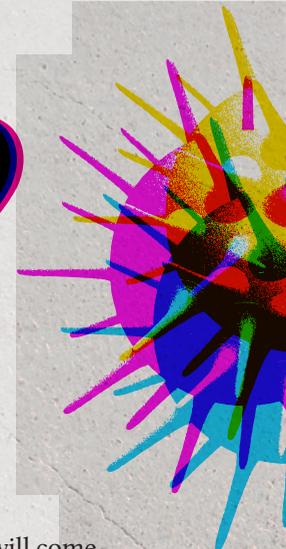


Rex Sexton is a church pastor in Portland, Oregon, and Northwest Camp director.



COVID-19

IS THIS THE END OF THE AGE?



that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences [epidemics], and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24:4-8).

The first thing to note is: He said don't be troubled—and these are troubling events! But He also says not to be deceived, to maintain hope and faith, and that these events are just "the beginning of sorrows." So while life is going to change for us in various ways for the foreseeable future, even after the heavy restrictions from COVID-19 are lifted, we are *not* experiencing the end of the age or the Day of the Lord yet.

The book of Revelation is where Jesus gives some more specific prophecies that help us discern whether we're in the end of the age. There is catastrophe after catastrophe that turns the earth into a living nightmare, with widespread famine, warfare, plagues and cosmic disturbances, all resulting in a death toll much higher than what we've seen from the COVID-19 pandemic. Jesus said to His disciples that "unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:22). Two UCG booklets dive into this subject if you're hungry for more understanding. One is *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*, which talks about some of the larger trends of the world with references to prophecies from throughout the Bible to show what's going on. The other is *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*, which helps specifically explain what all the events in Revelation mean and why.

Jesus went on in Matthew 24 to say, "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill

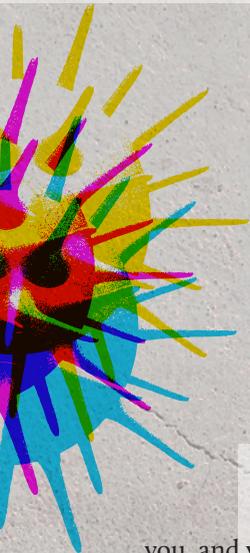
No,

not yet. There are many other events God revealed in prophecy that still have to happen before the end of the age (more on that in a bit).

That said, He is interested in how we respond to it—and He desires our response to be to change for the better. That's the lesson of the 10 virgins: the wise ones prepared for the "moment of truth" in advance, the unwise didn't (Matthew 25). The application for us is to allow God to work in our lives by loving Him and Jesus Christ, loving their way and living that way of life. Then when the "moment of truth" comes, our spiritual condition will help us respond to God's direction when it matters most.

And to be honest, the age we live in definitely has some characteristics that indicate we are closer to the time of Christ's return than ever before—things like the existence of the modern nation of Israel and the danger of mass destruction from nuclear weapons. UCG's got a great, short booklet called "Seven Signs Before Jesus Returns" that briefly explains some of those. You can read it online at ucg.org.

Consider what Jesus said when His disciples asked Him what would be the sign of His second coming and of the end of the age: "Take heed



you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another . . . And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (verses 9-14). Whew, quite a doozy—the followers of Christ will be persecuted and killed, people will betray each other and because of sin they'll stop loving each other! Use that list as examples of what to actively *not do* in your life. Choose to love others as God does, choose to forgive and obey God's law. And then there's that last part, that the Gospel will be preached in the whole world. *You* can be an agent of God's Kingdom in this world, preaching the good news of God's way always through the way you live your life, using words if necessary. These are the responses to this pandemic that God wants us to have.

While we don't know what the future holds—will there be other dramatic events in 2020 or 2021 that seem to speed us closer to the end of the age?—what God desires is for us to learn from this pandemic, and to become more like Jesus Christ. If you need some certainty right now, that is one thing you can bet on. **CC**



Mitchell Moss lives in Nashville with his wife Dana and son Stirling. They love traveling, particularly in Italy, where the tailoring is soft, the people are warm and the gelato cold (and never-ending).

Did God Cause the COVID-19 Pandemic as a Judgment Against Humanity?

He might have, but we can't say for sure—it appears to be the result of poor human decisions (not following biblical food laws, for instance). The Bible is full of examples where God intervened in human affairs in specific, direct ways, like the flood in Genesis 7 or the plagues of Egypt in Exodus 7-12. One of the main reasons He does so is to issue a wake-up call or punishment on a nation. He would tell them about it in advance so they would have fair warning to make a change. Jonah, for instance, warned the people of Nineveh about God's impending judgment, and the people took notice and repented, so God didn't carry out the punishment. In contrast, the people of ancient Israel did not repent of their sins, and God *did* carry out punishments as He promised.

But there are also events that happen that God does not specifically direct. You could call these "time and chance" events—natural disasters like floods, tornadoes, hurricanes or epidemics that aren't a result of God directly intervening to cause them, but which nonetheless carry big consequences and cause major changes in the world. The thing about these types of events is that, even if they're natural and somewhat random, God *allows* them to happen. They're not foretold in any specific way through a prophet like in the Old Testament, but God still brings about His will out of them. One of the themes of the Bible is that God created the world as good, but it was then corrupted by sin when Adam and Eve chose to disobey God under Satan's influence. And ever since, the cascading effects of sin have caused all of creation to be in a state of "rebellion" against God; Paul describes it as "groaning" to be delivered from "the bondage of corruption" (Romans 8:20-22). God allows all of this, broadly speaking, to show humankind that the way of sin does not end well; the contrast between God's way and man's way under Satan's influence is stark, with one ending in life while the other in death.

While debating with Greek philosophers of his day, the apostle Paul eloquently described how God expects all people (and by extension, nations) to listen to Him now, since we have the example of Jesus and the Bible to guide us: "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31). While Paul was specifically addressing the Greeks' worship of many different idols, the underlying message remains the same: God will not overlook forever man's ignorance of what's good, right and acceptable.

So the pandemic, whether specifically caused by God or not, is a tool He will use to bring about His purpose. Ultimately, every person should choose to respond to it by acknowledging Him and changing.



“I WAS ROBBED!”

Olivia Kess is a junior at Westerville High School. Andrew Preston is a senior at Piedmont High school. COVID-19 has meant the cancellation or modification of events they've been working toward and looking forward to for years. Here they share their thoughts on the situation and some suggestions for making the best of it.

The whole world seemed to screech to a halt as news of the severity of the coronavirus spread. Minor changes to life seemed to be expected such as increased protocol for staying home when sick or increased restrictions in travel. However, no one anticipated the complete shutdown the world was about to experience.

Throughout the months of January and February, as news of coronavirus spread, it still sounded distant here in the United States. The United States is a safe place, and there was no reason to believe that anything on the home front could be altered, right?

Within 24 hours, all church services had been suspended, and schools around the nation switched to online instruction. Stores adopted different hours, restaurants were restricted to drive-thru only and everyone was instructed to stay at home unless necessary. With the new adoption of the 6-foot apart rule,

coupled with the closing of virtually all places of socialization, isolation and sadness became a common feeling for many. The worst part is that as worry increased, there was no definitive end date to it all.

Many people have recently had to deal with losing things that matter to them personally. Eagerly anticipated events that many were thinking about for years were brushed aside with a wave of a hand. You might be in that very same position, feeling personally robbed after seeing schools, graduations, proms, camps and other anticipated social events canceled.

While both church and school were replaced with an online counterpart that gave similar instruction and knowledge, the social element of those events was missing. The feelings of loss, sadness and helplessness are understandable and felt by many. This sparked a sudden aspiration to find new ways to stay connected to what was important.

So how do we stay connected to friends, family and God during these strange times? Although we are used to certain basic means of connecting in person, there are numerous other ways for us to strengthen our relationships with God and His people!

A good verse to look to during this difficult time is 1 John 4:7: “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” A great way to show God your love for Him is by demonstrating love and kindness to His people. In a time when we are physically distant from friends and family, it is crucial and meaningful that we stay close to God’s children.

CONNECTING WITH GOD

So how do we do that? First, we start by staying connected to God. Here are a few simple points that can help you do that:

1. SET GOALS AND WRITE THEM DOWN

You are far more likely to complete a goal if you write it down, so make sure to write down your plans and put them in a place where you can be reminded of them every day. A constant reminder (such as a reminder to pray and study your Bible) can really help you strengthen your relationship with God.

2. BEGIN A PRAYER JOURNAL

A prayer journal is a great way to organize your thoughts and ideas when talking to God. It can also be a great way to look back at your prayers to see how God has helped you in the past.

3. MAKE A PLAN TO READ YOUR BIBLE

Creating a schedule for reading God’s Word can be incredibly encouraging in a time when we can’t physically be together at church! You can also try coordinating with friends to keep each other dedicated to completing your plan.

“DEAR FRIENDS, LET US LOVE ONE ANOTHER, FOR LOVE COMES FROM GOD. EVERYONE WHO LOVES HAS BEEN BORN OF GOD AND KNOWS GOD” (1 JOHN 4:7).

REACHING OUT TO FRIENDS AND FAMILY

It’s important to stay connected to God, but it’s also very important to stay connected with your friends and family. Here are a few simple ways to keep in touch:

1. WRITE A LETTER

Letters are a memorable way to reach out to others. Most people do not receive many handwritten letters anymore, so receiving one is usually a pleasant surprise!

2. SCHEDULE A GROUP VIDEO CHAT

While lots of people video chat with one or two people, have you ever tried to video chat with a large group of people? This can really help recreate the experience of standing in a circle at church or school and talking with your friends.

3. REACH OUT TO PEOPLE FROM YOUR CONGREGATION

A simple phone call can really mean a lot to someone, and it’s a simple gesture that anyone is capable of doing! Even if you can’t physically be there for someone, reaching out to them by phone can be a great way to show them you care.

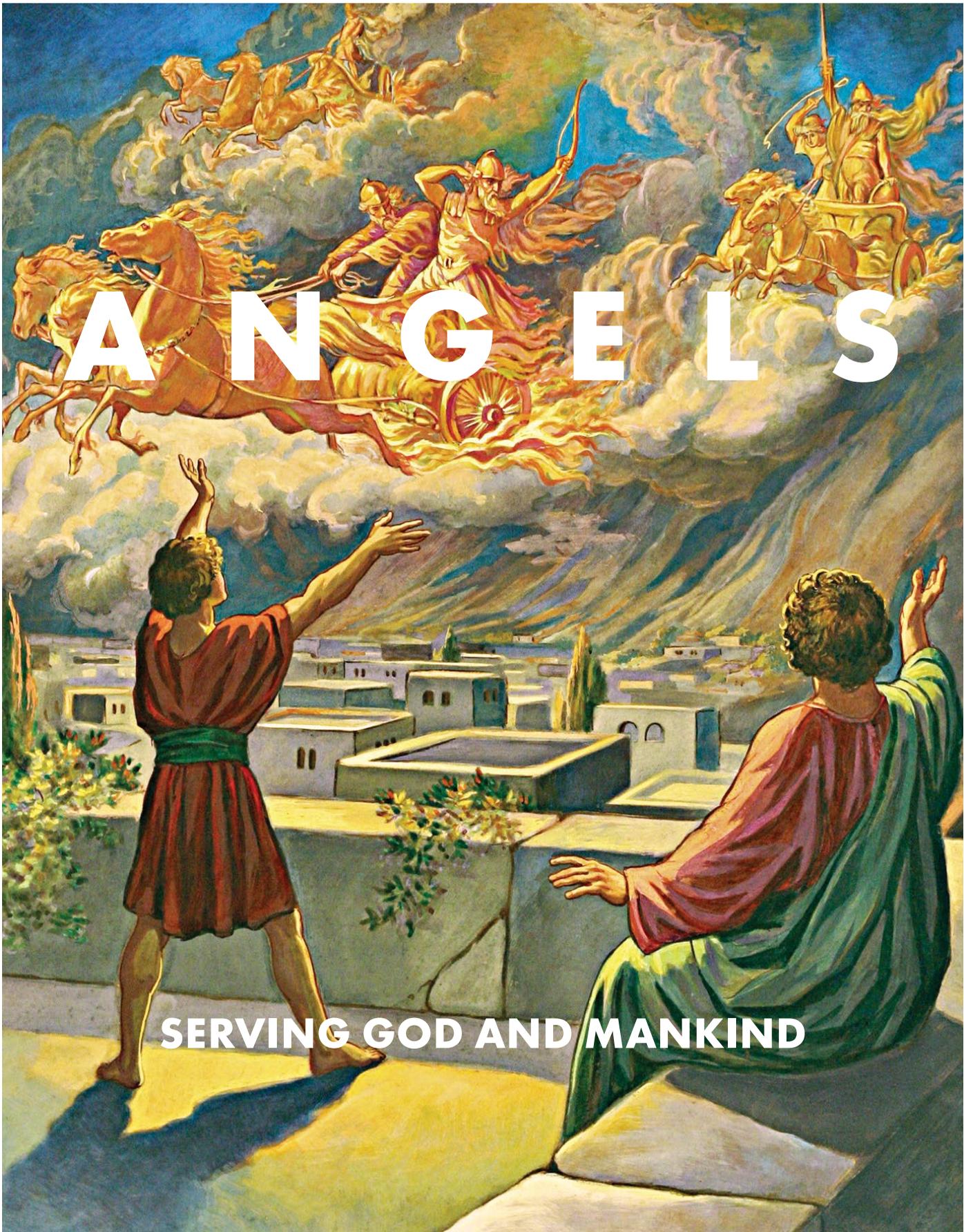
If this trial has taught us anything, it’s that life’s circumstances can change in an instant. Not just for each of us individually, but for the whole world. By strengthening our relationships with God, friends and family, we are practicing the godly quality of love that John wrote about. In addition, staying connected with God and His spiritual family can help you through whatever trials may come! **CC**



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ANGELS

SERVING GOD AND MANKIND



Why did God create angels? What are their responsibilities and purpose? While God doesn't reveal everything about angels and the spirit realm to us right now, He has told us a few things. Here's what we know about them from Scripture.

We know angels were created before the foundation of the earth was laid. They shouted for joy when they saw the earth in all its perfection (Job 38:1-7). And we know that there are millions of angels: "Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne . . . and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands . . ." (Revelation 5:11). The Bible also explains that God's righteous angels are immortal, as we will one day be (Luke 20:36).

God has given His angels important responsibilities. In the Bible we see many examples of angels acting as extensions of God's will and power. As such, all angels have certain common characteristics. Beyond that, God gives some angels special, individual duties in different situations. (For more specifics, see "Different Kinds of Angels" on ucg.org).

Common to all angels is the duty to heed and obey God. Angels were created as agents of God to carry out His will. And the righteous angels are in total obedience. (For information on unrighteous angels, see "What Is the Origin of Satan and Demons?" on ucg.org.) The perfect obedience of the angelic realm is why we pray to God, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). The angels of heaven carry out God's will perfectly—and we in prayer ask that all people on earth would follow that example. Psalm 103:20 states, "Bless the LORD, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word."

Beyond the core duty of acting in obedience to God, the Bible shares many fascinating stories of angels interacting with humans, helping those in need and furthering God's plan in different ways. We've included a collection here, but we encourage you to find more in your own personal Bible study.

GOD CREATED ANGELS AS A BEAUTIFUL AND POWERFUL ELEMENT IN HIS ETERNAL PLAN, WHICH INVOLVES OUR CURRENT PHYSICAL REALM ALONG WITH THE SPIRITUAL REALM THAT WE KNOW LITTLE OF AS YET.

ANGELS OBSERVE

While God is able to see everything through His Spirit, it seems He also wants a direct, eyes-on view of events on earth, through angels. We see this in the seven spirits of God that are described as "the eyes of the LORD, which scan to and fro throughout the earth" (Zechariah 4:10; see Revelation 3:1; Revelation 4:5; Revelation 5:6; compare Proverbs 15:3).

We also know that angels look after God's begotten children. Matthew 18:10 says, "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven."

ANGELS PROVIDE FOR HUMAN NEEDS

Angels don't just passively observe, however. While angels are spirit beings, they often minister or serve in very physical ways. Specifically, they minister to those called to be God's people today. Hebrews 1:14 says, "Are they [the angels] not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?"

Also, an angel provided Elijah with food and water: "Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, 'Arise and eat.' Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again. And the angel of the LORD came back the second time, and touched him, and said, 'Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you.' So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God" (1 Kings 19:5-8).

ANGELS COMMUNICATE MESSAGES

The angel Gabriel announced the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus Himself (Luke 1:5-38). And angels rolled the stone from Christ's tomb announcing He was not there—He had risen from the dead (Matthew 28:2).

In Revelation, angels take part in preaching the gospel to the world: "Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who

dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water'" (Revelation 14:6-7).

Likewise, God has used some angels as intermediaries in communicating various instructions and laws. Galatians 3:19 says that Israel's full legal and ceremonial system "was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator [Moses]." Hebrews 2:2 also referred to this "word spoken through angels [having] proved steadfast," wherein "every transgression and disobedience received a just reward."

ANGELS METE OUT JUDGMENT

Part of being an extension of God's power includes responding to humans who have not heeded the messages given. Sometimes this means doling out difficult punishments.

David sinned in numbering Israel. Consequently, an angel brought a plague and showed where a new altar of sacrifice should be built (2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21).

When God struck Egypt with plagues at the time of the Exodus, "He cast on them the fierceness of His anger, wrath, indignation, and trouble, by sending angels of destruction among them" (Psalm 78:49).

When Herod accepted the praise of people lauding him as a god, "immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died" (Acts 12:23).

In Revelation 15 through 16, we see angels pouring out bowls on the earth containing the seven last plagues at the time of Christ's return.

ANGELS PROTECT

Despite some examples of punishment from angels, we don't need to be afraid of them. They are an extension

ultimately of God's goodness and His desire to help us become part of His family.

Certain angels are assigned specifically to supervise and protect God's Church (Revelation 2:1). And an angel famously ensured physical protection for Daniel, closing the mouths of lions (Daniel 6:22). An angel broke Peter out of jail in Acts 12:7-8 and made sure Peter got himself dressed and put his shoes on properly!

And we see this comforting promise in Psalms: "For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone" (91:10-11).

ANGELS DEFEND

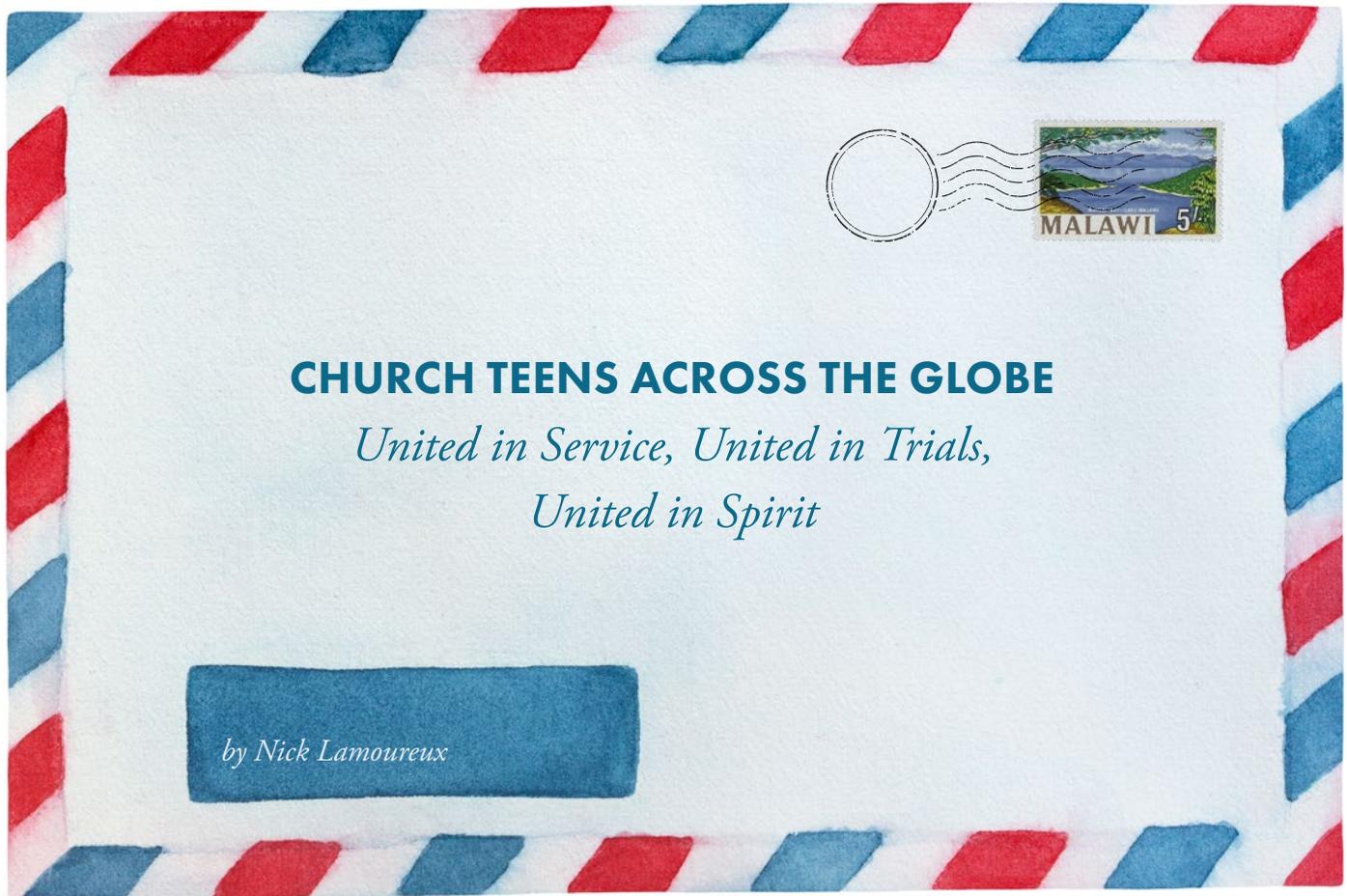
Finally, angels are on our side in the battle against evil. David often prayed asking for angelic help when enemies were against him: "Plead my cause, O LORD, with those who strive with me; fight against those who fight against me . . . Let them be like chaff before the wind, and let the angel of the LORD chase them" (Psalm 35:1, 5).

In Revelation 12:7-9, Michael and his angels will fight against Satan and his demons and cast them down to the earth. At Christ's return, He will have an angel lay hold of Satan to shut him up for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:1-3).

God created angels as a beautiful and powerful element in His eternal plan, which involves our current physical realm along with the spiritual realm that we know little of as yet. But we do know that God is good and He wants the best for us, so we can be assured that His angels are an extension of that goodness and are working under Him to accomplish His vision.



Edited from the booklet God's Messengers and Spirit Army. To read the rest, search "angels" on ucg.org.



Growing up, I didn't always know what I wanted to do with my life. What did I expect out of life, and what was expected of me? I think the questions I asked myself are typical of most young people, such as:

How do I impress that girl? Why do my parents make such a big deal about going to church every week? What should I pursue for a career? Should I go to this party on Friday night? When will I have a real girlfriend? What phone should I buy? Do my friends really like me?

I don't think I was alone in asking these types of questions. In fact, I know that these big life questions are common all over the world! One year ago, my wife and I moved to Malawi—a little country in East Africa—to serve some of God's people. Malawi is sweltering, densely populated, politically volatile, beautiful and full of warmhearted people. And guess what? Despite the language barrier and the economy, the people there really aren't that different from those where I was from in the United States. I would like to introduce you to some of the similarities between teens in Malawi and teens in America, and everywhere else.



The first similarity is that every single young person in God's Church whom I have had the pleasure of meeting possesses a willingness and a desire to serve. I often ask the young people in Malawi to serve in various ways in the congregation, and every time I ask they are more than willing to help however they can. Just like teens elsewhere, Malawian youths have a desire to feel that they are needed—to feel like they are part of the congregation—and they are willing



to *act* on that desire. Talk about an awesome character trait to have in common with someone in a foreign country!

Jesus Himself said, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45). Isn’t that the attitude we should all have when interacting with others? Don’t be discouraged if you aren’t 100 percent sure how you can help or even if you aren’t able to serve in the exact capacity you desire. I will tell you from experience that just demonstrating an initial willingness and desire to serve goes a long way! Having an attitude of service opens doors sometimes in the strangest places. People appreciate acts of service, and most importantly, God looks upon the heart and notices good deeds and a willingness to serve.

Malawian young people also share a love of sports with their North American counterparts! By a long shot, the favorite sport of Malawi is soccer, or as they call it there, “football.” Colonized by the British in 1891 and then receiving their independence from Britain in 1964, Malawians retained the British practice of using the letter “u” in various words (like “colour”), the love for tea, and of course, the enjoyment of playing and watching football. And boy, some of these kids are good! Maybe I just happened to notice the talents of a few individuals, but it seems to me that the ability to skillfully play soccer might run in the veins of Malawian teens. For what seems like hours, they can run back and forth and up and down a soccer field (or “football pitch”) in 95-degree heat—can you imagine! Some of you can—I’ve seen this sort of energy exhibited at Winter Family Weekends!

In 2019, we hosted a United Youth Camp (UYC) in Western Malawi. At the start of camp, teens and young adults arrived from all over Malawi and Eastern Zambia with the intention of having fun, making friends and

developing a relationship with their Creator. When camp was finished, everyone left thoroughly exhausted, having completed all of these tasks. They took with them new friendships, a stronger bond among themselves, and they gained a better understanding of how to be “lights to the world.” For many of them, this was their first time being exposed to a UYC, and they loved it.

But it’s not just the good experiences that Africans and Americans share; it’s also the struggles. Have you ever been faced with the temptation to drink alcohol or smoke marijuana? Alcohol is extremely cheap in Malawi, and alcoholism is a constant threat that plagues many. Marijuana is illegal for most people, but if a person claims to be a Rastafarian (a crooked branch of mainstream Christianity), they are legally allowed to possess and use it. With or without legalization, the use of marijuana and abuse of alcohol can be physically and spiritually damaging. (See the *Compass Check* article about marijuana in the Summer 2016 issue, and to learn more about the dangers of alcohol addiction, search “Overcoming Alcoholism” on ucg.org.)

Added to this, in Malawi there are many more people than jobs because the country is so densely populated. This means that as a teen or young adult, a Malawian must be extremely diligent and hard-working to get high marks in high school so that they may have a chance at finding a good job. The alternative is to develop some sort of manual skill or craft from which to make a living. You might wonder how this is similar to your life. Well, the similarity lies in the temptation to break the Sabbath. Many occupations in Malawi require employees to work on Saturdays; and what’s more, the education to even have a chance to *acquire* one of those jobs often includes going to class on Saturdays.

If you are growing up in God’s



Church, there will come a time (or many different times) when you will be faced with the following question: “Am I going to church because my parents are here, or because I really believe these things?” You may be facing this question now, or you may have already answered it, but either way you aren’t alone. In Malawi, for our teens, that question often comes in the form of: “Am I going to keep the Sabbath holy, or am I going to go to class?” Sometimes the choice is up to the parents, but in many cases, parents send their kids to boarding schools, where they are all of a sudden faced with the decision to follow God or follow their friends.

In Malawi, Satan often attacks the younger generation of God’s Church by presenting them with a pseudo-ultimatum: “You must choose between having a job, a family and money in a very poor country, or you can choose to follow God.” Have you ever felt like Satan is offering a similar pseudo-ultimatum to you? Sometimes it feels like you really have to give up a lot to follow God! But let’s see what God says about the matter: “The LORD your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your land for good . . . if you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, and if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deuteronomy 30:9-10).

Do we have to choose between receiving blessings and curses? Absolutely, but God’s way of life is a blessing to us, not a curse. That is something Malawian

teens and young adults are learning and having to prove for themselves, just like teens everywhere. Is this my parents’ church, or is it my church? If it’s my church, do I have a personal understanding of the fundamental beliefs? If I don’t, why not? Have I proven what I claim to believe for myself *from the Bible*?

These are just some of the similarities between the teens in Malawi and teens in the Church all over the world. There are many more! Teens here in Malawi want to be successful, and they want to enjoy life to the fullest. They argue with their siblings, they experience disappointment and they deal with many of the same issues you deal with. And when I see them at services on the Sabbath, it’s clear to me that the ones who are present at church are attending because, deep down inside, they recognize there is something different about their Church family, and they yearn to be surrounded by like-minded, godly people.

So, my friends, I encourage you to reassure, comfort, and above all, pray for your fellow teens here in Malawi and everywhere else throughout the rest of the world. Life isn’t always easy, but you’re all in this together. And you are the next generation of God’s Church—you are the ones who will shape the world around us as we draw closer to the return of Jesus Christ. **CC**



Upon returning to the United States from his time in Malawi, Nick Lamoureux is living in Cincinnati (along with his wonderful wife, Megan, of course), where he is engaged as a ministerial trainee.

COMPASS CHECK

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To Do After the Pandemic is Over

stay healthy!

- Don't take my health for granted.
- Stay in good physical health and use proper hygiene.
- Continue properly washing my hands!
- Get enough sleep.
- Take more walks.

Have good relationships!

- When a kind thought about somebody pops into my head, don't stop myself from saying it to them.
- Don't leave important things unsaid.
- Reach out to people I don't normally talk to.
- Share my life and experiences with the older people at church.
- Get to know our neighbors.
- Call/FaceTime my friends and loved ones I can't see in person—don't just text!
- Smile and be friendly to people just because.
- Don't take my parents or grandparents for granted—write to them more often.
- Maintain a close relationship with God.

serve more!

- Remember the shut-ins and write to them, call them or visit them.
- Sacrifice my time, energy and resources to help my community.
- Be mindful of how my choices and actions may affect others.
- Make extra time to help others, especially the elderly and needy.
- Say thank you even (especially!) for the little things people do for me. It might have been a big thing to them.

value the right things

- Allow myself to like what I like—don't be embarrassed by what others think is "cool" or what I'm "supposed" to like.
- Discern what's truly important, from the high perspective of life in the long haul: God, family, meaningful relationships.
- Don't take my health or other material blessings like reliable transportation, employment, an education, a warm home in the winter, etc. for granted.
- Learn to enjoy the "boring" parts of public life—errands, shopping trips, picking up or being picked up from school, etc.
- Be grateful for church services!

Improve myself and use wisdom!

- Read more, watch less.
- Dress up.
- Don't save my nice things for "special occasions" that never come.
- Think ahead and plan for hard times; save a cushion, be wise with my resources; have a plan for what I'll do in an emergency.
- Remember what Mr. Rogers said: "Look for the helpers. There's always someone helping."
- Reevaluate my priorities and values according to God's Word.
- Be a little more aware of what is happening around the world.
- Model the behavior I want to see in others.
- Use this crisis as a motivation to change directions toward God and/or away from negative influences in my life.
- Achieve something I've postponed doing for years.
- Don't let up on my prayers once the worst of the crisis is over.
- Be adaptable when I face uncertain times.