

# COMPASS CHECK

Helping you turn your spiritual compass toward God



## DATING OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

*Some Points to Ponder*

| What Would Jesus Eat?

| 5 Keys to Good Mental Health

| Let Us Go Up to the  
Mountain of the Lord

| What's It Like to Get Baptized?

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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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**Publisher:** UCGIA | **Council of Elders:** Scott Ashley, Aaron Dean, Jorge de Campos, Dan Dowd, John Elliott, Len Martin (chairman), Darris McNeely, John Miller, Mario Seigle, Brian Shaw, Randy Stiver, Paul Wasilkoff

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The goal of *Compass Check* is to inspire you to respond to the gospel message.

## Compass Corner

*Dear Compass Checkers,*

I hope this issue finds you all recovering from summertime fun and getting ready for the Holy Days! The Feast of Tabernacles of course represents the time when Jesus Christ will begin His rule over the entire world. Have you ever considered what kind of changes it will really bring about? In this issue, we'll talk about this very subject!

And speaking of change, most people who have been baptized would agree that it was a life-changing event for them. Maybe you've thought about baptism, but the whole prospect seems scary and you aren't sure how to begin the process. In this issue, we'll talk about that process and show that there's nothing to be frightened of.

Like baptism, marriage is a life-changing event. Which begs the question, *what should I consider when I begin dating? Does it matter whom I date, and what they believe?* We'll talk about that in this issue as well!

Along with all those topics, we'll ask (and answer!) what would Jesus eat? And, what does the Bible have to say about mental health?

Lastly, we're introducing a new feature in this *Compass Check*: "Notes on the Way." In this new, regular feature, we will be interviewing members of the Church who have graduated high school and are navigating their life's work. Their experiences might help answer some of your questions about life after high school and encourage you to pursue your goals, whatever they are!



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

# WHAT'S IT LIKE TO GET BAPTIZED?

*You've probably heard a lot of people talk about baptism. Perhaps you've begun to think about it yourself. Maybe you even understand what it means and how it's done. Still you wonder, How do I start the process? This article is written to help take some unknowns out of baptism—especially baptism counseling.*

*by Dan Preston*

## **FIRST, WHAT IS BAPTISM?**

One of the great joys of my job as a pastor is having the opportunity to baptize people. Baptism is the most important commitment you will ever make, and it is one that brings great spiritual and emotional joy to all those involved—the person being baptized, the person doing the baptism and even the angels in heaven (Luke 15:10)! So, what exactly is baptism?

One of the keys to understanding baptism is found in Acts 2:38: "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"

Peter sums up the commitment that

God wants each of us to make in a three-step process. First, we need to *repent*. We acknowledge that our behavior has been sinful, and recognize that we don't want to continue behaving in a sinful way. Even if we grew up as "good kids," we still have a sinful nature that needs to be overcome. Second, we need to *be baptized* to have our sins forgiven. And third, we need to *receive the Holy Spirit*. Having the Holy Spirit is what helps us avoid committing future sins. The book of Acts contains many examples of people following this exact process! You can compare Acts 2:40-41, 8:26-38, 10:34-48, 16:11-15, 18:5-8.

Technically speaking, baptism is the middle step in this three-step process. It's

the part where you are briefly submerged under water as a symbolic gesture—showing that your old way of life is dead (Romans 6:1-8). Although it sounds scary, most people who have been baptized will tell you that this is actually the easiest part of the process!

So, while baptism is the actual act of going under water to have our sins forgiven, most often when we talk about baptism, we're actually referring to the entire process.

## **GETTING STARTED: REPENTANCE**

As we saw from Peter's words in Acts, we need to begin with repentance. This word comes from the Greek *metanoeo*,



*Although our process of counseling for baptism might be a little more streamlined and formalized today, in reality, it is very much the same as it was in the book of Acts.*

and it literally means “to change one’s mind.” This change of mind isn’t like deciding that you want to eat a salad for lunch instead of pizza. It’s referring to deep changes in how we think about life. Back in Acts 2, Peter went on to say, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (verse 36). He had just finished explaining to his audience—an audience who had seen Christ in person and demanded His death—that Jesus Christ was indeed the Messiah they had been looking for, and was indeed God in the flesh.

He continued, “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’” (verse 37). Obviously, they didn’t realize their mistake at the time, but in that moment, a few weeks after they had been crying for Christ’s blood, they were hurt deeply by their own sin. So much so that they recognized a need for a real change in their sinful behavior.

While you and I were not there in the crowd chanting for Christ’s crucifixion, there comes a time in our lives when we, too, become “cut to the heart.” We recognize that our own way of doing things doesn’t quite work out. On a grand scale, we recognize that human logic falls short and inevitably leads to sin (Romans 3:23). Sin then leads to death (Romans

6:23), unless that sin is forgiven (1 John 1:9). The only practical solution is to be forgiven. When you reach this point, it’s time to move on to the next step.

### **BAPTISMAL COUNSELING**

If you’ve come to the realization that you need help with life—more than what your parents and friends can give—it’s time to begin talking to your pastor or a local elder about baptism counseling. The word “counseling” can sound negative, like someone is going to sit you down for a long lecture, but baptism counseling is nothing like that!

I’ve had the privilege of counseling dozens of people for baptism. Our conversations are open and honest, and most of the time, the person who comes for counseling does most of the talking. They talk about the stresses in their lives, what’s going well, and what’s not. But mostly, they talk about the fact that if they try to rely solely on themselves—they’re not doing as well in life as they should be.

When I counsel people for baptism, it’s something that I keep very confidential. I don’t share anything they tell me with anyone—not parents, friends or even my own wife! What happens in baptismal counseling stays in baptismal counseling.

Once we get rolling, the topic of repentance usually comes up early. I often ask, “What are you repenting of?”

This question can make people a little nervous, like I’m asking them to confess to me specific sins they have committed. But that is not the intent behind the question. While it is necessary to repent of specific sins, that’s something someone does between themselves and God—not to me. The answer I am looking for is completely different.

Remember that Greek word from before, *metanoeo*? It means “to change one’s mind.” In the case of repentance, we are seeking God’s help to change our mind in a very profound way. We are seeking to stop using our own reasoning to determine what is right and wrong, and to instead use God’s Spirit to see what is right and wrong. Of course, His written Word, the Bible, shows us that, but fundamentally speaking, we have to have a mind that is willing to read and do what the Bible says, even when we want to do something else. That is the real change in thinking God is looking for!

### **COUNTING THE COST**

Once we cover the fundamental “mind change” we need, one of the next things we discuss is counting the cost. In Luke 14:26-30, Christ says, “If you want to be my disciple, you must, by comparison, hate everyone else—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple. And if you do not carry your own

cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple” (New Living Translation). God doesn’t expect us to hate anyone, or to stop loving our family and friends. What He does expect is that we will choose to follow Him over anyone else, if a choice arises. In reality, there isn’t really a choice—we must follow Him!

He continues in verses 28-30: “But don’t begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it? Otherwise, you might complete only the foundation before running out of money, and then everyone would laugh at you. They would say, ‘There’s the person who started that building and couldn’t afford to finish it!’”

Once we commit to God and Jesus Christ through baptism,



*God gives us something to help us out—His Holy Spirit (John 14:26). The receiving of the Holy Spirit is a distinct and separate act from baptism.*

we must be “all in.” When trials come along, such as a job or other situation that would keep us from following or obeying God, we must not give up our Christian journey. We must make the hard choices, and continue to follow God, no matter what.

### **GETTING YOUR FEET (AND EVERYTHING ELSE) WET**

Once a pastor or local elder finishes counseling you for baptism, they will work out a time and place for your baptism to take place. This can be a very private event, or perhaps one you share with family and close friends.

At your baptism, the minister will ask you a few questions, such as “What is your full name?” and “Have you repented of

your sins and accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior?” Once you answer the questions, he will say something along these lines: “Because you have repented of your sins, which are the transgression of God’s holy, righteous and perfect law, and accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, Master, High Priest and soon-coming King, I now baptize you—not into any sect or denomination of this world, but into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—for the remission of your sins. I do this through the authority and by the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.”

He will then dunk you momentarily (just for a couple of seconds) completely under water. It’s not unusual for him to have someone help hold you in place, so your feet don’t pop up, or a strong current doesn’t take you away!

### **THE FINAL TOUCH**

After you come out of the water, you are at a very unique moment in your life—you are sinless. This symbolic gesture has cleansed you of your previous life of sin (Ephesians 5:26)! And while this is a wonderful feeling, the truth is, it doesn’t last very long. Our human nature begins to try and take control, and inevitably, we make a mistake, slip up and sin (James 1:14-15).

So, what do we do? Do we get re-baptized every time we sin? Of course not. God gives us something to help us out—His Holy Spirit (John 14:26). The receiving of the Holy Spirit is a distinct and separate act from baptism. In Acts 8, we read how the deacon Philip preached the gospel to a group of people who were then convicted to repent and be baptized, but Philip did not have biblical authority to lay hands on them.

Only later, when Peter and John came and laid hands on them, was their baptism complete, once they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17).

Although our process of counseling for baptism might be a little more streamlined and formalized today, in reality, it is

very much the same as it was in the book of Acts. First, we must repent. Then we must be baptized. Finally, we must receive God’s Holy Spirit. It really is that simple!

I hope this article has answered some of your questions, and perhaps eased some of your fears. Baptism, and the counseling that goes with it, while serious, aren’t and don’t need to feel scary. The entire process is not about your pastor deciding if you’re “worthy” of being baptized (*news flash*: None of us is!); but rather, if you’re ready and fully aware of the commitment you are about to make.

If you have ever considered being baptized, or just wanted to learn more about the process, please don’t hesitate to reach out to your pastor or an elder in your local church area! **CC**



# WHAT WOULD JESUS EAT?

**A**lthough the origin of COVID-19 is still being determined, there have been quite a few other deadly outbreaks over the past several decades traced back to eating biblically unclean animals. The SARS virus came from eating horseshoe bats in China's Guangdong province (EcoHealth Alliance). The MERS virus arose from eating camel meat in the Middle East (The Lancet). And the Ebola virus is thought to have sprung from eating infected monkeys or bats in the African Congo (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

In light of this, we should consider the Bible's dietary laws. Did Jesus do away with these, as many suggest? What is the relevance of these laws today?

In the face of rampant sickness in the world, let's explore some vital information about what we should and shouldn't eat. This can help us avoid many ailments, live a healthier lifestyle and adhere to Jesus Christ's example. As

the Bible tells us, "[Christ] left you an example so that you could follow in his footsteps" (1 Peter 2:21, Good News Bible).

## HEALTH LAWS IN THE BIBLE ALIGN WITH SCIENCE

God told the Israelites that in obeying His laws they would avoid many of the diseases common to other nations. This is possible through His blessing and also as the natural result of following principles of health embedded in some of the laws He gave them.

As He declared, "If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you" (Exodus 15:26).

"Levitical legislation concerning foods, unique in the ancient Near East," says the *International Standard Bible*

*Encyclopedia*, "embodied dietary principles that accord with modern scientific discoveries" (1982, Vol. 2, p. 644).

## A SUMMARY OF JESUS' DIET

Jesus, as was noted, came to set an example for us, and He faithfully followed His Father's commandments. He taught His disciples, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:10). Consequently, He did obey the biblical commands regarding what was and was not to be eaten.

God allowed plants and certain animals to be eaten—which had to be prepared in certain ways along with a few other restrictions.

Dr. Don Colbert, a medical doctor and *New York Times* bestselling author, has written 40 books on health and nutrition. In 2002 he wrote a book titled *What Would Jesus Eat?: The Ultimate Program*

for *Eating Well, Feeling Great, and Living Longer*.

Dr. Colbert asks, “What can we conclude from these basic food laws about the way Jesus ate?”

“First, we can conclude that Jesus ate a great many fruits and vegetables. In fact, His diet was likely rich in whole grains and whole vegetables and fruits.

“Second, we can conclude that Jesus ate only clean meat, poultry, and fish. We can also conclude from a rational look at the history of the time that He likely ate these clean meats in the proportion in which they existed at the time. Fish was plentiful, and Jesus likely ate fish as His primary meat source. Poultry was also plentiful, and that would likely have been the second most plentiful meat in Jesus’ diet. Meat—in the form of beef, lamb, and goat meat—was least plentiful, and therefore would have been the least likely meat for Jesus to have eaten [though He would have at times].

“Third, we can conclude that Jesus ate only animals that had been slaughtered according to biblical methods, that He did not eat young animals boiled in the mother’s milk, He did not eat animal blood, and He did not eat animal fat” (p. 27).

## **DISEASES AND HEALTH CONDITIONS LINKED TO UNCLEAN FOODS**

Over the years, theological as well as medical researchers have increasingly recognized the benefits of following the health laws of Scripture that Jesus and His disciples continued to follow in the New Testament.

Dr. Colbert provides information on many connections that modern science has made between biblically unclean foods and poor health:

### **Shellfish**

“Raw shellfish is a major source of food poisoning in our nation, and diseases commonly carried by shellfish include salmonella and the Hepatitis A virus.

Shellfish have a unique ability to purify waters of pathogenic bacteria such as cholera; many of these toxins are associated with raw sewage. Clams and oysters can filter between twenty and fifty gallons of seawater a day. The toxins, however, remain in the flesh of the shellfish” (p. 38).

### **Catfish and bottom feeders**

“Catfish caught in rivers and streams are perhaps the most contaminated of all bottom-feeding fish because they are the first to ingest the industrial pollutants that sink to the bottoms of streams and rivers.

“Like shrimp, lobsters, and all other shellfish, catfish were initially created by God to act as cleansing agents for natural water sources. These creatures have a great ability to absorb pollutants but not become sick by them. They can and do, however, pass on those pollutants to human beings who eat their flesh” (p. 58).

### **Pork**

“Many people declare today that pork is a safe meat to eat in modern times. I disagree. Pigs eat enormous amounts of food, and this dilutes the hydrochloric acid in a pig’s stomach. This in turn allows toxins, viruses, parasites, and bacteria to be absorbed into the animal’s flesh. Besides being gluttons, swine are also extremely filthy animals. They will eat garbage, feces, and even decaying flesh. All that is eaten usually becomes part of the pig’s own flesh. Pigs readily harbor parasites including *Trichinella*, the pork tapeworm, and toxoplasmosis” (pp. 74-76).

### **Fat and blood**

“One of the strict commands concerning fat is found in Leviticus 3:16-17: ‘All the fat is the LORD’s. This shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwellings: you shall eat neither fat nor blood.’

“The Lord clearly forbade consumption of all types of fat. He was referring not to plants here, or to the fats found in fish, but to the fat from the animals

declared clean for sacrifice to the Lord. All animal fat is saturated fat—it has been closely linked to elevated cholesterol as well as heart disease . . . I recommend that a person eat as little animal or dairy fat as possible. When eating meat, trim any visible fat from the meat before cooking it” (p. 77).

The fat restriction more specifically referred to clean mammals and not fish, as noted, or to birds—whereas the restriction against blood applies to both mammals and birds (see Leviticus 7:22-26). The fat prohibition further concerns the covering fat that can be removed rather than the fat marbled in the meat.

The requirement of draining meat of blood is even reiterated in the New Testament (see Acts 15:19-20, 28-29).

## **SO, WHAT WILL YOU EAT?**

The fact is, there is a clear relation between the biblical food laws and health principles that still apply today. Many sicknesses today could have been averted had people only given more consideration to what Jesus, as our prime example, would have actually eaten.

Finally, consider what God says when He gave the commands for clean and unclean foods in Leviticus 11:44-45: “For I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth. For I am the LORD who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.”

By following biblical guidelines for what to eat and not eat, we will not only be more healthy, we will also be fulfilling the command to be holy as God is holy! **CC**



Mario Seiglie teaches archaeology and intelligent design at Ambassador Bible College.



LET US GO UP TO THE MOUNTAIN OF THE

# LORD

*by Dan Preston*

**AS** a kid, I remember well the anticipation of getting ready to go to the Feast each year. We would borrow suitcases from grandparents, get the car loaded up the night before, and set out before sunrise the next morning. We often went to St. Petersburg, Florida, for the Feast since we had family in the area, and all of us enjoyed the beach!

Traveling today isn't quite the challenge it was when I was a kid. We didn't have DVD players or a minivan to spread out in. Instead, I had my older brother and sister in the back seat of our family sedan, and only schoolwork and "license plate bingo" (look it up) to keep me entertained.

At any rate, those are great memories and ones I will cherish forever. But they aren't the reason we keep the Feast. The Feast of Tabernacles is first and foremost a Festival of God and a Festival that has a purpose. That purpose is to remind us of a future time coming to this earth. Jesus Christ is returning to this planet to usher in an existence unlike anything we've ever seen. Simply, we refer to it as the Millennium, which is the first 1,000 years of the Kingdom of God.

This will occur only after a very difficult time known as

the Great Tribulation. While those called to be firstfruits will be spirit beings once Christ returns, there will still be mortal humans on Earth who have just endured a time of worldwide war, famine and disease. They will be shocked and scared for their very lives. It might take some time for them to understand and adjust to this new government that is based on love and truly has their best interests at heart. A lot of things will change when God's government is established. Let's take a look at just three of those things in this article.

## **A NEW BEGINNING**

Isaiah 2:2 reads, "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it." You've probably heard this scripture read a lot around Feast time, but why?

In biblical terms, mountains often denote a government, king or ruler; likewise a hill may describe lesser or smaller governments. Simply put, this scripture is a reminder that the government Jesus Christ is bringing with Him at His return will overpower and replace all other forms of government on Earth



at that time. Revelation 11:15 says this very clearly, “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!”

It’s interesting to note in Isaiah’s account that when speaking of this new government, it says that all nations shall “flow to it.” By the time Jesus Christ arrives on the scene, people will be ready for a form of government that really works!

## READY FOR A CHANGE

The next verse in Isaiah continues with this theme of people wanting a change: “Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (2:3). People will want to learn more about not only God’s form of government, but His instructions on how to live life.

We must remember the time we are living in now. It is a time when most people reject God’s laws and instead do what they think is best. This is the result of Satan’s deception and influence on this world (2 Corinthians 4:4). With Satan being removed and unable to influence the world (Revelation 20:1-3),

people will begin to see clearly that Satan’s old ways—their old ways—didn’t work out so well. They’ll see that it wasn’t just our human systems of government that were bad, it was our human way of *thinking*.

God foretold in Jeremiah’s time that a day was coming when people would have His laws—His way of thinking—written in their hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34). The apostle Paul puts it this way in Colossians 3:8-10, “But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.” When Christ rules the earth, nearly all of those on it will want to give up their old ways like anger and lies which led to death, and instead seek righteous knowledge that leads to life. More than the knowledge itself, they will have the *desire* to live this way!

## A LASTING SOLUTION

The section in Isaiah concludes with verse 4, “He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into



*Simply put, this scripture is a reminder that the government Jesus Christ is bringing with Him at His return will overpower and replace all other forms of government on earth at that time.*

pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” If we’re living under Christ’s direct supervision, it might sound weird that some nations will be rebuked (corrected). Why would this be?

Once again, we must remember what people will have just experienced in the Tribulation. It will have been a time of worldwide war, pandemics, riots, starvation and more. There will be a lot of people looking to place blame. They will want to take their hurt feelings out on others. Change will not happen overnight. In Zechariah 14 we read that if nations choose not to obey God, they will receive no rain.

The good news, though, is that people will learn quickly. Once they learn, they will begin to experience a time of peace and prosperity they had always dreamed of, but never had. God will deliver salvation to the entire world

through His Son, Jesus Christ. It truly will be a time unlike anything humans have ever known. It’s a time only possible through the perfect rulership of Jesus Christ.

The changes that Isaiah prophesied about are hard to imagine. What will it be like to have a truly good government? What will it be like when people *want* to know what God is teaching? How much joy will there be when the whole world begins to experience true prosperity, and an opportunity at salvation?

As you prepare for the Feast this year, don’t forget to enjoy and savor the good memories you are making with family and friends. But beyond that, make sure you remember what the Feast represents, how the world will change and your special calling in being a part of it. Until then, we can all pray: Thy Kingdom Come! **CC**



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# DATING OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

## *Some Points to Ponder*



*by Frank Dunkle*

I used to watch a popular television show in which the main character went through several difficult romances. At the climax of one episode, she exclaimed, “You can’t help it! You can’t choose who you love!” She continued from there to describe how falling in love was completely outside of any person’s control.

She was right—and at the same time, she was completely wrong!

Emotions are powerful and we can develop strong feelings for a person without planning or intending to do so. However, we certainly can control how we spend our time and with whom. If you stay away from a person, you are not likely to fall in love with him or her—but, if you hang out a lot, you might just find yourself head over heels before you know it.

Today many people not only believe that “falling in love” happens by accident, but that it should always be that way. The truth is, those people are mistaken. You have more control than you think. You can choose when you are ready to make your affections available, and, to some degree, you can choose to which people you make them available. I say, “to some degree,” because you surely cannot control how other people feel! As much as you might wish you could—you just can’t make someone fall in love with you. Believe me, I’ve tried.

### **WHY AM I TALKING ABOUT ALL THIS?**

Teens and young adults striving to live God’s way, within God’s Church, often have tough questions to answer:

“should I date outside of my church?” “Should I marry outside of my religion?” The general answer to both questions is, no—but that answer raises a number of *other* questions. “Why not?” “Is it true in every case?” “What happens if I’m already in love with a non-believer, or if I marry that person?”

Answering all these questions thoroughly would require a lengthy book; and even then, the answers would seem unsatisfactory to a few people. Still, it is worth considering an overview of the topic. The Bible does not say anything about dating—outside the Church or otherwise. Dating is actually a fairly modern invention. However, Scripture does give some clear guidelines about marriage.

The basic New Testament teaching

on this comes from the apostle Paul. He advised that a Christian can marry whom he or she wants, “only in the Lord,” which means to marry only a person called by God into His Church (1 Corinthians 7:39). Paul also directed Christians, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Corinthians 6:14). This metaphor tells us to avoid permanent attachments with someone of a different religion. The reason is that a marriage is the closest bond two people can have. Marrying someone with a different view of God than yours, even if they have good morals, creates a barrier between you and them. It creates tension in the most important aspect of your life—your relationship with God and Jesus Christ.

In several Old Testament scriptures, God forbade Israelite men from marrying “pagan wives.” That was an archaic way of saying not to marry anyone that worshiped a different god, and it makes sense that today we should not marry a person with different beliefs or a different religion.

### **A MODERN DAY EXAMPLE FROM SOMEONE WHO LEARNED THE HARD WAY**

Rather than elaborate more on Scripture, let me share my personal experience. When I was 18 years old, I began dating a girl I met at the fast-food restaurant where I worked. She attended a mainstream, Sunday-keeping church and I was part of the Church of God. As noted above, I wasn’t doing anything the Bible said not to do; however, I came to regret my decision. She was a very nice person, with good morals, and the natural thing happened: we fell in love. I even asked her to marry me.

I knew what the Bible teaches about marrying a non-believer, but I reasoned that she did believe much of what I believed. God wanted me to be happy, didn’t He? Yes, of course; God wants everyone to be happy! That is the purpose of His wonderful plan of salvation that the annual Holy Days represent. It was

during one of those Festivals, the Feast of Tabernacles, that I came to a stark and difficult realization. I knew that I believed what the Church of God teaches from the Bible—and I *knew* that I knew. I realized that my relationship with God and my future in His family was the most important thing in my life.

My girlfriend did not believe those things the same way. During that Feast, I came to realize that life would be very unhappy if I could not share the most important *thing* in my life (my relationship with God) with the most important *person* in my life (my wife)! That’s when I knew what I needed to do. It was the most painful thing I’ve ever done. I broke off our engagement and I was sad and miserable for quite a while after that.

But, you know what? I have never regretted that decision. In a couple of years my ex-girlfriend fell in love with and married a young man who shared all of her religious beliefs. In freeing her to do that, I helped her have a much happier marriage than she would have had with me. It was several years later before I married, but it was well worth the wait. My wife and I share the same beliefs and values. We sit together at services each Sabbath and Holy Day. We serve God’s Church together. That is how marriage should be.

Now, I would be remiss if I did not admit that there have been a few cases of happy marriages with non-believers. A person might marry outside God’s Church and have it go well—but I know of many more examples that led to frustration and misery.

### **A FEW THINGS TO PONDER**

As for dating, while I can’t tell you that the Bible forbids you to date outside the Church, I hope you’ll consider my story. I made a choice that brought me pain and sadness, but I hope my advice will help spare you from that.

As you build relationships and even prepare to build a family, please consider carefully the following:

- Whom do you spend your time with? This is a good question to ask whether you’re thinking of dating or not. Do the people you spend your time with share the same fundamental values as you? Have their thoughts ever led you in a direction that was unhealthy?

- What happens if you fall in love with someone? If you do happen to fall in love, where might it lead? Could it lead to a lifelong relationship united by the same core values and goals, or could it turn into a relationship that is constantly growing apart because of different beliefs? What happens when children enter the picture?

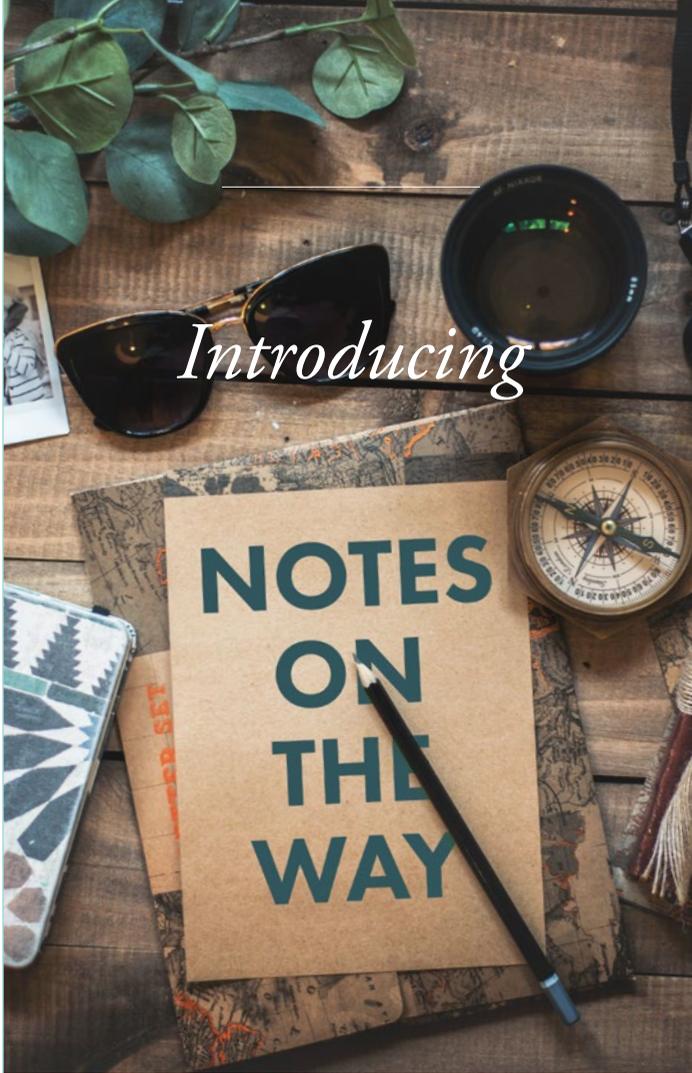
- Understand the power of emotions. Emotions are a wonderful, God-given human attribute. They are a necessary and vital part of life. But be careful that temporary feelings don’t lead you to a choice that’s contrary to your life’s goals.

- Where does your relationship with God stand? You probably believe in God, attend church and pray. But how committed are you to Him? If you’ve not given the commitment of baptism and the receiving of the gift of God’s Holy Spirit serious consideration, then maybe it’s time to hit “pause” on pursuing serious romantic relationships. Remember, God’s Spirit is available to guide us through life’s choices! (John 14:26, 16:13; Romans 8:26).

Making good choices about whom you share your time with and whom you date should lead to choosing a good partner for your life. Do not leave it to chance. Wise decisions today will lead to a happy life later on! **CC**



Frank Dunkle serves as a professor and Coordinator of Ambassador Bible College. His wife Sue is a middle-school science teacher and they have one son.



## Introducing

NOTES  
ON  
THE  
WAY

*Before they were called Christians, early followers of Jesus Christ were known as those of “the Way” (Acts 9:2; 11:26; 19:9,23; 22:4). Interestingly enough, when we speak of things we have learned from our life’s experience, we often say “I learned it along the way.” In this new series, we hope to offer some insight learned by members of “the Way” to help you handle life’s questions, challenges and decisions you encounter along the way.*

**AS** a child, your parents make the vast majority of your decisions for you—some for your own protection and others for your instruction. You begin to gain more personal agency as you get older, but in many ways your path is set while you’re in school and living at home. Then comes graduation day, and possibly your move-out day, and suddenly your personal agency has exploded.

That moment is one of liberation and celebration for some, and one of anxiety and fear for others. Not only do you now bear the responsibility of your decisions in general, but there is an enormous pressure to decide at age 18, 19 or 20 what you want to do for the rest of your life. Finding the right career path is a thrilling challenge for some, who think strategically or are just along for the ride; but for others, it’s so daunting it’s

easier to just not think about it. There’s a huge pressure to figure it out at a pretty early age because if you spend a few years on one path, then figure out you don’t like it, what’re you supposed to do—just go back to school? Start at the bottom in a new job for way less money?

And of course, on top of it all is the uncer-

“I am not a product of my  
circumstances.  
I am a product of my decisions.”

*Stephen Covey*

tainty of potential workplace conflicts with the Sabbath, Holy Days or other tenets of our faith. “Could I even do that job if their business involves promoting Pride Month once a year?”

We staff members here at *Compass Check* understand. We’ve wrestled with those and other quandaries. So, in that spirit, we introduce a new regular feature for the magazine: career profiles. We’ll be featuring people just a little older than you who hold a wide variety of jobs—doctors, accountants, programmers, parents, fitness instructors, graphic designers, marketers, entrepreneurs, you name it—to illuminate how these people navigated the same waters you find yourself in now (or will find yourself in very soon).

We hope you find value in the stories of these people, and can glean some insight into how many totally valid ways there are to approach your life’s work, whatever that ends up being.

As always, if you ever have a question or want to follow up, feel free to reach out—we’re on Instagram, Twitter and email like the rest of the Olds.

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# Notes On *The Way*

## JACOB MAMMEN

*Senior financial analyst at a large insurance firm*



*Jacob Mammen has served at a ton of camps over the years—you might've met him! We're kicking off this series with a profile of him because he's well-known in the camp circles, and because he was the first person to respond to our emails (kidding . . . sort of). Read on to find out why he left a job he loved, what he likes about his career and what he's working toward next.*

### **What's your church background?**

I would consider myself born and raised, because my parents came into the Church when I was around three or four years old. I don't remember much else before that point.

### **What do you do for a living? How did you get to where you are now?**

I'm a senior financial analyst for an insurance company. In college, I first looked at becoming a pre-health professional [that is, following an educational path that will serve as a good foundation

for a post-graduate degree in the medical or health field]. I was interested in making a lot of money, but I learned that I wasn't quite that smart! So, I settled into business and went into business management and accounting. That has its own level of challenge—it isn't the easiest field—but much of it was relatively straightforward. I enjoyed learning all about business finance, although accounting wasn't my favorite. (That said, accounting is kind of what I do now.) I also wanted to get out of school as fast as possible, and I could do this in a couple years.

During college I got an internship as a business analyst at a trucking company. I enjoyed that a bunch, but I didn't like the work/life balance and wasn't paid enough, so after graduating in 2010, I found a new job at a law firm in private accounting.

After a few years of working there and a bit of networking, I landed a job at one of Chattanooga's (and the world's) biggest insurance companies. However, the insurance company began outsourcing positions. A couple friends asked if I'd be interested in a position at a construction company,

so rather than be part of the outsourcing, I accepted their offer.

After a while working there, the construction company had a bad year and laid off a bunch of people, including me. But when I got laid off, I remember not being super bummed about it. I went to my car, prayed and told God that I was sure He had something in store for me; He'd never let me down before.

Interestingly enough, a couple weeks before being laid off, my old manager from the previous job I had held with the international insurance

company contacted me about a senior position within the company, but in a different field. So, when I was laid off from construction, I sent my resumé over and, within a week, landed that senior job. I was earning better money and better benefits than I had been previously, and also received severance from the construction company, causing me to come out ahead (financially) in the end. All along I continued to believe God would take care of me. I'm still with the same company, although potentially looking to pivot to other areas of the company in the future.

It was a series of events that led me to where I am today; I didn't intend to be where I'm at right now. People who are very career-focused have aspirations to be at a certain firm, in a certain position. That's not me. I can do my job well, but I'm still trying to figure out what I really want to do, you know?

#### **Do you enjoy your work?**

I like what I do—I don't love it. The best part of my job is working with other teams. I enjoy partnering with other departments. It's kind of a networking opportunity too. For instance, someone might come to me to try to find an explanation for a trend in their department, and I do some research to find out what's going on. That's very rewarding for me. In my role, I work with a broad set of people, so I collaborate with people in IT, people in the expense department, and people in financial planning

and analysis. Because of this, I have a lot of visibility into the whole company.

Right now, I'm looking for jobs where I can find a better fit with managers, and also where I can gain additional skills that will be valuable at other companies.

#### **Does your work ever come into conflict with your faith?**

Surprisingly not, and I attribute that to one thing. I know that many human resources and interview professionals say this is a bad move, but I do it for peace of mind and to have a clear conscience: I talk to the hiring manager about my faith. I explain how I can't work past sunset on Friday night,

but that I can work Sundays if needed. I explain that I observe annual Holy Days and that the dates for them might fall at good or bad times during the year. I get all that out in the open during the hiring process so they know up front.

I've also benefited from people who have come before me at the organizations I've worked at, who have also kept the Sabbath. They "paved the way" and worked with managers to create workarounds to complete work on Sundays

instead of on the Sabbath. There's only been one time years ago when a manager wasn't thrilled that I couldn't come in on a Saturday like everyone else.

#### **What advice would you give to someone in high school or junior high about pursuing a career that's personally fulfilling?**

When you get past high school and if you're doing general education in college, I suggest reaching out and talking to a bunch of different department heads to see if there are any electives or classes in their departments that sound interesting to you. Explore many majors; you might not think a particular

Another thing: Don't feel like you're on a timeline; you can take classes to see if you're interested. If it doesn't work out, even if you have to work harder later to get it done, the experience will still be beneficial.

If you have summers free, go on a really cool trip all summer. Don't stay at home doing nothing and just hanging out, unless you really need to work. Once you're in a career, you'll no longer have summers off.

#### **Is there anything else you'd like to mention for additional context or helpful information?**

I attended University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, a

*During those two years before you become locked into your major, try a bunch of things and see what extra classes you can sit in on to get exposed to new things.*

field is appealing, but once you take a class you realize it's interesting. In high school and early college, we don't know what types of jobs even exist out there. During those two years before you become locked into your major, try a bunch of things and see what extra classes you can sit in on to get exposed to new things.

Use the Internet; take those masters classes that are always advertised online. Public libraries have tons of free resources that help with this too.

public university, and graduated with hardly any student loan debt. At some point, within a year or two of working, no one cares what school you went to (aside from Harvard or MIT or something specialized). I wasn't a very good college student, but I still scored great jobs because of networking and developing strong friendships. Once you land your first job, if you work hard, make a good impression, and have faith that God will provide for your needs, things will go well from there. **CC**



# 5 KEYS TO GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

*by Tim Pebworth*

## IT'S

no secret that in today's world, mental health is a major cause for concern. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the percentage of adults in America with anxiety or a depressive disorder increased substantially.<sup>1</sup> Youth mental health worsened as well, with the proportion of those seeking help increasing 9 percent between 2019 and 2020.<sup>2</sup> If you followed the Olympics, you probably saw Simone Biles decide to drop out of all but one of her competitions, citing mental health reasons.<sup>3</sup> Folks everywhere are grappling with how to deal with stress, anxiety and the pressures of life.

Sadly, there's still a stigma around opening up about mental health challenges, with many people feeling too ashamed or hopeless to get help or support. What shame might we feel here in God's Church around sharing that we suffer from things like depression or thoughts of suicide? We may think that as God's people we shouldn't have those problems.

I'm not an expert on this topic, but I'm a long-time student of these discussions, having witnessed firsthand the devastating impact of untreated mental disorders within my family as I grew up and into adulthood. Thankfully, I don't have to pretend to be an expert in this area as the Bible has so much to say.

In this article, I want to share five principles of mental health. And more than anything, as opposed to a listing of clichéd responses to a complex topic, I hope this stimulates discussion, reflection, prayer and meditation.

### **1. JESUS CARES ABOUT OUR MENTAL HEALTH**

Our physical, mental and emotional health is at the core of Jesus Christ's message. In Luke 4:18, Jesus reads from Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed . . ."

Christ says He came for a purpose. He came first to preach the gospel to the poor.

Why? Because in this life the poor don't have much. He came preaching another world, a world to come. If you are rich, you likely don't yearn for a new world to come. Your world is okay. But if you are poor, this physical life doesn't offer as much. And in biblical times, a person's chance of rising out of poverty was near zero.

Many in the United States have grown up in an environment where hard work plus time equals success. But it isn't that way with everyone. The coordinator of a social program in the tenderloin district of San Francisco (a neighborhood with a high rate of homelessness and poverty) talked about his experiences at an orientation I attended. He shared that there is a great sense of hopelessness that leads to depression, anxiety and helplessness in those who experience poverty. Jesus Christ came first of all to preach good news to the poor—those without hope; those without resources or help.

Next, it says He came to heal the brokenhearted. These are people who have been so damaged emotionally and physically that their very being has been crushed and shattered. Christ came to heal those whose backgrounds and circumstances have scarred, shattered and irrevocably destroyed their hearts. This is about physical and emotional abuse. This is about suffering from trauma before we even knew we were suffering. Many people live 18 years with their families growing up and then spend the next 60 years trying to overcome the trauma that occurred in childhood.

Luke 4 then says He came to preach deliverance to the captives. This includes those who were in slavery physically, but also mentally, those who have no escape. He also came to give sight to the blind. Literally, He gave sight to the blind, but He also healed those with many different physical infirmities. And lastly, He came to set at liberty those who are oppressed. He freed those who lived under oppressive masters, or who lived under the tyranny of a world ruled by the great adversary.

I believe this verse shows we must begin with the premise that Jesus Christ came to address our physical, mental and emotional trauma. He cares about our depression and mental anxiety.

If this is true, then why do we still suffer from depression and mental illness?

We find one explanation in 2 Corinthians 12. Paul had a physical ailment that he called a "thorn in the flesh," which God used to develop in him the mind of Christ. Mental ailments can also provide us strength through God as we grow to better understand our own weaknesses.

"Concerning this [thorn in the flesh] I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Corinthians 12:8-9).

That doesn't mean we can't or

**CHRIST CAME TO HEAL THOSE WHOSE BACKGROUNDS AND CIRCUMSTANCES HAVE SCARRED, SHATTERED AND IRREVOCABLY DESTROYED THEIR HEARTS.**

shouldn't get help. It just means that God may allow some suffering (rather than instantly healing any infirmity) for the benefit of our longer-term spiritual growth. In other verses, the Bible shows there are things we can do to strengthen our mental health and lessen feelings of depression or anxiety.

## **2. REACH OUT AND CONNECT WITH OTHERS IN GOD'S CHURCH**

One way to counter mental health struggles is to reach out to others. We are not alone in this fight—we are part of the Body of Christ. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 shows the danger of isolation: "Woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up."

Why do we as God's people suffer in silence with depression and mental illness when there are people we can call? Many times, specifically in the Church, we are too afraid to admit we have a problem. We don't want to appear weak; we don't want to show our vulnerability.

I would like to tell you that I'm not moody, that I don't get depressed and that I'm perfectly calm all the time. But I'm not. I'm not perfect and neither are you. And it would be great to think and believe that because we come to Church every week and pray and study our Bibles, we won't have

mental health problems—but that’s *just not reality*.

The fact is, we all suffer from some sort of anxiety, worry, fear or depression. And the sooner we start being able to share our feelings openly, the sooner we have a chance to bounce back from the mood swings that plague us all.

We tend to think about the “iron sharpens iron” analogy in Proverbs 27:17 in terms of a sharp sword sharpening a sharp sword, but sometimes our sword is pretty dull. That’s why we have some strange ideas about ourselves and what’s best for us, and we need to learn to take advice. We need to learn to listen to others: our parents, ministers and mentors in the Church. Especially in the teenage years, it’s easy to lack perspective, and

just for a little while. In Mark 6:31, Christ said to His disciples, “Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.” We should follow this example.

This resting should also include exercise that helps get ourselves out of our heads and connects us with our physical body. Regular exercise and rest are well documented to regulate moods and behavior.

#### **4. GO BEYOND SELF-CONTROL AND TRUST IN GOD’S PROMISES**

Self-control is one of the fruits of God’s Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22), and God expects us to exercise self-control over our mind. Self-control is important in managing negative self-talk, the brain

“When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all” (Psalms 34:17-19, English Standard Version).

“Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).

“Don’t worry over anything whatever; tell God every detail of your needs in earnest and thankful prayer and the peace of God, which transcends human understanding, will keep guard over your hearts and minds as they rest in Christ



*We should be encouraged to know that God has promised to care for us. We should be memorizing key verses that will help us when we need to control our thoughts.*

sometimes this can lead to disastrous consequences, like finding yourself in an abusive relationship or making life decisions that negatively affect your future employment or finances.

#### **3. TAKE THE TIME TO REST AND GAIN PERSPECTIVE**

Another way to boost your mental health is to make sure you have time for rest. God crafted a calendar of rest to help us recover and gain perspective. We know that God created the Sabbath and three Holy Day seasons (spring, summer and fall) to break the routine of our regular weekly pace.

Besides the Sabbath and the Holy Days, we should take the time to get away. Find some way to rest, even if it’s

chatter and the defeatist emotions that sweep over us. So, self-control is important, but our own willpower is often not enough when it comes to mental health. For this we need to go beyond self-control and trust in God’s promises.

We should be encouraged to know that God has promised to care for us. Look at Deuteronomy 6:8-9 and see that God commanded Israel to bind the law as frontlets between their eyes. We should be printing key verses and placing them in our homes to read and be reminded. We also know that we should write the law in our hearts. We should be memorizing key verses that will help us when we need to control our thoughts.

Consider His promises in these verses:

Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7, J.B. Phillips New Testament).

In the next verses (8-9) Paul makes it clear that we must meditate and focus on the positive, the noble, the true. This is our part.

#### **5. THERE IS NO SHAME IN SEEKING PROFESSIONAL HELP**

How we view mental illness in ourselves and our brethren is important. We need to consider carefully our mental model about mental illness.

A fairly well-known Christian blogger, Frank Viola, shared three mainstream Christian views about mental disorders in a post from Aug. 22, 2014:<sup>4</sup>

“Throughout my years of being involved in various and sundry Christian



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*Be proactive if you are suffering and seek help. If you see someone suffering, don't ignore it; go and get help for them. God's hand is not slack to save.*

movements and denominations, it seems that Christians understand mental disorders in one of three chief ways:

1. Mental illness is demonic in origin. So, the antidote is to cast out the demons that are causing it.
2. Mental illness is psychobabble. There's no such thing as a "mental disorder." All so-called mental illnesses are just sinful behaviors. So, the antidote is for the person to repent and get right with God.
3. Mental illness is a physiological disorder. The brain is a physical organ just like the heart, the thyroid, the joints, etc. Thus, if someone has panic attacks or bipolar disorder or schizophrenia or chronic depression or ADHD, they have a chemical imbalance in the brain, not dissimilar to a hyperthyroidism or high blood pressure or arthritis.

I cut my teeth [or began my career] on a movement that promoted #1. I've met many people who believed #2. But I believe #3 is often the case. Yet it's not so simple."

Frank Viola's comments are very much on

point. We understand that there is a spirit realm which exists and that it is possible for sin to affect us mentally and emotionally as well as spiritually. But churches can fall into the trap of attributing all mental illness to spiritual forces or sin, ignoring good research on mental disorders or throwing up their hands and saying it's unknowable.

Be proactive if you are suffering and seek help. If you see someone suffering, don't ignore it; go and get help for them. God's hand is not slack to save. He doesn't want anyone to suffer unnecessarily.

There are no easy answers, but God is merciful. There are biblical principles that we can hang onto. There are actions we can take, and we can reach out for help.

Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still, and know that I am God." When I become anxious or worried, I remember this verse and that Christ said to not worry or be anxious, but to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. We can take heart that our God is the ultimate Comforter, and Christ came to heal the brokenhearted. **CC**

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# COMPASS CHECK

United Youth Magazine

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

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# MAKE IT THE BEST FEAST EVER

*By serving! It's a time to rejoice and that means helping others rejoice too. Sign up to help! Look after somebody who seems alone! Make it a point to talk to the older people! The Feast is meant to help us picture God's Kingdom, when we'll all be serving together alongside Jesus Christ. Let's practice that this year.*

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