

# Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement  
For The Real World

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*“Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, Which, having no captain, Overseer or ruler, Provides her supplies in the summer, And gathers her food in the harvest.”—Proverbs 6:6-8*

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## Flight of the Monarch

By Ruth Kerr

*God's design of a delicate butterfly reminds us of the tender love He has for mankind.*



**O**F THE MANY MIRACLES THAT OCCUR in the natural world one of the most amazing involves the monarch butterfly. While the, metamorphosis from larva to butterfly is remarkable in itself, it pales in comparison to the other great miracle these butterflies participate in each year.

The monarchs are striking in appearance with their fiery orange and black markings. But they are frail creatures. They have flimsy wings and tiny bodies. They fly-dance in the air with no discernable purpose. Their diet consists solely of milkweed. Were it not for the nearly 3,000 miles they migrate each year, these butterflies would seem ordinary indeed.

It is astonishing to consider the migratory path of the monarch. Each August, the butterflies leave eastern Canada and the United States to make their way to a winter nesting site in the transvolcanic mountains of central Mexico. Every single year these creatures make the journey to the same 50-square-mile piece of real estate. If that weren't amazing in itself, consider the following:

- The butterflies cannot travel too early in the day when the air is cold and damp, nor can they fly at night.
- The butterflies are highly susceptible to winds and



inclement weather.

- The butterflies are vulnerable to predators such as birds and mice.

The monarchs' migratory path is long and perilous. Once-in-a-lifetime trips generally are. No butterfly ever makes the trip twice. Yet a new generation of monarchs make their way to Mexico each year, just as though they've personally made the trip a thousand times. Even if a butterfly is knocked off course by wind, it knows how to get back to the migratory route. This was designed by God, of course, who planned the migration and was careful to provide the monarchs with places to rest and feed during their journey. Not only has the Creator given each butterfly the innate ability and desire to fulfill its destiny, He has given them the means to do so.

As humans, we are frail like the butterfly. We can withstand only so much grief, only so much tribulation, only so much illness and injury. Not only does God recognize this, He *plans* for it. He gives us shelter, He feeds us, He leads us back on course. He gives us everything we need to fulfill our destiny.

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*If God designed the butterflies' route with such detail, how much more preparation has He put into your destiny?*

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If God would take such care of a floppy insect that measures less than three square inches, how much more would He do for His begotten children? If God designed the butterflies' route with such detail, how much more preparation has He put into your destiny? The monarch butterfly is a minor part of creation. But if God has so painstakingly cared for just one insect, just think of how much more He cares for you.

### **Recommended reading**

Make sure you read our booklets [Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?](#) and [What Is Your Destiny?](#)

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## Cherishing the Sabbath

By Hector M. Earle

*The Sabbath...our special time with God.*



**I**T'S A LATE SABBATH EVENING in mid-July and I'm looking out my patio door feeling a little melancholy. It's nearing the end of another Sabbath and my special time with God is almost over.

Don't get me wrong, I enjoy the other days of the week too. As Christians, we should appreciate all the days of our physical lives. This life is our window of opportunity to work diligently the other six days of the week to prepare for God's Kingdom to come.

But the Sabbath is a time to renew our mind, body and spirit. A designated time from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. It's no wonder that Jesus said that the Sabbath was "made for man." God knew the importance of this slow-down period of the week for renewal and reflection.

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I must admit though, I have to celebrate the Sabbath in a little different way than people who live in areas close to a church. I live in an area of Canada where there is no United Church of God congregation anywhere near me. The closest congregation is 450 kilometers away in St. John's, Newfoundland. My area is a Sunday-keeping world.

But I'm not deterred. The Sabbath is my rest that allows me that time of refreshment and enables me to face the challenges in my job as a school principal. What sort of things do you do, one might ask, when there is no congregation with whom to fellowship?

A typical Sabbath day for me starts with prayer and Bible reading. (I particularly like the Bible Reading Program on the UCG's [Web site](#).) The rest of the day may see me spending time with the family by going for a drive along a country road or a walk in the woods. It's on the walk through the forest that I have opportunities for "teachable moments" with my daughter about the wonders of God's great creation. The rest of the day may include an afternoon nap after listening to Gary Petty on one of United Church of God's sermon broadcast on the Internet.



Some Sabbaths I may visit a friend or the elderly in my community. (It's amazing how much seniors can teach us and how much wisdom they can offer.) Sometimes my wife and I take this opportunity to spend some quality time together. This summer we've had some lovely picnics on the beach where we sit and talk and appreciate each other's company.

However, on this day in mid-July, I just finished a wonderful Sabbath walk along the beach. As I stare across the bay from my patio, I'm reflecting on a wonderful day I've had with my Creator. Earlier in the day I packed a lunch and rode my bike along a path to the seashore. From there I walked to my favorite spot on the rocks and ate my dinner. After doing a little sightseeing through my binoculars (today I spotted a humpback whale), I settled in for a time of reading. I brought an issue of [The Good News magazine](#). The blessed sunshine forces me to seek shade and my afternoon low called for a nap on the cool sand. I woke up at the sound of seagulls, feeling refreshed and grateful. I spent some time in prayer and meditation before heading back home, feeling uplifted and rejuvenated on this wonderful Sabbath day.

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*It's on the walk through the forest that I have opportunities for "teachable moments" with my daughter about the wonders of God's great creation.*

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I take another sip of my iced tea and glance at my watch. I still have another hour or so to go before sunset. I think I will finish reading another article and really "top off" this glorious Sabbath.

### **Recommended reading**

For more on God's precious Sabbath day, read our free booklet [Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest](#).

## The Better Travel Plan

By Anthony Wasilkoff

*God set up a financial system that allows us to have maximum enjoyment while keeping His annual Feast of Tabernacles.*



**A**T THIS TIME OF YEAR, we come across many advertisements urging us to take a summer vacation somewhere exotic. Pictures of Mexico, Portugal and Spain beckon the work-weary individual to enjoy all the amenities that those balmy regions have to offer. When the potential traveler wonders about the costs involved, the real figures are often hidden by the use of the preposition “from.”

But then it doesn't really matter because the promoters encourage the traveling public to “go now and pay later.” It is so easy. All we have to do is use a major credit card and then hope we can handle the 18 percent interest rate that we will be charged until the amount is finally paid off. As a result, a high price tag becomes ever higher! How different is God's approach toward travel and associated costs as evidenced by His instructions related to the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles.

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*The principle God employs is just the opposite of the one the world offers. It is not at all “go now, pay later.” Instead it is “save now and go later.”*

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### God's travel plan

Our loving Creator has given us this annual fall festival as a vacation with Him. We experience more than a week of educational and spiritual learning. We meet different people in various venues. We travel to different parts of the country and different parts of the world. The

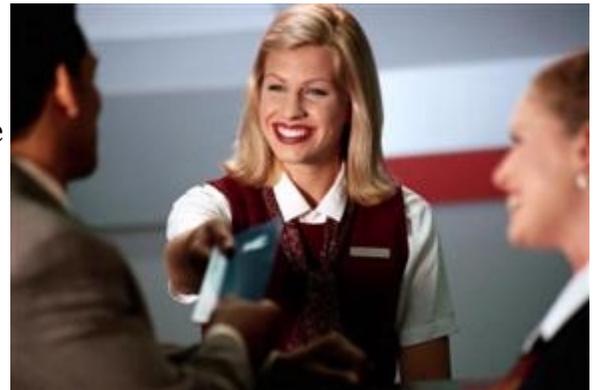
opportunity for broadening our horizons on many levels is vast. But what about the finances? How do we pay for all this?

*The intent of our Creator is that we can rejoice at His festivals and do so without going into debt.*

The principle God employs is just the opposite of the one the world offers. It is not at all “go now, pay later.” Instead it is “save now and go later.” That makes far more sense to the fiscally-responsible person. According to the directives given in the Bible, the believer is to save 10 percent of his or her income for expenses incurred in observing the annual Holy Days.

Deuteronomy 14:22-25 states: “You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year...[T]hat you may learn to fear the LORD your God always. But if the journey is too long for you, ...then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses.” Thousands of adherents to God’s Holy Days have followed this savings plan for decades. The festival tithe is deposited in a separate account and is used exclusively to observe each of the seven festivals. Of course, the bulk of this expense occurs while celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles.

The Church asks festival attendees to donate 10 percent of their festival tithe amount in order for the costs of planning and maintaining each Feast of Tabernacles site to be met. We have customarily used the term “tithe of a tithe” for this amount. Several months have transpired since the Feast of Tabernacles in 2006. How much festival tithe have you saved up until now? Have you chosen to diligently set aside 10 percent from each income source for future festival use? Probably you have. And if you have, you will be blessed accordingly.



You will be able to meet all of your festival costs and you may even have something extra with which to help others. Often, many faithful festival tithe savers find that they accumulate more than they require for their own needs. They then kindly help those less fortunate than themselves. Such generosity and kindness is greatly admired and appreciated. Most of all, God notices and is pleased.

### **Still time to save**

The fall Holy Days are a few months away. There is still time left to save for those wonderful occasions in accordance with God’s saving plan. The intent of our Creator is that we can rejoice at His festivals and do so without going into debt. His design is that instead of “going now and paying later,” we “save now and feast later.” God’s ways are superior and they really do work. How wonderful are the Holy Days and how wonderful is the financial plan to observe them.

If you’re interested in learning more about God’s Holy Days and tithing principles, please request our free booklets [God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind](#) and [What Does the Bible Teach About Tithing?](#)

## God's Amazing Grace and Two Great Men

By Don Hooser

*God offers us a gift, the gift of His grace, a reflection of His love and forgiveness. It truly is an amazing gift!*



**T**HE NEW TESTAMENT SPEAKS OFTEN of God's *grace* (Greek *charis*). It's impossible to come up with a simple definition to do it justice, because it encompasses so much about God's character, His loving-kindness, compassion, mercy and generosity. Perhaps the best single word is *gifts*. It is the summation of all the wonderful gifts God offers to mankind.

The more one understands and experiences it, the more amazing it is.

The greatest single gift from God, the one that opens the door for us to receive all the rest of God's gifts, is the *forgiveness* of our sins made possible by the sacrifice of our Savior Jesus Christ. This removal of our guilt and its penalty of death is also called *justification* and *redemption* (Romans 3:24).

The New Testament book that most profoundly speaks of grace is Ephesians. "In [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (1:7). "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (2:8).

### John Newton

Let's now look at a brief summary of the lives of two men who were deeply grateful for God's grace. The first is John Newton who wrote the words to around 300 hymns, including "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken" and "Amazing Grace" (first published in 1779).

Newton was born in London July 24, 1725. In his nautical career, he served on a merchant ship, then a military ship and then on slave ships. He ultimately became the captain of his own ship, continuing to ply the slave trade.

Then on March 10, 1748, he thought his ship was going to be destroyed by a violent storm, and cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us!" He survived, and always looked back to that day as the beginning of his path to Christianity. He continued in the slave trade, but from that day on he made sure the slaves on his ship were treated humanely.

He retired from seafaring in 1755 and began intense self-education in the Bible, also learning Latin, Greek and Hebrew. Before long, he became a minister in the Church of England, first serving at Olney, Buckinghamshire. In 1767, the poet William Cowper and he became friends and they collaborated in writing many hymns.



For a long while, Newton was so ashamed of the "20,000 ghosts" of the slaves he had transported, he avoided thinking about his grisly past. Then he began to record his memories in letters and journals, and historians today credit them for most of what is known about the 18th-century slave trade.

In 1780, Newton became the rector of a church in London, where he drew large congregations and served until his death on Dec. 21, 1807. He influenced many people, including a young member of Parliament, William Wilberforce.

### William Wilberforce

The movie *Amazing Grace* is based on a book by the same title, which is a biography of William Wilberforce, the pioneering British abolitionist who labored almost 20 years to end the British slave trade. The movie was released on Feb. 23, 2007, exactly 200 years from initial passage of the Slave Trade Act in 1807.

Wilberforce's turn toward Christianity began in 1784 and was partly the result of the influence of John Newton. Wilberforce considered becoming a minister, but Newton advised him to stay in Parliament where he could have a greater impact by influencing reforms in British law.

Then an abolitionist meeting in 1787 transformed the young MP (member of Parliament), into a crusader. For years, only a few friends shared his conviction and gave him moral support. One was a wise and witty woman, Barbara Spooner, whom Wilberforce married. Above all, Wilberforce was inspired by his knowledge of the Bible and strengthened by his faith in God.

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*Then on March 10, 1748, he thought his ship was going to be destroyed by a violent storm, and cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us!"*

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Wilberforce began his crusade to end slavery in the British Empire as a lonely voice against great opposition. But he was not only determined, he was an eloquent and powerful speaker. After speaking out for 20 stressful years, the British Parliament finally outlawed slave trading.

After passage of the Slave Trade Act, Wilberforce continued to be an effective force in bringing about other reforms in British society.

Sadly, although slave trading has been officially outlawed in virtually every nation on earth, there is an incredible amount of illegal slave trading and human trafficking, mostly of women and children, going on all over the world.

The world could certainly use many more William Wilberforces to be bright lights and strong voices in the wilderness. But the world will continue in the darkness of sin until Jesus Christ returns to “preach deliverance to the captives...to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18). His return is a sure fact. We hope it will be soon.

William Wilberforce also set a rather revolutionary standard for fatherhood in his day, spending lots of time with his six children in spite of his busy schedule. He was spiritually devout, humble and self-disciplined, being very regular with Bible study, prayer and fasting. For example, he memorized all of Psalm 119. He must have loved God’s law! But he never tried to make a show of his Christianity.

### God’s grace deserves the deepest gratitude

After his conversion, John Newton’s attitude was similar to the apostle Paul’s, who regarded himself as “the least of all the saints” and “chief” among sinners (Ephesians 3:8; 1 Timothy 1:15). Newton said, “I remember two things: I’m a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior.”

William Wilberforce was also humble, not feeling or acting self-righteous and superior to other people, even though he was religious and an eloquent speaker. The author of the book *Amazing Grace*, Eric Metaxas, said, “Wilberforce knew that he was as wicked a sinner as the worst slave trader, without that sense of one’s own sinfulness, it’s very easy to become a moralizing Pharisee” (*World Magazine*, Feb. 24, 2007).



Since we are saved by God’s grace, which is a *gift*, the greatest gift imaginable, how can we claim any credit and “boast” as if we are saved by our own works? (Ephesians 2:8-9). There is a wonderful story in Luke 7:36-50 contrasting the woman who came to lovingly worship Jesus because she realized she had been forgiven of much and the smug Pharisee who didn’t think he needed forgiveness.

*The apostle Paul regarded himself as “the least of all the saints” and “chief” among sinners.*

Jesus told a story of a king who forgave his servant of a huge debt, but that servant later would not forgive a fellow servant of a minor debt (Matthew 18:21-35). The first debt was 600,000 times as large as the second debt! That illustrates how *much* sin God forgives us of compared to how *little* the hurt is we have to forgive others of.

When the king learned of this lack of mercy, he “delivered [his servant] to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him” (verse 34). Then Jesus said, “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses” (verse 35).

Perhaps the number one reason for an unforgiving attitude is the lack of understanding of the enormity of sin for which God has forgiven us. On the other hand, to those who see their awful sinfulness, God's grace is truly amazing!

### The beloved hymn

The lyrics and melody of "Amazing Grace" have made it one of the best-loved hymns around the world. Once one knows the story of John Newton, it's clear that the words are partly autobiographical. Through the years other writers have reworded some of the original verses. The lyrics of the six stanzas below are those most commonly sung today:

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas Grace that taught my heart to fear.  
And Grace, my fears relieved.  
How precious did that Grace appear  
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares  
We have already come;  
'Twas Grace that brought us safe thus far  
And Grace will lead us home.

The Lord has promised good to me.  
His word my hope secures.  
He will my shield and portion be,  
As long as life endures.

When we've been here ten thousand years  
Bright shining as the sun.  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we've first begun.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.

The words remind us of the gift of grace that God will someday extend to all mankind—both slave and free.

To learn more about God's grace and love for mankind, request our free booklets [What Is Your Destiny?](#) and [The Road to Eternal Life](#).

## The Law Mirrors God's Character

By John Leitch

*God's law is a reflection of His character. His laws guide and help us in developing our character.*



**A** FEW YEARS AGO A FRIEND POINTED OUT to me how God and His law are described by the same words. As Christians, we will find it interesting and important to compare the scriptures that describe God, to those that describe His law. The parallel is both astonishing and telling. Here is a partial list to consider.

### **Righteous**

- God—"The LORD is righteous in all His ways" (Psalm 145:17).
- Law—"All Your commandments are righteousness" (Psalm 119:172).

### **Truth**

- God—"You have redeemed me, O LORD, God of truth" (Psalm 31:5).
- Law—"Your law is truth" (Psalm 119:142).

### **Goodness**

- God—"Good and upright is the LORD" (Psalm 25:8).
- Law—"The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good" (Romans 7:12).

## **Everlasting**

- God—“Then Abraham called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God” (Genesis 21:33).
- Law—“All His precepts are sure, they are upheld forever and ever” (Psalm 111:7 8).

## **Holiness**

- God—“Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16).
- Law—“Therefore the law is holy” (Romans 7:12).

## **Love**

- God—“God is love” (1 John 4:8).
- Law—“Love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13: 10).

## **Perfection**

- God—“You shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).
- Law—“The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul” (Psalm 19:7).

## **Spiritual**

- God—“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24).
- Law—“For we know that the law is spiritual” (Romans 7:14).

## **Just**

- God—“He is the Rock. His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice” (Deuteronomy 32:4).
- Law—“The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good” (Romans 7:12).

## **Light**

- God—“God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5 ).
- Law—“The commandment is a lamp, and the law is light” (Proverbs 6:23).

If we as Christians sometimes find the law of God disagreeable, then it could signal it's time for some serious fasting and soul-searching to find why we might have this frame of mind. Do we really think the Father gave us His law to punish us and make our life miserable? It is important that all Christians be Christ-centered and be imitators of the way He lived His human life (1 Peter 2:21).

We as Christians, must pay attention when our Lord tells us, “For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:18-19).

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*It is important that all Christians be Christ-centered and be imitators of the way He lived His human life.*

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Reader, I appeal to your common sense. Look out the window and ask yourself, “Has the earth disappeared?” Christ loved his Father’s law and walked in obedience to it and so should we. It is not the hearers of the law that are righteous in God’s sight, but the people who practice and obey the law (Romans 2:13).

The only place the early New Testament Church could go to prove all things (1 Thessalonians 5:21) was the Old Testament. The New Testament was not put together for many years after the death of Christ. Malachi recorded in Malachi 4:4, “Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments.”

In summary, to believe Christ did away with His Father’s law, one would have to believe Christ suffered an agonizing and horrible death to rid the world of something that was righteous, true, good, everlasting, holy, loving, perfect, spiritual, just and a light to a Christian living in a dark world. Does this make sense?

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*Christ loved his Father’s law and walked in obedience to it and so should we.*

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The carnal mind has a strong dislike for God’s law (Romans 8:7). It finds all kinds of reasons and excuses not to keep the law, but to reach the Kingdom of God, a converted Christian is expected to obey God (Matthew 19:16-19). After leaving one’s spiritual Egypt, Christians have a long difficult journey through a dark world. Does anyone realistically think he can reach God’s Kingdom, without God’s perfect law of love to light the way?

To learn more about God’s law, read our free booklets [The Ten Commandments](#) and [The New Covenant: Does It Abolish God’s Law?](#)

## Letters to the Editor

### [A Few Good Men in Some Honorable Roles](#)



Great article! God has certainly made it clear what righteous character is and what our spiritual goals should be.

Out of curiosity, I wonder if you feel the points listed and explained at the end of your article are any less applicable to godly women?

— Susan B.

*Thank you for your letter. In his article, Hector Earle said he would take the “qualities stated for Church leaders in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and apply them in a broader sense to all men.” In the same way these godly qualities can be taken in a broader sense and applied to women as well, though that was not the purpose of this particular article.*

Some feedback messages are edited for space and/or clarity