



# COMPASS CHECK

Helping you turn your spiritual compass toward God

*How Can*  
**PASSOVER**  
*Have Meaning  
for You?*



Camp: A Time for  
Building Relationships!

Five Things Jesus  
Didn't Say

Dopamine: How understanding this brain  
chemical can help you find happiness



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## COMPASS CHECK

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

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## COMPASS CORNER

*Dear Compass Checkers,*

In my last note, I commented how most of the leaves on the trees would be gone by the time you received the last issue of *Compass Check*. As I sit writing today, we are already beginning to see signs of spring here in North Carolina. The grass is beginning to green up and we have had several daffodil flowers blooming in our yard already. As the old saying goes, “My, how time flies . . .”

Not only does spring bring flowers, it brings the beginning of God’s annual Holy Day season. While you are pretty familiar with the meaning and symbolism behind Unleavened Bread, you might not be as familiar with the symbols and meaning of Passover. In this issue, we’ll dig into those and see the value they hold for you, whether you are baptized or not.

Just after spring comes summer and with it UYC’s summer camps! Everyone looks forward to them, but is there something you can do to prepare to get even more out of camp than just fun?

Summer also brings high school graduation for some of you. You’ll likely hear a commencement address meant to inspire you to take on the world. While that’s a fine goal, how do the things said in those speeches compare to the inspiring word of Jesus Christ?

While there’s a lot of fun to look forward to, is there such a thing as too much fun? In this issue, we’ll look how to train your brain not to overdo it and get addicted to fun. And when the fun stops due to tragedies that inevitably arise, how can you deal with the feelings of loss and grief?

Finally, do you like Spiderman? I do, but probably not for the same reasons you do. As editor I like to think of myself as J. Jonah Jamieson, chief of the Daily Planet. The truth is, I’m a lot nicer than that, and if you’ve ever thought about writing for *Compass Check*, in this issue we’ll show you just how fun and easy it can be, and maybe even earn you extra credit in your English class!

I pray this article finds you well and hope you are ready to enjoy all that springtime has to offer!



*Dan Preston*

*Editor of Compass Check magazine*

# CAMP



## A TIME FOR BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

*by David Cobb*

**WHAT'S** the most important part of being at camp? That's easy! For both campers and staff, it's the same thing that's most important in every part of life—relationships!

The purpose of human life is for God the Father and Jesus Christ to expand their family by reproducing Themselves. That simple but incredibly profound reality is the answer to why we are here! Why are they doing that? The Bible makes it clear that relationships are the most meaningful element of existence, whether that existence is physical or spiritual in nature.

In a song about relationships titled “Bring Your Love to Me,” folk-rock band The Avett Brothers capture that life can be lived alone, but as the lyrics point out: “. . . just not as well, and besides, what kind of fun is there to be had with no one else?” Those words echo a consistent theme that can be seen and heard in every form of human expression. It accurately reflects the reality that life is

better as a shared experience!

Being at camp provides fantastic opportunities to develop and practice the relational skills that help us become full members of the spiritual family that God the Father and Jesus Christ are building. Three types of relationships that you can develop and work on at camp are your relationship with God, with mentors and with friends and peers.

### **YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD**

Camp is a great time to focus on and respond to the incredible and exciting reality that God wants a relationship with you! On the Feast of Pentecost, just weeks after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Apostle Peter was speaking to a crowd of people about the opportunity for salvation through repentance and the relationship with God that Christ's death provided for them. He explains, “For the promise is for you and for your children



and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself” (Acts 2:39, English Standard Version).

These words share the wonderful reality that God extends the opportunity for a relationship with Him to those whom He is directly working with at any given time, to their children and ultimately to all people in the timing that He chooses to call them. You are blessed and privileged to have that opportunity now, and camp is a fantastic place to strengthen that relationship.

Throughout His revealed Word, God repeatedly shares His desire to be with His people. After Israel was delivered from captivity in Egypt, as the tabernacle in the wilderness was being prepared as a physical structure for God to inhabit, He made it clear through Moses: “I am the LORD their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them” (Exodus 29:46).

Many hundreds of years later as He prepared for His final Passover, Jesus Christ, the One who had inhabited that tabernacle, shared with His disciples that He and God the Father come to those who obey them and make their home with them (John 14:23). This refers to Them dwelling through the power of the Holy Spirit with those who respond to being called.

Relationships are built by spending time together and communicating with one another. At camp, God’s way of life is the primary focus. All activities are structured with the goal of learning to live His way of life by experiencing it during the time at camp. Coming together in an environment where He is the center of attention is a great way to spend time with Him. At camp we are able to regularly dedicate time to communicate with Him by praying, reading His Word and practicing His way.

## **YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH MENTORS**

Being at camp is a great way for both campers and staff to build connections and relationships with others who can mentor them in living God’s way. The Merriam-Webster dictionary



*Being at camp is a great way for both campers and staff to build connections and relationships with others who can mentor them in living God’s way.*

defines “mentor” as, “a trusted counselor or guide, [a] coach.” While dorm counselors serve in the very important role of guiding and coaching a group of campers, everyone that comes to camp has the opportunity to both give and receive meaningful mentoring support!

Jesus Christ, our example in all things, has many names throughout the Bible. Not surprisingly, one of those names is “Counselor” (Isaiah 9:6). The Blue Letter Bible Concordance shows that this word describes someone who advises, consults and plans together with someone else. It’s a wonderful role that our Savior plays in leading us through life, and camp is a fantastic time to experience that relationship with Him and with others who are learning to be like Him and following His example.

The Bible is also clear that seeking out mentors who strengthen you by providing right and purposeful counsel is a key to succeeding

*As you prepare for camp this year, challenge yourself. Set a goal to make building meaningful relationships your primary focus.*

spiritually and in all areas of life. Proverbs 1:5 states, “A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel . . .” Proverbs 15:22 clearly states the benefit of seeking and pursuing guidance in life: “Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisors they succeed” (ESV).

Campers can receive guidance and coaching in many aspects of life from their dorm counselors, activity staff, camp administrators and even from one another. Staff members also have a great opportunity to support one another throughout and beyond the time at camp. The focused environment provides many occasions to practice supporting and walking alongside others who are in similar and different phases of life, sharing experience in God’s way for the benefit of all.

### **YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH FRIENDS AND PEERS**

Camp is also a great place to build and strengthen lasting friendships. Some of my closest friends today are people whom I became much closer to while we were campers and staff together at camps 20 years ago. The camp environment is unique in its separation from external influences to spend time together in learning and enjoyment. That environment enables the development of friendship bonds that are hard to replicate anywhere else.

In a portion of his letter to the Romans that has much to say about using God’s way to form solid relational connections, the apostle Paul offers a simple but profound recipe for building friendships that will endure over time: “Don’t just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other” (Romans 12:9-10, New Living Translation).

As you prepare for camp this year, challenge yourself. Set a goal to make building meaningful relationships your primary focus.

Draw closer to God by dedicating time and attention to getting to know Him. Purposefully connect with people who can guide you with wise counsel that equips you to navigate life, and look for opportunities to share what you learn with others who can benefit from it too. Be kind. Listen. Show genuine respect to everyone.

As Biblical scholar William Barclay’s New Daily Study Bible points out with respect to the mutual love described in Romans 12, “We are not strangers to each other within the [Church]; much less are



we isolated units; we are brothers and sisters, because we have the one Father, God.” The most important things that you can take away from camp each year are the relationship connections that bring us closer to becoming future members of God’s family for eternity! **CC**



*David Cobb attends the Indianapolis congregation of the United Church of God. He lives and works in Columbus, Indiana, with his wife Mandie and their three children, HannahBeth, Joshua and Elijah.*





# How Can PASSOVER Have Meaning for You?

by Dan Preston

## *I remember*

a strange mix of feelings when I was a teen every year when Passover came around. I knew it was something only baptized members could take part in and so it was the one time a year my parents went to church without me. When I was little, I'd go over to my grandparents' house, but as a teen, my mom set me up with a TV dinner (which was a treat, as I saw it) and I had the run of the house to myself. I could watch whatever I wanted on TV, call friends and talk on the phone (we only had one landline back then and as the youngest of the family of five, getting the phone to yourself was a rarity) and do pretty much whatever I wanted.

Despite this "freedom" for the night, I still felt kind of . . . guilty. Not for watching TV or calling friends or even sneaking a candy bar out of my mom's stash, but for *not* being at Passover. I knew I wasn't allowed to participate in the service, but still, I felt like I should have been there. And even though my parents had explained to me what happened at Passover, I still didn't quite understand it. Why was this night so different from all the rest?

Interestingly enough, that is a question God anticipated that children would ask. "And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' that you shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt

when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households: So the people bowed their heads and worshiped" (Exodus 12:26-27).

Of course, the context of this scripture is slightly different. In Exodus 12, we read of the first Passover where Israel was about to be freed from slavery in Egypt. That's also when a lamb was killed and blood spread on the doorposts and lintel (Exodus 12:1-7). Under the New Covenant, the instructions regarding the keeping of Passover are different. Since Jesus Christ was sacrificed for all sins ever committed, the symbolic sacrifice of lambs each year is no longer needed (Hebrews 9:26-28; 10:12).

### **MEANING OF PASSOVER SHOWN WITH SYMBOLS**

It's from here we can really begin to understand what the Passover service means; in addition to the animal sacrifice being eliminated, some new symbols were instituted for Passover. At His last Passover, Jesus Christ set the example of foot-washing (John 13:2-6). While this seems very odd to us today, we must understand what it meant in that day.

People used to walk everywhere on dusty, dirty roads. They wore sandals, which were open and allowed all the muck and grime to cover their feet. When you went into a restaurant or someone's home, there would often be a servant there to wash your feet. This job was the lowest of the low! By Jesus Christ—who is far above us in every

way—washing the disciples’ feet, He showed that we are to be humble servants to one another. “So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should

do as I have done to you” (John 13:12-15).

In addition to foot-washing, Jesus instituted a new command concerning unleavened bread. “And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19). The symbol of the bread as His body foreshadowed the terrible beating and scourging He would receive before His death. His



*People used to walk everywhere on dusty, dirty roads. When you went into a restaurant or someone’s home, there would often be a servant there to wash your feet. This job was the lowest of the low!*

body carried the weight of sin for us so that we can be healed not only of illness but also of the pain and suffering that illness, injury and (most of all) sin causes (1 Peter 2:24).

The symbol of Christ’s body as bread is further illustrated in John 6:48-51, “I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” Here Jesus contrasts the manna that was given to ancient Israel when journeying to the Promised Land with spiritual food. It was temporary, physical bread that sustained their lives. By comparison, Jesus Christ was the “bread of life,” able to sustain us permanently in eternity.

Following the eating of unleavened bread, we see Jesus teaching a new command involving wine: “Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them,

saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:27-28). The wine, red in color, represents Jesus’ blood, which would be spilled out on the ground the following day when He died on the cross. It is through His sacrifice that sins can be forgiven.

So, getting back to the original question, what do Passover services mean? A very simple summary might be:

1. We are to humbly serve others as Jesus illustrated through the foot-washing.
2. Jesus Christ is the bread of life; through Him, we can have eternal life.
3. Sin is forgiven through the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

### **BUT WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU?**

But what does that mean to you if you aren’t baptized? While only those who are baptized can receive the Holy Spirit and inherit eternal life (Romans 8:9-11),



the actual meaning of Passover does not change for unbaptized members. What does change is that instead of having God's Spirit dwelling in you, you are at a stage where you are learning the benefits and reasons for making an important commitment through baptism.

In my later teen years, I was able to observe and learn a little more about Passover and what it meant. When I was about 16, I was asked to serve on security for Passover services. My job was to walk the hallway and make sure no one accidentally walked in and disrupted services. I remember sneaking a peek through the cracks in the big metal doors that went into the main room and seeing everyone sitting quietly, while the pastor was seated at a table, reading Scripture. There were big vases of roses and silver-covered trays, which I would later learn had small cups of wine and unleavened bread in them.

But perhaps the most striking thing I noticed was the people's faces before and after the service. As they walked in to sit down, there was very little conversation, and the tone was somber. Some were crying as they sat down to read their Bibles. Afterward, as people exited, the feeling was much different. There was a feeling of refreshment in the air as if a weight had been lifted off everyone's shoulders. There were still a few tears, but they were accompanied by smiles and hugs from those with whom they had just shared a very special service.

What I began to see, is that beyond the meaning of Passover, it was a special service for what it *did* for those who partook of it. Perhaps King David

said it best in Psalm 51:11-12, "Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit" (English Standard Version).

For those who are baptized and have received God's Holy Spirit, they have entered into a covenant with God. The core of that covenant, or agreement, is that we agree to willingly surrender our lives to God's Word and will, and He joyfully adds us to His family by placing His Holy Spirit in us. Throughout the year, as mortal humans, we sin and break our end of the agreement. But through repentance, we can be reconciled to God and brought back into a right relationship with Him, restoring that covenant. This most precious and special Passover service each year is how God restores our relationship with Him (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

### WHAT THE PASSOVER WILL MEAN FOR YOU SOMEDAY

Passover is indeed a very special service. And while you may not yet be able to be a part of it, it certainly has meaning for you. Passover reminds us of Jesus Christ's sacrifice, by which we can be forgiven of sin and reconciled to God the Father. It also reminds us of the joy of salvation—eternal life in the family of God. It is my—and all those of us here at Compass Check—greatest hope to share a Passover with you someday! **CC**



Dan Preston  
Editor of Compass Check  
magazine

## SO WHY CAN'T UNBAPTIZED MEMBERS TAKE PART IN PASSOVER?

**B**aptism is the most important commitment you can make in life. As such, it should be taken seriously. In Acts 2:38 we read, "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.'" Repentance is a true change of your mind. Not just what you think, but how you think. It's a commitment to completely and totally submit to God. In turn, God forgives our sins and gives us the Holy Spirit, which enables us to have eternal life.

Each year, the Passover is a renewal of this commitment. Paul shares the instructions he received from Christ in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26: "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes."

In ancient Israel, only those who were circumcised could be a part of Passover (Exodus 12:43-45). Under the New Covenant, baptism replaces circumcision as the outward symbol of our covenant, or agreement, with God (Colossians 2:11-12). Because of the seriousness of this covenant with God through Christ Jesus, only those who have fully committed themselves through baptism should take part in Passover. **CC**

### *Here are a few questions for discussion with your parents as the Passover approaches:*

1. Are there any aspects of Passover you as a teen don't understand or would like your parents to share more with you?
2. What do your parents feel before and after the Passover service?
3. What thoughts or events led your parents to know they needed to be baptized?





# 5 Things Jesus Didn't Say

by Rex Sexton

**"D**ecide on your own standards and then live by them!" booms through the speakers and across the audience. At high school and college graduations across the nation each year, it's typical for the commencement speech to include phrases that will inspire the audience. These public orations contain familiar expressions and sayings that sound logical, positive, sincere and emotional—but are they accurate? How do they measure up to the written Word of God?

If Jesus Christ were invited to give a graduation speech today, what would He say; what *wouldn't* He say? How might the words of the resurrected Christ be received by those listening? And how would His message for the graduates be different from the graduation speech you heard last year or the one you will hear next year? In this article, we'll take a look at five of the most often repeated and accepted "truths" frequently professed at graduation ceremonies, and see how they measure up to the Word of God.

## "BE TRUE TO YOURSELF"

This is a common phrase, but did Jesus ever say this? Quite the opposite.

Instead, our Creator said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). The phrase, "*Be true to yourself*," implies that each person knows what is best for themselves. And while each individual has talents, abilities and goals, we all need guidance and direction from our Creator. The book of Proverbs (written by one of the wisest men who ever lived) warns us, "He who trusts in his own heart . . ." (Proverbs 28:26), and instead admonishes us to, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and *lean not* on your own understanding," (Proverbs 3:5, emphasis added).

Besides seeking God's instructions,

we are directed to take advantage of our parents' experience and wisdom, as it says in Proverbs

6:20-22 and 13:1. In fact, one of the most important lessons we should learn in life is that we aren't born with wisdom—wisdom must be developed through study and effort. Trusting in yourself *sounds* wise and self-sufficient, but that path is dangerous and ultimately leads to destruction. We would do well to heed the words of Solomon when he wrote: ". . . incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding . . . then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God" (Proverbs 2:2, 5).

*If Jesus Christ were invited to give a graduation speech today, what would He say; what wouldn't He say?*

## “FOLLOW YOUR HEART”

Students today are encouraged to find their own “moral compass”—their own set of beliefs and values regarding right and wrong—but what did Jesus say? He actually said the opposite, and instructed us to *deny ourselves* and instead, to “follow Me” (Matthew 16:24). Why? Because as our Creator (Colossians 1:16), Christ knows that the hearts of men and women are deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9). He said, “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false

witness, blasphemies” (Matthew 15:19). Because of this, Christ taught that the heart of a person can change *and needs to!* In fact, the Eternal promised that “a new heart” will be given to us when we determine to follow God’s laws and become converted (Ezekiel 36:26).

Rather than following our own hearts, the Bible often warns us to guard *against* following the dictates of our hearts and emotions. Proverbs 14:12 speaks to this, saying, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” Emotions and feelings are an important part

of life, and a blessing from God if experienced in a right way! *Following* one’s emotions, however, can lead to making life-altering mistakes, like sexual sins, reaching adulthood without adequate education, bankruptcy, and many others. Remember that our Creator placed your head above your heart, perhaps implying that our minds must rule over our emotions. Rather than seeking to live by our own “truth,” let’s be diligent to follow the real Truth. In Jesus’ own words, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17).

## “BELIEVE IN YOURSELF”

Jesus didn’t say anything like this.

He actually said, “. . . you believe in God, believe also in Me” (John 14:1). We can believe in the Father and Son because They are perfect—They only speak things which are true and it is impossible for Them to lie. When we find ourselves in the midst of difficult trials, it might be beneficial to remember Paul’s encouraging words, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). In fact, Paul is an excellent example of belief in Christ, and his life is a testimony to that belief.

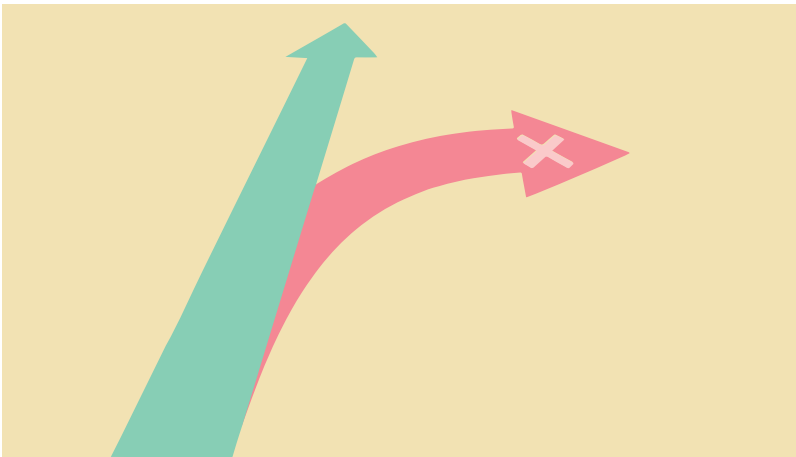
Many people in our society today claim to believe IN Christ, but they don’t want to BELIEVE Christ—very few are actually willing to DO what Christ said to do. Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall

enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). Consider the example of Paul when Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus: A bright light shone, blinding Paul while Jesus reveals that it was He whom Paul had been persecuting. Paul comes to understand this and changes from a life of persecuting Christians to a life of preaching the gospel. Paul believed Him and lived his life acting out those beliefs, giving his best and working hard at everything that he did. Doesn’t even Ecclesiastes 9:10 tell us, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might . . .”? We shouldn’t forget, however, that it is God’s Spirit, working with our spirit of man, which enables us to accomplish so much more than we can by ourselves.



*The Creator intends for us to experience the right kind of pleasure which brings true and lasting happiness.*





Happiness is a wonderful thing! We all want to be happy, but what is it that *truly* makes people happy? Don't assume that happiness is the result of wealth, status, fame or possessions. Do you remember the rhetorical question Jesus asked? "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Matthew 16:26). How would you answer this question?

We live in a society that idolizes people who are renowned in the sports or entertainment industries, yet the "happiness" they portray is often a mirage. We regularly hear of famous people who experience broken lives of failed marriages, substance abuse, and (all too often) early death. The praise of men is fleeting at best. Happiness encompasses feelings of satisfaction and contentment, and Jesus equated happiness with inner peace. "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). Happiness, as given to us through Christ, is different than the

"happiness" offered by society around us. The Creator intends for us to experience the *right* kind of pleasure which brings true and lasting happiness.

King David wrote about following God, "You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11). What kind of pleasure does God intend for us? The most rewarding happiness in this life comes from family. God intended husbands and wives to rejoice together (Proverbs 5:18; Psalm 127:3-5). But Satan the Devil *hates* the family structure God created, and Satan especially hates children. That's why Satan—the god of this world—has deceived society into believing lies about gender, about the proper respect we should have for life, and about the source of real happiness and peace.

Real happiness and peace are the result of knowing and obeying our Creator and Savior. He wants to fill you with happiness! As Paul wrote, "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace..." (Romans 15:13).


This is partially true, at least concerning the effort you put forth in your own life. God offers each of us the choice between life and death, and it would be most logical for us to choose life (Deuteronomy 30:19). We are to follow God's teachings, work hard, live a life that is a good example to others, and reap the blessings of doing so, but we cannot change what will ultimately happen to the world in the future.

There are end-time troubles on the horizon that are poised to occur *in the very near future*, but the good news is that those trials will not last forever! The end-time tribulations that will shake the whole earth are designed to act as WAKE-UP CALLS to a world deceived by Satan, but after a relatively short time, Jesus Christ will return as King of kings and will bring with Him real peace and true, lasting happiness to the entire earth. And actually, part of this future is in your hands—you can be part of Jesus Christ's future government! Notice Christ's promise in Revelation 2:26 and 3:21: "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations . . . 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." Wow—that sounds like real happiness for all time!

The most wonderful, lasting promises are given to us as a result of being true to God, following His instructions, believing in His words and promises, doing what is pleasing to Him, and placing our trust in God for both our future and the future of the world around us. Now *that* would be an inspiring graduation speech! **CC**

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*Rex Sexton and his wife, Patricia, have served congregations in Oregon, Washington and Alaska. In addition to pastoring responsibilities, they have also taught at and directed youth summer camps for many years.*

# DOPAMINE

*How understanding this brain chemical can help you find true and long-lasting happiness.*

**H**ave you heard of dopamine? Some people call it the “pleasure” chemical, but that’s not really accurate. Dopamine is a chemical that your brain produces and releases between brain cells when you do certain things. Lots of activities can trigger a release of extra dopamine: eating sugar, playing sports, scrolling social media, watching movies, playing video games, taking drugs, drinking alcohol, watching pornography. Different activities cause different amounts of dopamine to be released, but when it happens, the dopamine gives you a little boost. You feel a little happier, a little excited, or just a little less blah for a short time.

This is not always a bad thing. Dopamine gives you the drive to put in hard work because you know you will feel accomplished when you’re done. Dopamine pushes you to want more for yourself, for your life or for your family. However, today we have access to more dopamine triggers than any other time of human history. Here’s the problem: the brain is never satisfied. It always tells you: You need

more. Dopamine never produces feelings of contentment, satisfaction or peace. Notifications on your phone, Netflix on your tv, video games in your room—all these are triggering consistent and strong dopamine releases in your brain, telling you to keep doing those things over and over, but not producing true happiness or satisfaction.

Proverbs 27:20 says, “the eyes of man are never satisfied.” This is a great description of the dopamine cycle in our brain. If you follow just desire, pleasure and entertainment, it never brings satisfaction because that’s not the purpose of dopamine.

Ecclesiastes 2:10-11 tells us: “I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun” (New International Version).

Pursuing pleasure (dopamine) is not satisfying and does not produce true joy or satisfaction in the long run. Over



time your brain gets used to having high levels of dopamine being released constantly. Consequently, you start to feel bad if you try to stop checking social media or playing video games. Things that normally give you a little satisfaction, like spending time with family, walking in nature or figuring out a tough problem, stop feeling good. These changes are especially influential to teenage brains, which are still going through major changes up until at least age 25. The human body is never satisfied with dopamine because its only purpose is to motivate you to take action.

Distractions like social media or video games are really just your brain seeking a quick excitement and energy from a dopamine spike, which is a lot easier than putting in the effort to find peace and satisfaction. Distraction and escape are easy and pleasurable in the short term, but they end up making you more sensitive to pain. It becomes more and more difficult to feel good. Your brain requires more and more dopamine to feel pleasure in the moment.

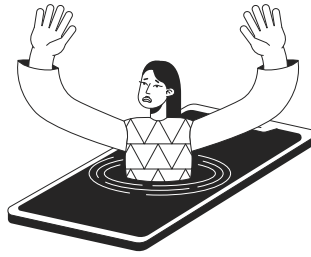
On the other hand, if you are willing to moderate and put limits on how much dopamine you are seeking during the day, you will allow your brain to produce other chemicals that allow for contentment and true happiness.

So, what can we do? It helps to make a plan for how you want social media, video games, tv, etc. to play a role in your life. If you don't have social media, I would suggest waiting to start. Research is showing that it makes teens less happy over time.

Talk with your parents. Be honest with them about what you see around you and how teens are using social media. Your parents want you to be happy, but they also need to keep you safe and help you develop your full potential through your teenage years.

If you do have social media, be honest with yourself—are there things that you wish you spent less time on but can't seem to stop? Do you feel worse about yourself after using social media or watching too much tv or playing video games for too long?

If yes, you will need to decide on some rules for yourself to moderate how you spend your time. This is not just for teens; it's important for adults to do this as well. For example, you could decide to make the Sabbath a digital Sabbath as well. Or you can limit yourself to a certain amount of time on social media each day. Ask your parents for help—you shouldn't try to rely only on will power for this. Have them turn off your



## *If you do have social media, be honest with yourself—are there things that you wish you spent less time on but can't seem to stop?*

access to your phone or social media outside of the time you decide together. (For more ideas on social media usage, see [ucg.org/members/compass-check/4-tips-to-cut-the-negativity-of-social-media-in-your-life](http://ucg.org/members/compass-check/4-tips-to-cut-the-negativity-of-social-media-in-your-life).)

You could also decide to delete certain social media apps altogether. If there is a certain one that your parents feel is unsafe or is creating negative interactions or temptations, it's not worth keeping it.

This isn't an easy process. Unfortunately, you

will probably feel worse before you feel better. If you implement some of these techniques, be ready for negative feelings for up to two weeks. This is the time it takes for your brain to bounce back. It is telling you that it's not getting the dopamine it's used to getting. Lean in to family time, time in person with friends, time in nature and time doing truly satisfying activities like art, music or sports. After two weeks your brain should be back to producing dopamine from these productive and healthy activities and you will start to feel better.

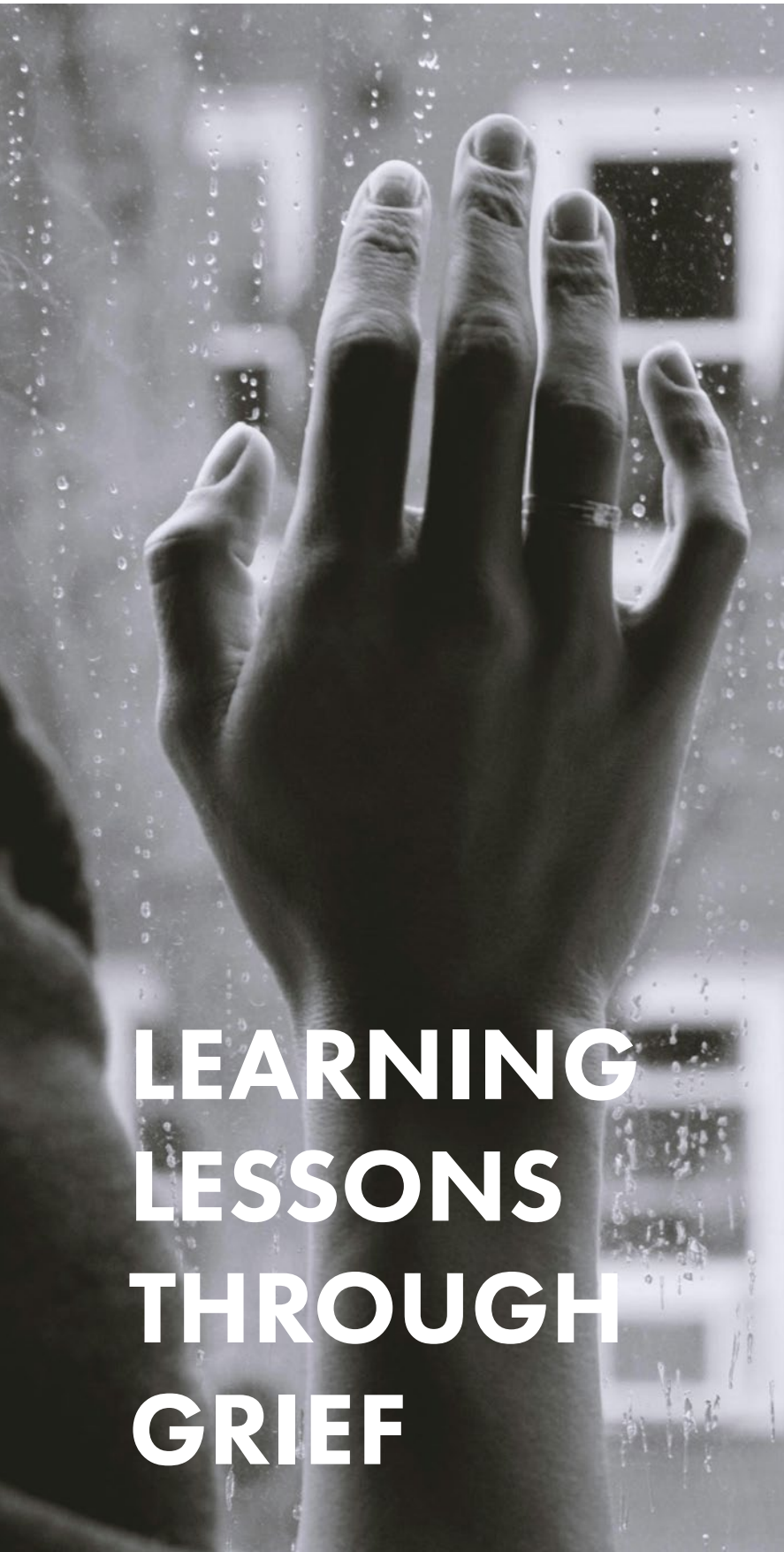
Today's culture tells you that you should pursue what makes you feel good, whether that's social media, video games or even drugs or alcohol. But those things only give a temporary pleasure and in the long term make you feel worse. In our society today, you have to be proactive with moderating dopamine-releasing activities like social media, so it doesn't hijack your brain's ability to feel pleasure from healthy activities.

You do have to be willing to experience and feel some unpleasant emotions like boredom, loneliness, frustration and awkwardness without immediately seeking an escape. Insulating ourselves from all pain and discomfort, running from it instead of facing it, ends up just making it worse. Sometimes understanding how our brains work can help us take back control of behaviors that we know we should reduce or eliminate.

Psalm 16:11 reminds us that God provides the way to contentment and true joy: "You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore." **CC**



*Kayleen Schreiber graduated in 2017 with a PhD in neuroscience. She is fascinated by the brain, learning, and education. Her graduate studies focused on how the human brain perceives and understands speech.*



# LEARNING LESSONS THROUGH GRIEF

*by Emma Cortelyou*

**F**eb. 16, 2022, was the day my dad died. One month and five days later, I lost my grandfather. Grampa's death was expected; Dad's was not. Grieving a loved one is not something that anyone ever wants to go through. Whether the death is expected or not, it is a dreadful ordeal. But everyone must go through it at some point in their life. Maybe you're already thinking about a date—a day on the calendar that you remember with a sinking feeling, a day that you can't help but relive over and over again. If not, don't take for granted the time you get to spend with your family and loved ones because every second spent with them is a great blessing.

Even two years later, I still experience grief every day, but amid the paralyzing weight of it, I have learned three things from grief. I don't believe I would have learned these lessons quite so deeply if I hadn't experienced grief firsthand. It doesn't make it easier to bear, but it allows flickers of light to appear in various areas of my life. I hope these three lessons can help you whether you're experiencing grief yourself or you know someone who is going through it. Every trial, no matter how difficult, teaches you lessons about yourself and the world. "... we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Romans 5:3-4).

## **GOD ALONE SEES YOU THROUGH**

The greatest lesson I've learned through grief is that God alone sees me through. Without His presence in my life and the hope of His plan, I don't know how I would have gotten through it all. When going through something as seemingly hopeless and final



*When going through something as seemingly hopeless and final as death, it takes God's peace and complete reliance on Him to get me through the days.*

as death, worldly comforts can only help so much. It takes God's peace and complete reliance on Him to get me through the days. When things don't make sense, pray to God. Ask Him for peace. There's a verse in Philippians that describes perfectly what it's like to partake in God's peace: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (4:6-7).

Even through the darkest trial of my life, I can feel God working with me and bringing me peace. It surpasses all understanding that I can feel peace. It's because it comes from God and not the world. God's peace mainly comes from hope in His plan. The Bible teaches that after death, we enter a state of rest, much like sleep. At Christ's return, those who have lived faithfully will be resurrected to eternal life in a new spirit body (1 Corinthians 15:50-51; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). I find peace in the knowledge that this life isn't the end, and the future God has for us will not fade: "I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever, nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it" (Ecclesiastes 3:14).

Keeping the big picture burning brightly is what helps me get through the days. Dad's favorite verse was Matthew 6:33: "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." That was Dad's motivation throughout his entire life, and now I wear a ring



that reminds me of that precious motivation. Additional verses that help me are Romans 8:18, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, and 1 Peter 1.

### **GRIEF IS A GOAD**

A goad is not a term that we're very familiar with in our society today, but it was common in ancient times. Back then, goads (sharp, pointed sticks) were used frequently in farming to help prod and encourage an animal to move forward. Solomon used a goad as a metaphor for intellectual and emotional improvement in Ecclesiastes: "The words of the wise are like goads . . ." (12:11). Here, he characterizes wise words (or instruction) as a goad—something that prods an individual and helps them move forward. In a previous chapter, he writes about grieving. Although he doesn't explicitly mention goads in this verse, the idea is similar: "Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting . . . Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better" (Ecclesiastes 7:2-3). Here, Solomon highlights the vast difference between partying and mourning, especially the inward differences between the two. A party atmosphere (or living in constant lighthearted enjoyment) doesn't encourage contemplation. It is fun, but there is nothing there to prod you, to push you toward improvement.

Mourning, on the other hand, promotes inward thinking. It acts as a goad in that it brings an individual to see their shortcomings through meditation. It prods and pushes. A goad isn't pleasant—it is sharp, and it hurts to be poked with it. However, it is meant to help you spring into action and keep you from being stagnant.

**GRIEVING, THOUGH AT TIMES PARALYZING, CAN ALSO HELP PROD YOU FORWARD. USE THE NATURALLY CONTEMPLATIVE NATURE OF GRIEF TO PUSH YOU TO IMPROVE YOURSELF.**

Standing still is not an option.

There have been many instances in which I felt my grief was making me take steps backwards. It is paralyzing at times. But through the process, I have learned to be more contemplative about my life. I take things more seriously and strive harder to keep building my relationship with God. Part of this is driven by the desire to live up to Dad and Grampa's examples. Grampa was one of the hardest workers I knew—and not just physically—spiritually too. There were many times when I would see him in his office pouring over his Bible. He hated reading, but he loved studying his Bible. Not long before he died, I remember him talking to someone on the phone and commenting on the trial he was going through saying, “These are exciting times.” He kept his mind focused on what mattered, and his outlook at the end of his life reflected his ultimate goal of being in God's Kingdom. I often think about his example and push myself to improve.

**GRIEF TEACHES EMPATHY**

Grief has helped me be more empathetic towards those going

through trials—especially those who are going through the loss of a loved one. In the past, I would read prayer requests, pray for the people once or twice, and then move on

with my life. Now, I feel the pain with them. I think about them often and keep them in my prayers because I know what they're going through. Even though no one's grief is the same, there is still a feeling of connection when two people go through a similar loss. Through this connection, I have found it much easier to comfort others.

Comfort first comes from God who is the ultimate Comforter: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:3–4). From the comfort that God gives us in our trials, we are able to comfort others through their trials.

One way this learned comfort manifests itself is in the ability to know what to say. I won't sit here and profess that I always say the right things, but I've learned about what words are helpful and more importantly, which ones are not. A couple of things I don't say anymore are: “How are

you doing?” and “I'm here if you need anything.” Asking someone going through deep grief how they're doing is an impossible question. Unless you are a very close friend and are in a private situation, ready to listen, it's better to avoid it. Be more intentional with what you say. A simple “It's good to see you” or “I'm praying for you” holds more meaning than “How are you doing?” The second statement sounds nice, but it doesn't offer any specificity or time frame. It may be difficult for a grieving person to make decisions or ask for help. A better way to help someone grieving is to give them options and a time that you are available. “I would like to help you with [specific thing]. I'm available [date, time]; can I come over and help?” Doing this takes the pressure off of the person and only requires them to figure out the date and time that would work for them.

Grieving a loved one is not an experience that anyone ever wants to go through, but it is inevitable. When faced with that seemingly insurmountable trial, it is paramount that you rely on God. Only





He can provide you with true, lasting peace through the truth of His plan. Grieving, though at times paralyzing, can also help prod you forward. Use the naturally contemplative nature of grief to push you to improve yourself. Finally, with the comfort that God grants to us, work to pass on that comfort to others who are going

through similar trials.

In the last letter Dad wrote to me, he ended with these words: “Keep putting God first, and it always works out—even when it may not make sense.” The trials we go through may not make sense, but God’s plan is greater. He will see us through. **CC**



*Emma Cortelyou spends her time making niche Spotify playlists and daydreaming about the next time she gets to be a counselor at camp.*

## INSIGHTS FROM A COUNSELOR

**G**rief is a deep sadness when someone dies or when you have a major change in your life. Levels of grief can vary and be caused by many things, such as the loss of a loved one, moving to a new school or congregation and missing your old friends, ending a close relationship or friendship, or working through a major diagnosis such as cancer. Although you may experience various stages of grief, there are some things that may help you process your emotions and overtime lessen the intensity of grief.

### UNDERSTAND YOUR EMOTIONS

When you experience grief, it can be difficult to navigate the strong emotions that arise. Becoming aware of those emotions is a good first step. For example, you may feel anger, numbness, shock, depression, guilt, abandonment, resentment or disappointment. Using the Wheel of Emotions (you can Google it and download the image) gives you quick access for those moments when you’re experiencing tough emotions. This will also help you to effectively communicate with others what you are experiencing as you grieve. Sharing your emotions with close friends or family members, or journaling your thoughts can be effective ways to express your feelings.

### PAY ATTENTION TO PHYSICAL CHANGES

Grief may affect you physically, such as weight loss or gain as you experience appetite changes. You may also experience restlessness or changes in sleeping patterns, wanting to sleep additional hours or not being able to fall or stay asleep. Understanding that there are connections between your emotions and your body’s physical responses can be helpful when processing grief. And you can actually use those connections to your advantage. For example, taking deep breaths (a physical response) can be helpful to work through and ease anxiety (an emotional response).

### SEEK ADVICE AND SUPPORT

Grief may lead to questions such as, “Why did God allow this to happen?” Taking your questions to your parents, your minister or trustworthy friends may assist in processing such hard and deep questions. Reflecting upon these questions with others can help deepen our relationship with God and help us more fully understanding His plan. We can come to appreciate the need for His Kingdom and His victory over death (1 Corinthians 15:54).

### MOVING FORWARD

Grief may last a long time, but as you move forward each day, it will eventually become less intense. Keeping your loved one in your memories is important. You may speak of your loved one often to others, or keep a photo of them in your locker at school, or some place in your home where you will see it every day. It’s perfectly normal to want to talk about your loved one as you process your grief. Reminiscing over the memories you share with your loved one is very important!

There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Some days, you may be angry and other days you may share laughter as you remember fond memories of your loved one. It’s okay to cry and it’s okay to laugh. Grief is complicated, so be patient with yourself as you navigate such hard emotions. Keep in mind that it’s best not to grieve alone. Incorporate the loss of your loved one into your life even after they are gone through expressing emotions with others and sharing memories of your loved one.

If you or someone you know is in need of counseling, please speak with your parents or your local minister to locate a Christian therapist near you.

*Rebekah Drury holds a Masters Degree in Professional Counseling and is a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor in Ohio. She has an affinity for mentoring and supporting others as they work toward achieving their goals.*

# HOW TO WRITE FOR COMPASS CHECK AND GET EXTRA CREDIT IN YOUR ENGLISH CLASS

**H**ave you ever thought about writing an article for *Compass Check*, but weren't sure what the process would be like? Maybe you were worried that the staff here at *Compass Check* would think your idea was cheesy, or that if you said something wrong, you'd get in trouble for it. Well, I'm here to tell you nothing could be further from the truth!

The staff here (primarily myself, Kourtney Kovanis and Mitch Moss), absolutely LOVE working with anyone who wants to submit an article for consideration. And don't worry about your article being dumb or full of heresy or anything like that. That's what we're here for: to help you write the best article you can and have fun doing it.

So, what do you need to do to get started? It's a very simple three-step process:

Step 1 - Come up with an idea for what you want to talk about.

Step 2 - Get it down on paper (or your computer) in around 1,200 words or so.

It doesn't have to be perfect. Just write your article the best way you know how.

Step 3 - send it via email to [CompassCheck@ucg.org](mailto:CompassCheck@ucg.org)

That's it. It is truly that easy. Now, once your article gets to us, it will go through a lot of other steps, but for you, the hard work is over! From here on out, we'll do the work of editing, formatting, spell-checking (I did that on purpose . . .) and whatnot, to get your article ready for print. If there is any work you need to do, you'll get a friendly email from Kourtney or myself with suggestions. We'll fix the small stuff, like punctuation, grammar, etc. without hassling you.

So, what does the process look like once you send in your article? Here's a quick breakdown of what happens to your article after you hit the "send" button:

1. The article arrives in my email inbox. I will read over it and send it to Mitch and Kourtney, to get their feedback. (BTW, Kourtney is our Managing Editor. She's responsible for managing the process of getting articles written and making sure they are a good fit for *Compass Check*. Mitch Moss is our Content Editor. He looks at articles to see how the tone fits with *Compass Check*, and how they will actually look when printed on paper. Matt Hernandez is another guy who helps a lot with *Compass Check*—he's responsible for a lot of the cool graphic designs you see.





*Writing for Compass Check is not only easy, it's a lot of fun! Plus, if you play your cards right, you might be able to get some extra credit in your English class for having an article published!*

My job as Editor is to be responsible for the overall magazine. Think of me as J. Jonah Jameson from Spiderman. I sit behind my desk and yell “STOP THE PRESSES” and stuff like that. If people don’t understand things, or have questions about an article after it’s been published, I’m usually the one they come to talk to).

2. Your article is then sent on to Copyediting. At this stage, one of our volunteers (or sometimes Kourtney or myself) will begin to lightly edit your article if needed. We might rearrange the order of sentences to help with the flow, or perhaps suggest adding more details or eliminating redundancies. If there’s anything really big, we send the updated version back to you, as the author, to get your input. We don’t want you to feel like we are taking over your article and re-writing it for you! So if it’s a pretty big change that needs to be made, you’ll have the opportunity to change it the way you like.

3. Next it goes on to proofreading. This is a straightforward review of grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc. We’ll also make sure that if you’ve quoted any scriptures, the verses you mention are the correct ones. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve written in my notes something like Matthew 2:20 when I really meant Matthew 20:2. (FYI – we usually try to stick to the New King James Version [NKJV] for most scriptures, but if there’s another translation that helps bring out the true meaning of the verse, we’re cool with that too.)

4. From here, the article goes on to be reviewed by a team that consists mostly of UYC Camp Directors. I can’t think of a single article that has been written where there hasn’t been at least one person on the

review team who says, “Hey, I know this person!” The review team looks at the overall article and makes suggestions for updates if they see a need. Just like the copyediting stage, if it’s anything big, we’ll make sure to keep you in the loop.

5. Next it goes to a final review. This is just one last step to make sure everything in the article is doctrinally accurate and matches what the Bible teaches. Very rarely do we have to make any changes at this stage.

6. After this, the article goes through one last proofreading for grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc. Heidi Braun, who works as the Associate Editor for Internal Publications (and does a lot of work on the United News!) helps us a lot with this. You might remember reading about her in the Fall 2023 Issue of *Compass*

*Check*, in the “Notes on the Way” section. Lena VanAusdle (who works as a Proofreader for the Church) also helps a lot with this part.

7. Finally, the article gets laid out on a computer with graphics, pictures, etc. This is where Mitch Moss and Matthew Hernandez do a lot of work. Do you like the overall look and feel of *Compass Check*? These are the guys who make it happen!

So, that’s pretty much it. Writing for *Compass Check* is not only easy, it’s a lot of fun! Plus, if you play your cards right, you might be able to get some extra credit in your English class for having an article published! (And it looks really good on your resume when you start applying to colleges or jobs).

I hope this helps make the idea of writing an article look less scary, and I hope to see your ideas soon! **CC**



*Dan Preston is the Editor of Compass Check and probably doesn't look near as cool as he thinks he does sitting at his desk, imagining he works at the Daily Planet. Also, if you're reading this, you're experiencing one of my favorite parts of Compass Check—the short biography that goes with your article. These can be pretty simple if you like, but we always encourage you to have fun with them too!*

# COMPASS CHECK

United Youth Magazine

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