

The Good News

January-February 2014

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING



5 KEYS TO A Happy Family

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What's the Purpose of Family?

Have you noticed how much the family is under attack these days? In many nations, about half of all marriages end in divorce. And that's just among those who choose to marry, since many avoid real commitment and decide to simply live together instead. Far from helping couples determine if they're really ready for marriage, studies have proven that living together only increases the odds that they'll later break up.

Our mass media plays a major role in undermining family. The message of much of today's music is degrading to girls and women, portraying them as sex objects for satisfying male lust. How sad that the "sex, drugs and rock and roll" of a generation ago seems so tame by today's standards!

TV sitcoms and movies glorify the single life—and the more promiscuous, the better! When married characters are portrayed, typically the husband is depicted as an inept bumbler while the wife rules

What is God's purpose for families? It's spelled out in the Bible, but most overlook it.

the home. Children are often shown as know-it-alls who mock and insult their parents.

TV and movie screenwriters constantly push the envelope with sex, nudity, profanity and perversion—"defining deviancy downward," as one phrase captured the trend so well several years ago.

Meanwhile, our governments, rather than holding the line against influences that corrupt society, actually advocate policies that undermine families as they redefine marriage, penalize traditional marriage through higher taxes, advocate sex outside of marriage, reward promiscuity and single motherhood and teach children distorted family roles. And this is just scratching the surface.

But why? Why such a sustained, continual assault on families? Consider that the Bible refers to our day as "this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4). It further reveals that an evil being whom it calls "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4) has blinded the minds of people, and "the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19) "who deceives the whole world" (Revelation 12:9). This being is, of course, Satan the devil.

A primary reason for this war on families is that *Satan wants to blind humankind to God's true purpose for families*. And what is that purpose? It's spelled out in the Bible, but most overlook it. The truth is that *God is creating a divine family!*

God is a family, currently consisting of the Father and the Son. That is clearly a *family* relationship! But God is in the process of *expanding* that family to include *more* family members!

Notice 2 Corinthians 6:17-18, where the apostle Paul says of God the Father, "*I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters*, says the LORD Almighty" (emphasis added throughout). Jesus Christ came to reveal God not as some distant, unapproachable being, but as a *Father* to us (Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22). He tells us to pray to "our *Father* in heaven" (Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2).

In Ephesians 3:14-15, Paul writes of the Father, "from whom *the whole family in heaven and earth is named*." Two members of this divine family—the Father and Jesus Christ the Son—now exist in heaven. Others—those led by God's Spirit (Romans 8:14)—now live on earth, awaiting the time when they will be glorified just as God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son now exist in radiant glory (1 John 3:2).

That is God's great purpose for family, and *for you!* Keep reading *The Good News* to learn how you can be part of that family!

—Scott Ashley, Managing editor



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5 KEYS TO A Happy Family

With the advancement of technology and social media, the family unit is disconnecting and fragmenting. You can build or restore family closeness with five keys that can open rewarding doors to a happier family. *by Jerold Aust*

Dr. Stephen Covey's wife Sandra wrote the foreword to his very helpful 1997 book on families titled *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families*. Good values transcend time, as does this outstanding book and the lesson relayed in her forward.

Mrs. Covey shares a heartfelt story about one of her daughters:

"I remember an experience I had when our oldest daughter, Cynthia, was three years old. We had just moved into our first house . . . I loved decorating and worked

hard to make it charming and attractive.

"My literary club was meeting there, and I had spent hours cleaning so that every room looked perfect. I was anxious to show my friends around, hoping they would be impressed. I put Cynthia down for the night and thought she would be sleeping when they peeked in to see her—noticing, of course, her darling room with the bright yellow tied quilt and matching curtains and the cute, colorful animals I had made and hung on the walls.

"But when I opened the door to show off

my daughter and her room, I discovered to my dismay that she had hopped out of bed, pulled all of her toys out of her toy chest, and scattered them all over the floor . . . She had dumped out her Tinker Toys, puzzles, and crayon box—and she was still going at it! Her room was a disaster. It looked as if a tornado had hit it. In the midst of all this, she looked up with a mischievous smile on her face and said sweetly, 'Hi Mummy!'

"I was furious that she had disobeyed me and gotten out of bed; I was upset that her room was all messed up and that no one could see how cute it was decorated; and I was annoyed that she had put me in this embarrassing situation in front of my friends.

"I spoke sharply to her, spontaneously spanked her little bottom, and put her back to bed with a warning not to get up again.

Her lower lip started to quiver. She looked shocked at my response, and her eyes filled with tears. She started sobbing, not understanding what she had done wrong.

"I closed the door and immediately felt terrible for overreacting. I was ashamed at my behavior, realizing that it was my pride—not her actions—that had set me off. I was angry at myself for such an immature response and shallowness. I was sure I had ruined her for life. Years later I asked her if she remembered the incident, and I breathed a sigh of relief when she said no" (pp. 4-5).

Mrs. Covey went on to say that life's tests refine parents and that parents too often lose their temper, misunderstand, judge before understanding, fail to listen carefully, and generally act unwisely.

Parents learn from their mistakes. Sensitive and understanding parents apologize, grow up, take on good values, recognize children's growth stages, overreact less, roll with the punches, learn to laugh at themselves, have fewer rules, enjoy life more and, finally, realize that rearing children takes attentive and rigorous work, both physically and emotionally.

Another thoughtful book about happy families, Dr. Phil McGraw's *Family First* (2004), is an excellent "how to" on making your family a high priority. In the epilogue, he helps those of us who are parents face reality: "Your children go out into the world every day. Whether it's their first day in kindergarten or at a new school after you've moved, their first time to compete in a spelling bee or dance contest, they take their experiences of home with them . . .

"Have they been parented in a way that will cause them to go into the world feeling confident, worthy, special, safe and secure? . . . Or will they go into the world with self-doubt, feelings of inferiority and guilt or shame because their private reality, their home, is flawed and ugly? . . .

"You have within your grasp the ability to make sure . . . those questions [are] answered in the right way" (p. 275).

What about you? If your family relationship is deteriorating because of society's downward moral spiral and how modern technology devours time and attention, and you want to shore up or restore a good family relationship, *you can*. It begins, of course, with having God and His revealed morality as the foundation of

your life—giving a proper outlook and direction. Beyond that, we'll look at five keys that can open the rewarding doors to a happy or at least a happier family.



Interact with your children

1 Do you visit with your children? Do you discuss their thoughts and feelings with them? Do you care enough about your

Some parents simply let their children "grow up," which is to say they don't teach and train them in good moral values. Consequently the children don't really grow up or become responsible and mature adults.

children to share with them your plan for their success in life?

Have you ever heard parents refer to sweet little children as rug rats, curtain climbers or similar terms? How many parents feel their children are in their way, restricting them from having fun or from pursuing their own personal dreams and ambitions?

These are debilitating and childish thoughts that cut across the rich tapestry of happy family relationships. Rather than acting out our frustrations on our children, why not contribute to their health and welfare through sensitive and encouraging interactions?

Our children are our future. If you and I want to secure our future, then we must invest in that future. The best investment you and I can make with our children is *ourselves*—devoting our time and energies to them, caring for them and pointing them toward a bright future.

The ongoing problem of selfishness, common to parents and all human beings to different degrees, *can* be overcome. But it

takes understanding of our selfish human nature, a deep desire to overcome it, and a plan that works. Let me share a small part of a plan that worked in my life.

When my wife and I were raising our children, we cultivated a family environment that was undergirded by love. Often we lived in a two-story house. If you were in our house in those days, you would have heard all four of us shouting unexpectedly to each other, sometimes at once and certainly unannounced, "We love you kids (or mom and dad)!" The immediate response: "We love you too!"

This would have sounded strange to the uninitiated, but to us, we anticipated and luxuriated in hearing those words. And we did this often. This might not be your way of interacting with your children, but I've heard worse things in homes I've visited, which made me hurt for the entire

family and especially the children.



Set a good example

2 Action talks, blathering walks—or, as we more commonly hear it, actions speak louder than words. Talk is cheap if it's not accompanied by actions that matter. Children learn right ways faster and better from parents who model good character than from those who merely preach about it.

There was a time when parents actually lived by good values and talked less. Today's parents are so pressed for time, money and holding their jobs that they feel



The Bible and You

they have precious little time for their children. That's both a sad commentary on our times and a lack of doing what is vital—setting a good example.

Let's break it down. God provided a man and a woman with the chemistry to come together, what we call infatuation. God did this to perpetuate the human race. Infatuation that helps bring a man and woman together precedes responsibility to parent a family.

After a number of months of marriage, the new wears off, the honeymoon is over, infatuation disappears, and what's left is the reality of making life work on a day-by-day basis as husband and wife. Suddenly, two lovebirds can become demanding and fighting parents. If this continues, they immerse their defenseless children in their own selfish indulgences, arguing, fighting, cursing and generally modeling a negative approach to life.

If you're a parent, are you expecting something of your child that you're not living up to yourself? Do you monitor your own behavior, especially the words you use, in front of your child? Do you use foul language or tell dirty jokes in front of your child? Remember this: *Whatever you say or do is precisely what will be imprinted on your child.*

Small children look on their parents as “gods” in a sense—seeing them as ultimate authority, as providers, protectors and caregivers, and as their source of learning. Your little ones will follow your example; you are their hero or heroine as they grow up. If you smoke, your child will likely take up the habit. If you do drugs, your child will likely do drugs. If you laugh at or tell jokes that disparage marriage or family relationships, your child will replicate your actions.

Dr. Stephen Covey wrote about this in pointing out that most people get caught up in their circle of concern, automatically diminishing their circle of influence. He explained that if we, as parents, are motivated more by our concerns, who's right or who's wrong, than by our influence, the example we're setting for our children, then we can expect to see inferior conduct in our children (pp. 40-41).

Successful parents are those who realize that what they dislike about their children may be easily traceable to them. When parents look at things this way, humility suddenly washes over them and they begin to change their attitudes, adopting values that make parents pleased with their children.

If you set a good example for your child and follow the other keys here, it will greatly help your child to have a happy and secure

life and to grow up to wisely raise his or her own family to be secure and happy.



Watch over & protect your children

When our children were young, my wife and I watched over them like a hawk. Someone once derided me for doing this, asserting that I wasn't allowing them to learn lessons the hard way and that I was overly protective. But this person didn't understand our circumstances.

She lived in a small town you could drive through in five minutes on a busy day. We, on the other hand, lived in a sprawling megalopolis of more than 11 million people, where burglaries, muggings, gangs and kidnappings were pervasive.

When we went shopping, whether in a supermarket or toy store, we stayed with and watched over our kids. We wanted them to grow up safely and one day have their own family. We took nothing for granted. Anyone who watches the nightly news can appreciate this concern.

How do some parents watch over their children today? Many children must walk home from school to an empty home, their parents still at work. The kids are on their own, and some parents see nothing wrong with the situation. What if there are sex offenders in the neighborhood? What if there are drug pushers or human traffickers cruising the neighborhood waiting to take advantage of helpless, hapless children who have their noses buried in their iPhones while texting their friends?

Here's where knowing the purpose of marriage and families can be very helpful, especially if you happen to be a parent who takes parenting lightly. If a father and mother view their kids as being in the way and they can't wait until the day they are on their own, then such parents aren't aware of one of God's main purposes for marriage—to produce and rear godly children, serving as stewards of God (see Malachi 2:15). God

is a family, and He is building His family right here on earth—yes, with *you*, if you allow it (Hebrews 2:10).

Every day, media stories speak of children who are abducted, and few are found alive. This is a sickening commentary on our society, but it's reality. So if you desire to see your children grow up to have their own families, be sure you watch over and protect them assiduously.

God holds us accountable for our children. We have them for only a few years, but God will have them forever. Take your God-given responsibility seriously and don't go the way of the world.

Watch over and protect your children, both outside and inside your home. Know what they're viewing on TV and set guidelines. Know what they're doing on the Internet and set guidelines here too.

Young peoples' minds don't typically mature until their early 20s. We generally have our children until age 18. Understand your responsibility for your children before Almighty God and strive to be good stewards and guardians of these precious young lives He has entrusted to your care.



Train your children

We train animals, especially dogs, but we assume we can't or shouldn't train our children to do the right things. How strange is that thought? The Bible says that we are to “bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4; see also Proverbs 22:6).

When we train our children in the way of God, they in turn will honor us, and when they do, they will be blessed by God. As the Fifth Commandment states: “Honor your father and mother, as the LORD your God commanded you. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the LORD your God is giving you” (Deuteronomy 5:16, New Living Translation).

Please understand and consider that God views parents as stewards of future sons and daughters of God. This means that the

blessings and joys that come from having children, training them up with godly values, and rejoicing in their later accomplishments aren't the end of training our children. In the bigger picture of life, parents raising children are stewards of future gods

God holds us accountable for our children. We have them for only a few years—take your God-given responsibility seriously.

for God (compare Psalm 82:6).

Some parents simply let their children “grow up,” which is to say they don't teach and train them in good moral values. Consequently the children don't really grow up or become responsible and mature adults. Some parents, themselves, have never grown up, which means the entire household is filled with children.

Other parents do understand and appreciate their duties in setting a healthy example for their children and for teaching and training them in living the right way. We call such parents mature. No, they're not perfect. Perfection belongs to God. But these parents, mature enough to know they aren't perfect, are motivated to strive toward perfection, completeness or full maturity. God instructs us to “Be[come] perfect [complete or mature], therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48, New International Version).

Teach and train your children in the ways of the Lord. My wife and I discussed the importance of training our children in God's ways. When they were 6 months old, we would place them on the bed and pray to God in front of them. We wanted them to grow up hearing God's loving will for humankind. As they got older, we would have them kneel and pray with us beside the bed, asking them to pray a short prayer sandwiched between their mom's prayer and my prayer. We believe that God blessed us in this, for now they teach their children God's holy ways.

Here's God's command to us to teach His ways to our children: “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Love him with all your strength. The commandments I give you today must be in your hearts. Make sure your children learn them. Talk about them when you are at home. Talk about them when you walk along the road. Speak about them when you go to bed. And speak about them when you get up” (Deuteronomy 6:5-7,

New International Reader's Version).

As our children got older and they wanted to watch certain TV shows, we sat and watched *with* them. If, during a TV program, something wasn't according to God's ways, we would mention it to them and ask them

if they could tell us what was wrong with what they saw and heard. This helped them learn to evaluate what they watched on television and not just

accept anything the media presented.

We discussed with them the fact that media is a business and that what is shown on TV generally plays to people's physical senses in order to sell products and ideas to them. Now that our children are parents, they are teaching their children the same principles.



How many times have I heard parents say to me that they could no longer love their children because the children got hooked on drugs or alcohol? This should make us recoil. How in the world can we give life to our children and not love them unconditionally?

Sometimes I've found that some parents give up on their children out of selfishness. In some cases, their children didn't measure up to them, their self-concept, or their idea of their children's profession. At other times, parents give up on their children because they don't understand the worsening downward pulls of our modern society and the effects of those pulls on their children.

Some parents either don't think about what children are exposed to at school or don't care. Like the proverbial ostrich that allegedly buries its head in the sand, they ignore the deleterious effects of social media, television and other environmental factors.

Again, personally, my wife and I deter-

mined early on—and we reminded our children of this—that we would love them unconditionally. We didn't want them to guess about our relationship with them, so we made it abundantly clear that we were in their corner while they were at home, when they left home, and for the rest of their and our lives.

When children know that their parents love them unconditionally, they live happier and healthier lives. This is precisely the lesson God gives us. Read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and the takeaway is that God loves weak human beings—all the way to the death of His Son, Jesus Christ (John 3:16-17). If God loves us so much that He gave His only begotten Son to die for us, can we not at least love our children enough to live for them, to model God's way for them?

God shows that once we're committed to Him, having surrendered our will to His, He is unconditionally committed to us. Even when we sin or perhaps stray from Him for a while, He never forgets us, and He always works to bring us back to Him (see Luke 15:11-32; Philippians 1:6). God the Father and Jesus Christ are our sterling examples in unconditional love.

Love your children unconditionally; it will pay off big for you and exponentially bigger for them and their children. They will be more apt to follow your example of unconditional love and pass this divine attitude on to their children.

If, then, you apply the five keys we've covered here to having a happier family, you can help make your family secure, service-oriented and successful.

This leads us into the ultimate purpose of the family, a lesson that transcends time and cultures. To help you better understand, be sure to read the companion article “The Ultimate Purpose of the Family.” GN

Learn More

The Bible has a great deal to say about family. And that's not surprising, since it was God Himself who created the family! If you'd like to learn more about our Creator's instructions about family, download or request our free booklet *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension* today. And be sure to read the accompanying article “The Ultimate Purpose for Family,” beginning on page 8.



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The Ultimate Purpose of

THE FAMILY

Do you know the ultimate purpose for the family? When you know that purpose, it can transform your family's relationships! *by Jerold Aust*

Despite the corruptions it has suffered throughout humanity's past, the family has generally remained the most dependable bond of human togetherness. Typically speaking, a person's family is his or her support in life in ways no one else can or desires to be.

From humankind's beginning, God made it clear that He wanted man and woman to come together to build a family: "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it'" (Genesis 1:27-28).

God also instructed that Adam and Eve be joined in physical union and living together to become one: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

God gives a husband and wife a family: "Children are a gift from the LORD; they are a reward from Him. Children born to a young man are like sharp arrows in a warrior's hands. How happy is the man whose quiver is full of them!" (Psalms 127:3-5, New Living Translation).

The family as God intended is a preeminent joy and an ongoing pleasure. But does

the family unit only apply to life in the human flesh, or is it a picture of something far greater and more glorious? Does God have an ultimate purpose for the family unit that nearly 7 billion people don't know about? Let's explore God's ultimate purpose for the family.

Ruth's extraordinary family

It may come as a surprise to learn that one of the most faithful families of the Old Testament began with a gentile woman named Ruth and the highly regarded Israelite she married, Boaz. Both had great credibility. Ruth earned hers the hard way, rigorously and sensitively. Boaz earned the respect of his community by conducting his business affairs in a reputable way, fair and solicitous of others' needs.

Ruth started from nothing and allowed her mother-in-law and God to make her into something. A Moabitess who grew up amid false religion, Ruth was led to learn of the true God. And when she did, she forsook her Moabite family and religion and cherished God's holy truths.

Ruth loved her mother-in-law, who loved God. That which Ruth loved in Naomi was God. God's love illuminated and emanated from Naomi's loving character. When Ruth lost her previous husband, one of Naomi's

sons, she refused to leave Naomi's side, no matter what:

"But Ruth said: 'Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me'" (Ruth 1:16-17).

Loyalty and faithfulness characterized the life of Ruth. Her inward beauty came from God after she unconditionally surrendered herself to Him. For there is nothing more beautiful in human beings than living according to the holy truths of Almighty God!

God transformed Ruth, though she showed good character before she left her native land. She was pliable in God's hands, and He shaped her into a vessel of mercy and saw to it that she would marry the renowned Boaz, who set an unimpeachable example of godly character. From a marriage between an Israelite and a gentile came eventually Jesse the father of King David, and later the King of Kings, Jesus Christ (Ruth 4:22; Matthew 1:5, 16).

Philip's faithful family

The evangelist Philip evidently had a wonderful family with deep roots in God and His Word. The relatively little said about Philip and his family speaks volumes. He was ordained as a deacon in the

early Church in Jerusalem, handpicked by discerning brethren:

“Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’

“And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them” (Acts 6:1-6, emphasis added throughout).

Philip was the second deacon mentioned in the New Testament, after Stephen, who suffered martyrdom (Acts 7). Philip was also a highly effective preacher of God’s truth, and many people were called through his teachings and observed how God performed miracles through him (Acts 8:5-13).

Later we see Philip referred to as an evangelist (Acts 21:8). It’s recorded in the same place that his four daughters prophesied (verse 8), implying that all were well-grounded in God’s truth, having been taught by a faithful father. And though nothing is said of Philip’s wife directly, it seems reasonable to assume that she also had much to do with this outstanding family. Philip’s family is highly commended by God in their faithful attitudes and actions.

Clearly the earthly family, intended by God as an institution for spiritual instruction, is very important in His eyes. And it points to another family that eclipses the physical family, as important and wonderful as the human family is.

God’s begotten family on earth

God is a family, and He has a family on earth (Ephesians 1:5; 3:14-15). Presently, the God family on the divine level comprises the Father and the Son (Romans 1:1-4; Hebrews 1:1-2; Matthew 3:17). Further, God’s spiritual family also consists of the saints of God—that is, true Christians: “For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God” (Romans 8:14, New International Version).

The book of Hebrews discusses God’s family, stating: “But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

“In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. Both the one who makes people holy and *those who are made holy are of the same family*. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters” (Hebrews 2:9-11, NIV).

The apostle Paul further shows that the spiritually begotten family of God, both sons and daughters, are viewed as seated with Christ at God’s throne. While we of course remain here on this earth physically, through the work of Christ we are presented as raised up with Him:

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4-6, NIV). God refers to those things He has planned that haven’t yet come to be as though they have (compare Romans 4:17).

So we see from Scripture that God has a family here on earth consisting of His begotten sons and daughters. These have repented of their sins and committed to obeying Him, have turned in faith to God, believing His promises, have been baptized or immersed in water and then raised from this “watery grave,” and have had a minister of Christ lay hands on them for the receiving of God’s Holy Spirit. (See our free booklet *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* to learn more.)

The ultimate purpose for family

Part of God’s ingenious communication to humankind is through the pattern of physical models picturing spiritual realities. For example, Scripture describes our bodies as physical temples (2 Corinthians 5:1) and the entire Church as a temple too (1 Corinthians 3:16). And God fulfills the physical forerunner in ultimate reality—divine, spiritual, immortal reality.

So it is with marriage. The marital and family relationships human beings have the privilege of enjoying are but models or types of the spiritual family of God and

the coming marriage of Jesus Christ to His transformed people (Revelation 19:7).

Both Jesus Christ and all God’s saints are all children of God, Christ being the first-born Son of God—the first to be raised into divine glory (though He also preexisted in glory before His human life, unlike any of us—see our free booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*). The Church’s New Covenant union with Christ, represented by the heavenly Jerusalem where God reckons His family as seated, is the mother of us all (Galatians 4:26), and God is our Father forever.

Eventually, after the great salvation periods of the 1,000-year reign of Christ and the Great White Throne Judgment that follows (Revelation 20:4-6, 11-13), God the Father will bring the New Jerusalem down to a renewed earth, and Christ will present all the many billions of saved children of God to God the Father.

The apostle Paul describes it well in laying out the order of people being raised into glory: “But each in his own order: the Messiah is the firstfruits; then those who belong to the Messiah, at the time of his coming; then the culmination, when he hands over the Kingdom to God the Father . . .” (1 Corinthians 15:23-24, Complete Jewish Bible).

Therefore, the ultimate purpose for the family on earth is to provide a great spiritual, divine family for God forever. This is why the physical family is so vitally important to God and to us. When we understand the ultimate purpose for which God established our human families, it provides us with peace and security, allowing us to rise above the selfish tendency to see children as getting in the way or as nuisances.

We can also then more easily accept the opportunities God gives us for daily dedication to the better welfare of our little ones. This will bring us joy and other rewards—some immediate and some later on. But all human beings have human nature that fights against us as an enemy to overcome. And overcome we must—through prayer to God, meditation on His Word and the resultant strength and comfort that comes from the Father and Christ through the Holy Spirit.

The family unit helps to secure the marriage relationship. There is an ultimate purpose to the family relationship, and that is for all who are willing to become a part of the divine family of God. Now you know God’s ultimate purpose for the family unit. And with that glorious knowledge, you can help secure your own family in the peace of the Prince of Peace, Christ Jesus! **GN**



Why Are Young Christians Divorcing?

Just a few short years ago she was dressed in a long white dress and he in a tuxedo, confetti was flying, and everyone was cheering and celebrating the wedding. Now they're living separately and may even divorce. No one thought this could happen—least of all them. *by Mitchell Moss*

It's sad to see any marriage run into trouble and break up. But it's a particularly sad phenomenon that an increasing number of married young adults who have been born and raised with the teachings of the Bible have begun having serious marital problems. Anecdotally, I know of a few who have even divorced. You probably know of some yourself.

What's going on in such situations? When two lives commit to become one in marriage there will be big adjustments. But are those in today's Millennial generation—those in their teens and 20s—dealing with a particular mindset and set of expectations harmful to lasting marriages?

Great expectations and the big lie

Our modern Western culture teaches us that to have a good life, we must reach for the stars, pursue our dreams and be all that we can be. It says that for us to be happy at the end of our lives, we have to be able to look back and see that we've tried everything that seems good and pursued every dream and opportunity to its fullest. In other words, the ultimate goal of life is the self-fulfillment of our own desires, wants and dreams—to have checked off everything on our “bucket list.”

My generation—those now in their 20s and getting married—has been bred with the lie that self-fulfillment is the ultimate and highest attainable goal in life, and therefore by extension that love—the kind you fall into—exists to give us what we need and want. Therefore a good marriage is one where both parties get what they need.

We may not even realize what has happened to our thinking and values. We've been taught to think in a self-centered way as we pursue the ideals of the well-lived life. We rationalize that “of course God wants me to be happy,” while we kick the can of responsibility down the road just a little longer.

This belief in self-fulfillment pervades our generation so deeply that it's almost as if it were in our blood. But in that version of attaining happiness, marriage is downgraded to only a part of the fulfilled life—another contributing factor to one's own personal fulfillment.

Extended adolescence

Concurrent with the rise and acceptance of this pursuit of self-fulfillment is the increasing delay of maturity—the extended period of adolescence.

Today many people delay marrying until

their 30s, using their 20s as the decade to check off as many things as possible on the list before reality sets in and responsibility drags them down. The attitude could be summed up as, “Getting married at 22 seems an awful lot like leaving the party at 9:00 p.m.” The “party” is the pursuit of both self-fulfillment and romantic/sexual experience.

Taken together, the quest for self-fulfillment and the extended adolescence intertwine into an idea that one should experience as much as he can while he's single, so that he can get a sense of what he values and who he is and therefore have a better chance at finding “the one.”

“The one” is the person who will make him happy and whom, theoretically, he will make happy. They will be highly compatible. Their chemistry will be undeniable. Their love will come easily and naturally—so easily that all that will be required is for them to fall into it.

Finding “the one”—or not

Regrettably, “the one” is a lie handed down by Plato and Greek mythology that makes individual choice only a bystander in the drama of dating in order to find the one with whom it all “just clicks.”

In that drama, however, there is real danger that the moment trouble arises (their love doesn't come so easily or their points of view don't align perfectly or their respective bucket lists change or their personalities change or whatever it may be), both parties can't help but wonder, “If this is so hard, maybe I married someone other than the one for me.”

Then perhaps one of them meets somebody else who seems to be more compatible—whom he or she identifies with more and “clicks with” better—and getting to know that person the sinking feeling sets in that “I married the wrong person.”

The final stage is when you hear, “It didn’t work out”—as if “it” was the problem. “It” is never the problem—the *people* involved caused the problem.

True love isn’t focused on self

But true love is not the pursuit of fulfilling one’s *own* needs, wants and desires. True love is a *sacrificing of one’s own life* for another. It is putting one’s own wants, needs and desires in second place (or third, or fourth, or farther down the line).

Marriage is a commitment each of us makes to our Creator and our spouse. Marriage partners are “to be heirs together of the grace of life” (1 Peter 3:7). In other words, we are to work together to help each other attain our ultimate goal of God’s Kingdom (Matthew 6:33).

We are to encourage and help each other to succeed in this life’s endeavors, but with that to grow in grace and knowledge so that we can stand before Jesus Christ at His return (Luke 21:36). To do this we set aside self-fulfillment in favor of what the other needs.

It involves making one’s life the definition of service in living for the other. It entails setting aside childish shortcomings, avoidance of responsibility and foolish distractions and striving to emulate the perfect love and example of Jesus Christ.

To be clear, by no means do I recommend that we shouldn’t experience life to its fullest, that we shouldn’t pursue our dreams or that we shouldn’t seek self-fulfillment. Nor do I mean that we shouldn’t find out through dating what type of person will

make a happy, fulfilling marriage the most likely for both parties. Or that we shouldn’t have a list of goals to pursue and live to our fullest potential with the talents God has given us.

I don’t mean to imply any of that. None of the things mentioned are bad or good in and by themselves. Knowing firmly who you are and finding a compatible person with whom to share your life makes the Christian walk much more enjoyable and fulfilling.

Finding a truly fulfilling life

To live a truly fulfilled life is to look back at the end of it and see that more of your time was spent serving God than not—that you sacrificed your needs and desires and dreams in deference to His will and the needs of His children, having made your life the definition of service.

We do not exist to check off the bucket list and to look back and think, “Wow, what a self-fulfilled life I’ve had!” It is not our destiny to live a personally satisfying life and then die. Nor is it to marry the person who makes us happy until he or she doesn’t anymore and then find somebody else.

No, we exist to become like God the Father and Jesus Christ in their loving character. We exist to learn what true love is—an outgoing, service-minded devotion and care—and to exercise that love toward all of God’s children. In marriage, it is to put personal needs, desires and dreams in third place behind those of God and one’s spouse. It means making the hard decision not to do what feels good, but to instead do what’s right.

We exist to look back and say, “Wow, I would’ve never dreamed of how much God used me to fulfill *His* purpose!” May this focus guide you in marriage and in all of life! **GN**

Love Is Something That We Do

Several years ago country singer and songwriter Clint Black recorded an insightful song that he titled “Something That We Do.” The lyrics apparently stem from his own experience of staying married to his wife for more than 30 years now.

Love isn’t something we find.

Love isn’t something that we have.

Love’s not just something that we’re in.

Love isn’t someplace that we fall.

All of these phrases are followed by the real truth: **Love is something that we do.**

In other words, real love is a choice—a choice to act in a certain way. Real love is much more than just a feeling. Real love requires effort, time and personal commitment. Real love takes work—sometimes lots of it. But the rewards are well worth it!



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Will You Wait for Each Other?

Why do some marriages last while others don't? I've learned some important lessons in my own journey of 40 years. *by Darris McNeely*

I was six days short of turning 22 and my wife was 21 the day we married. Fresh out of college, I had a job but little experience in the details of life on my own. What we knew about the world was limited—but that would soon change.

That was more than 40 years ago.

I didn't fully know who I was, nor did she. We barely knew each other. Oh, we had been friends for three years, the last year of which we dated seriously and were engaged. But we had been in a college environment living in dorms, eating cafeteria food and pretty much having the everyday things in life done for us. It wasn't the real world, which was to come. Neither of us realized how much growing up we would have to do. But we were in love and decided to get married.

Looking back, I think I knew her better than I knew myself. It was probably the same for her. The key to our marriage is that as we came to know our own selves, it didn't change our basic orientation in life—we were the same package even though the ingredients seasoned, matured and got better with age. And in our case, our growth

brought us together rather than apart.

But not every marriage experiences this. Marriages today are at risk—especially among the generation raised with electronic devices providing much of their communication.

Reading the companion article on marriage on page 10—"Why Are Young Christians Divorcing?"—led me to think about why our marriage has lasted when many don't. So many of our friends who married at the same time are divorced, some multiple times. I haven't been privy to the details, but it's clear that a lasting marriage requires more than just good intentions.

I don't mean to discount the basic laws and principles that govern a marriage relationship as typically laid out. But experience has taught me that sometimes more is needed to overcome the challenges in any relationship. So I'd like to share some experiences and lessons of married life.

Challenges in our first year of marriage

Let me go back to the thought of our basic life orientation. Debbie and I were Christians. We had accepted God's calling

in our youth and believed that to the degree we submitted our lives to Him, He would guide us. It was a simple faith that would be tested and developed in the crucible of life.

In our first year of marriage we went through a gut-wrenching experience that not only tested our faith but our marriage. I was a young minister, and the church organization I was working in went through a division. People get emotional in a church split, and we felt the brunt of emotional turmoil unlike any we had ever seen. Our faith was tested. My commitment to the calling of a minister was tested.

For myself, I was no longer an inexperienced rookie. My rose-colored glasses had been replaced by high-definition lenses that showed me just how difficult it can be to work with people in the spiritual arena. I can say we passed through the period and continued on the job, but we were changed people for it. And we were still together as a couple.

The next challenge—hold on for the ride!

The next big life development came with children. Our first son was born within two years, and four years later came our second. We were now parents. What a ride!

Your world changes when you are responsible for developing, rearing and

training children. It goes far beyond the physical things you provide. It goes to example, to character, to the everyday episodes you write into their young minds. The young ones develop their personalities first, then their own mind and views as years go by and they eventually become maturing adults.

For us, as with most parents, it was on-the-job training. I've never met any parent fully prepared for the role. It's one you learn by doing. It calls for constant adjustments, what is known in American football jargon as "calling an audible." Like a good quarterback you have to "read the defense" and adjust your play to succeed.

Good parenting demands that you "read" your children and adjust your approach to teach them properly. We managed to impart many of our values and raise our sons to become responsible adults and

religion. Be sure you have at least a rough understanding of your spiritual purpose in life—enough to begin shaping it with thoughtful care and diligence. Life is going to bring you through experiences that will not only shape you but reveal what is already there and likely unseen.

The renowned sculptor Michelangelo described the sculpturing process as removing the excess stone to reveal the figure inside. That was his way of explaining how he carved a work of art. In the same way, life knocks away our outer shell and the rough edges and reveals what is inside.

That is how we come to know ourselves through life. But as you grow and come to understand who you are, you need to understand another key to making marriage last: *Don't let yourself grow apart from the person you married.*

Honor the commitment you made.

***Time and circumstances play a part in life for all of us.
Many things happen in life that are out of our control.
But one choice is always within our control.***

good parents in their own right.

Years ago a wise member of one of my congregations told me that a parent never stops being a parent. I learned he was right. The job is never done. Being a parent changes you, potentially for the better. Debbie and I were transformed throughout the process and, again adjusting in our relationship together, our marriage was strengthened.

One of the strengths we had was our relationship with each other. After our relationship with God, our marriage was paramount, and we imparted that to the kids. While we both loved our boys, they knew we deeply loved each other. When it came time for them to fly the nest and go out on their own, our marriage didn't falter. We were ready to move on to the next stage of life, together. We had continued to grow together through the years.

Lessons learned in looking back

Today we look back on 40 years from a higher perspective. We see more of the landscape of life, and with that comes understanding. So what I am passing on—to anyone thinking about marriage or perhaps in a marriage that is less than they expected—is this: *Know yourself.*

Know your passions, goals and dreams. Know what you believe about God and

Honor your mate. Don't buy the false idea that you must be true to yourself to the exclusion of promises made to one another before God.

Time and circumstances play a part in life for all of us. Many things happen in life that are out of our control. But one choice is always within our control. My wife and I made a commitment to each other, and we kept it. As we grew as individuals, we didn't let who we were take us away from the care, commitment, affection and love we had for one another.

One of my favorite songs conveys better than anything what I'm saying. The song, "If I Should Fall Behind," expresses the sentiment of two people who pledge to "walk together . . . come what may." And if the darkness of life causes them to "lose [their] way" and "a hand should slip free," then they pledge to each other, "I'll wait for you, and should I fall behind wait for me."

For Debbie and me, we "waited for each other" as we got to know ourselves. If one of us fell behind, the other waited until the one who had fallen behind caught up. I think that pretty well explains a lot of our success. If you wait for the other, then you will meet together, as the song says, "in the evening trees" of life—continuing this journey of life together. **GN**

Who's Behind The Good News?



Who's behind *The Good News* magazine?

Many readers have wondered who we are and how we are able to provide *The Good News* free to all who request it. Simply put, *The Good News* is provided by *people*—people from all walks of life, from all over the world, as enabled by God.

And those people have a common goal: **to proclaim the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to all the world as a witness and to teach all nations to observe what Christ commanded** (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).

We are dedicated to proclaiming the same message Jesus Christ brought—the wonderful *good news* of the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43; 8:1). That message truly is good news—the answer to all the problems that have long plagued humankind. Through the pages of *The Good News*, various booklets (also free) and our *Beyond Today* TV program, we show the biblical answers to the dilemmas that have defied human solution and



threaten our very survival.

We are committed to taking that message to the entire world, sharing the truth of

God's purpose and plan for us as taught by Jesus Christ.

The United Church of God has congregations and ministers around the world. In these congregations believers assemble to be instructed from the Scriptures and to fellowship. For locations and times of services in your area, contact us at the appropriate address on page 2. Visitors are always welcome.

For additional information, visit our website:

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Our Wounded Children:

Who Will Make It Right?



Many children today are in constant danger due to neglect, warfare, disease and starvation. So many have little regard for the most vulnerable among us. But there is hope for the future in the sure promises of God. *by Janet Treadway*

Davion Henry, dressed up in a very nice suit, stood up during a church service. He took his place at the podium and made a shocking request. Davion said: “Old or young, dad or mom, black, white, purple. I’ll take anyone.” He was begging someone to adopt him.

Davion was given up as a baby and spent a lifetime in foster care. At the age of 15, he found out that his real mother had died in prison. Now an orphan, he is seeking for a family of his own, even to the point of humbling himself and asking people in his congregation to consider adopting him (“Old or Young, Dad or Mom, Black, White, Purple. I’ll Take Anyone,” *Daily Mail*, Oct. 16, 2013).

This was a heartbreaking story for me to read, because I can so relate to Davion in such a personal way. I felt his pain. I spent my childhood and much of my teenage years in foster care.

From the time I was 4 until the age of 14, I was moved from foster home to fos-

ter home. Thankfully I was with my twin brother during those traumatic years. Jim and I were placed in a total of eight foster homes and two children’s homes over a 10-year period. Just when I felt comfortable enough to begin to call the new foster parents Mom and Dad, it was time to be moved again.

I could always remember the night before I was to leave one foster home for another, stressing and wondering who would be our next parents. How would they treat us? What school would I go to next? Sadly, as statistics will show, I am not alone in enduring a tragic childhood.

There are more than 150 million orphans worldwide! That is staggering and sobering. More than 150 million orphans like Davion, who desire to have parents of their own. Why so many orphans? There are a lot of reasons—war, parents who cannot or will not take care of their children, or famine, and diseases such as HIV/AIDS. According to UN agencies, there may be more than 40 million orphans from AIDS alone.

According to 2013 figures, there are 400,000 children in the foster care system in just the United States. It takes nearly \$20 billion per year to take care of these children. And these numbers are on the increase, as more and more children enter the foster care system.

Will God do something about this problem and others that children now face?

A dangerous world and divine perspective

In thinking about the plight of children in today’s world, we must not forget the many unborn babies who are killed every year through abortion. There are approximately 1.2 million abortions in America each year. Did you know that nearly 89 percent of all abortions take place by the 12th week of pregnancy? The United States has the highest abortion rate (19.4 per 1,000) of any Western industrialized nation. Estimates are that there have been more than 55 million abortions in the country since 1973.

Furthermore, every year 15 million children die of hunger worldwide. Each year approximately 10 million children die from such causes as birth defects, malnutrition, accidents, disease, SIDS, cancer, starvation, homicide and war. This doesn’t even cover the children who grew up with neglectful or abusive parents. More than 28 million Americans are children of alcoholics, and

nearly 11 million are under the age of 18.

When you read these statistics, you may wonder, “Where is God?” How could He allow the suffering of so many children? The fact of the matter is that the majority of people do not want God in their lives. Yet they think He should police everyone else’s lives and blame Him, as uncaring, for all the suffering. God does care, but there is an overall plan He is working out. We must remember the following key principles.

1. *God has given mankind free will to make his own choices.* It was mankind that chose to make a ruling allowing the abortion of babies. Mankind has decided to go to war because of greed and hatred. It’s mankind that decided to follow its own path instead of submitting to God’s loving and knowing will. Again, people for the most part do not want God in their lives. As a loving parent, He says, “Okay, make choices and see if they work for you.”

2. *God has allowed Satan to influence mankind and exercise control over the world.* Satan is the one to blame. The apostle Paul referred to him in Ephesians 2:2 as “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobe-

good people and children. God’s plan is far greater than what happens to us temporarily. God sees the bigger picture beyond this age and all the world’s suffering. Unlike the governments of this world, He will bring ultimate solutions. (For more on this important topic, request and read our free booklet *Why Does God Allow Suffering?*)

Despite all the doom and gloom, there is real hope for the future. I found that hope myself. When I felt that gaping hole in my heart of wanting and needing a father, God came in and filled it. David wrote in Psalm 68:5, “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling.”

I understand why bad things have happened to me, because the ultimate cause is Satan’s evil influence (Ephesians 2:2; 2 Corinthians 4:4). I can relate to someone like Davion, who has suffered so much pain and loss. I know what the solution is because I have been there and know the process. I know what God the Father has done for me. I know He is the Healer of the brokenhearted, especially the broken, wounded children. I know that God is the Father to the fatherless because I have seen His amazing love in my life.

He endured unimaginable emotional and physical pain and is able to understand our pain and plead our case before God the Father when Satan is accusing us.

The apostle John wrote: “For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:16-17, New Living Translation). That’s a pretty awesome Father who would allow His only begotten Son to die for all of us so that we could also become part of His family.

God cares greatly for all children. Matthew wrote, “He called a little child and had him stand among them.” Jesus was making a point: “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:3-6).

Jesus continued, “Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven” (verse 10). Wow! What a message sent on behalf of the children. Children are not cut off from God but instead have every opportunity to seek Him and go His way.

God does care! If you are like Davion, with a void in your heart, seek the true God. You are never too young to seek Him. I became so aware of God and my great need for Him even at the young age of 9. Ask Him to come into your life and be your Father, for He is the Father to the fatherless and cares very deeply for you. He is the Healer of all wounded children and will heal every one of them in due time according to His step-by-step plan for humankind. He is the one who will make everything right!

Pray, then, for the better world to come wherein Satan, the ultimate cause of all of mankind’s heartaches, will be banished (Revelation 20:1-3), and an awesome Father will rule over the earth through His Son Jesus Christ. Then God our Father will take over and be a real Father to us all. He is the one who will make it right! Pray for Christ’s soon return for our children’s sake! **GN**



“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.”

dience.” The devil does not have ultimate power, but God is allowing him a short amount of time as the behind-the-scenes ruler of this world. But God will intervene in our lives if we call on Him, and if we truly acknowledge His existence and genuinely seek Him in an obedient attitude.

3. *God sees the bigger picture.* He is working with all of us in many different ways, and sometimes this comes through suffering. God also wants people to see that their lives won’t work without faith in Him and obedience to His law of love. That is why bad things happen to apparently

Many people go out to help and become advocates for others because they understand the pain. They know the healing process and that through suffering those who are afflicted come out even stronger than before going in. They make great advocates because they have been there. That is part of why we suffer—so we can understand and help others.

God’s great care for children

Jesus Christ is our greatest Advocate. He went through enormous suffering for us so He could be our Advocate with the Father.



Prepare Your Child to Follow Christ

As a Christian parent, what can you do to encourage your children to follow Jesus Christ? *by Linda LaBissoniere*

The Bible explains that the children of Christian parents are holy and that God is calling them into a relationship with Him (Acts 2:39; 1 Corinthians 7:14). However, even with God's invitation, your children must personally choose to follow Jesus Christ. You may wonder what you can do now to encourage them to accept His call to live Christian lives. Here are several suggestions to consider.

1. Teach your children to love and revere God

The best way to help your children learn to love God is through your personal example. If your children see that you are in constant loving fellowship with Jesus Christ and obey Him at the expense of small sacrifices in your life, they'll likely desire to do the same. Conversely, if you rarely take time to study the Bible or pray, your children may feel that having a relationship with God is of little or no value.

Besides demonstrating a Christlike example, you can regularly discuss God and His nature with your child. Scripture tells us that parents have the responsibility not only to teach their children about their Creator, but to help them learn the importance of obeying His laws and revering Him (Deuteronomy 6:4-7).

Additionally, be sure to talk often about all that God has done and continues to do.

The Bible says we can even *boast* about Him (Psalm 34:2; 1 Corinthians 1:31). Highlight many of His qualities by pointing out the marvels of the natural world. You can also discuss how God provides your family's daily needs and how He has assisted you in miraculous ways. These actions can help your children comprehend that God is very real and that He blesses those who choose to honor and obey Him.

2. Give your children the vision of God's purpose for them

Your children need to see not only that God has a purpose for their lives, but that He will guide them into future success. Help them understand that they will receive greater blessings by following God than by leading a life without His involvement.

Make a point to show them not only that they can expect a promising future, but that life today can be rewarding and fulfilling (John 10:10).

This is important, for if your children feel that living a Christian life is only one of sacrifice with few immediate benefits, it will seem unattractive to them. While helping them enjoy life now, continue pointing them to the special future that awaits them in the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33).

3. Present Christianity in a positive light

We all know that even while striving to

lead a Christian life, troublesome events occur from time to time. Be very careful about discussing negative situations in your children's presence that don't really concern them. This is because most children lack the maturity to accurately evaluate adverse events. If at all possible, discuss such circumstances with your spouse and friends in private.

If your child does learn about a particular problem, take the time to explain the situation in the most positive manner possible. Failing to do so could lead him or her to inaccurate conclusions. If negativity is emphasized, a child may begin to think that God is weak, powerless or even a myth. Explain that patiently waiting on God's help and intervention is vital and that there are many valuable lessons to be learned in the process.

If your children observe poor or sinful conduct in other Christians, help them understand that all Christians sin at times. Encourage them to pray for those who have fallen short and to trust that God will deal with the situation in a just and fair manner.

4. Teach the purpose and value of trials

God sometimes allows trials to correct and refine us. Children should be taught that such difficulties are meant not to discourage but to strengthen and help us to think and act more like Christ (James 1:2-4).

At times we can unintentionally discourage our children by describing troubles or missed opportunities we've encountered as a result of obeying God's laws.

For example, a parent might mention that

he was passed over for a promotion at work because he wouldn't do something unethical. While it's understandable that a parent may be temporarily discouraged by such an event, a child might mistakenly conclude that God's way of obedience, patience and faith doesn't work. Always remember that your child needs to see that God's way of life brings greater success and happiness, but sometimes requires faith and patience on your part (Matthew 11:28-30).

In Romans 8:28 the apostle Paul stated that "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." Help your child understand this truth by discussing the stories of Joseph, Esther and other biblical personalities who successfully overcame difficulties with God's help. Teaching your children lessons like these can help them build spiritual faith and confidence.

5. Fulfill your children's physical, social and emotional needs

Children need to feel accepted and valued, and it's crucial for their spiritual and emotional development. Be sure to spend a lot of time talking and interacting with them in addition to caring for their physical, social and emotional needs.

Sometimes parents only correct for misbehavior and fail to give their children praise for accomplishments. Try hard to have the majority of your interactions positive. You can do this by actively looking for ways to positively reinforce good behavior.

As your children grow into their teen years they'll experience increased social requirements. Since their friends will gradually influence them more and more, it's important to give them many opportunities to interact with other teens from Christian homes.

To do this, however, you might need to give up some of your short-term personal goals. But sacrificing for your children will give you greater long-term blessings. Your sacrifices will also show them how truly loved and valued they are to you.

6. Honor God by disciplining your children

While it's important to make your children feel accepted and valued, they also have to understand that you won't allow bad or sinful behavior. In an attempt to please their children, some parents allow them to dishonor God by their actions. Teach your children godly principles of obedience to all of God's laws, including the Fifth Com-

mandment to honor their parents (Exodus 20:12).

Lovingly discipline your children when they fall short. We find many scriptural admonitions to do so (Proverbs 19:18; 23:13-14; 1 Timothy 3:1-5). For example, the Bible tells the sobering story of Eli the priest who didn't correct his sons for their bad behavior. Eli honored his sons above God, which is sinful (1 Samuel 2:30; Matthew 10:37). In the end this led to both his and their demise (see 1 Samuel 2:12-3:18).

Parents who overlook sin or neglect discipline can cause damage to their child's character (Proverbs 22:15; Romans 6:23). For example, if you fail to teach self-control your child may suffer penalties from lack of self-control throughout later life.

Teach your children that every decision and action has consequences. Help them understand the debilitating results of sin. As situations arise where you see the penalties of sin in other people's lives point these out to your child, without revealing names, unless it is a circumstance he or she already knows about. Such examples may help your child see that sin leads to bad results.

Create in your children the desire to obey God. For example, instead of just telling your son that he can't be involved in sports on the Sabbath, ask him if he loves God. If he answers that he does, remind him that God instructs us to observe the Sabbath as a day of worship and rest, and that it isn't for seeking our own pleasure (Isaiah 58:13).

Help him understand the lasting blessings of godly obedience compared to the temporary pleasure of playing sports on God's weekly Holy Day. And try and find him another activity that does not fall on the Sabbath, so he can learn to build a fulfilling life in line with God's law.

7. Guide and correct through loving parental authority

While parents should always encourage their children to voluntarily obey God, there will be times when they may be unwilling to do so.

To use the above example again, if your son insists on participating in sports on the Sabbath, you might have to use parental authority to keep him from doing so. However, determining how such a situation should be handled will be different in each family.

For instance, if your spouse is not a practicing Christian you may not be able to establish family Sabbath rules. Also, you

may have just begun Sabbath observance yourself and your child has already been participating in Saturday sports activities. In these situations you may want to seek counsel with a minister of Christ on how to best proceed. (Contact the United Church of God, which publishes *The Good News*, to be put in contact with a minister near you.)

8. Help your children discern for themselves

Your children will need help dealing with scientific theories like evolution. Widespread concepts like this can lead to the faulty conclusion that God is a myth. You should take the time to discuss the biblical account of creation with your children and answer any questions they may have to help them reach an understanding that God is very real.

It's important for you to know what they're being taught so you can help them by giving factual, scientific research and information revealing the many inconsistencies and falsehoods of evolutionary theory. A wealth of information is available on the *Good News* magazine website (www.GNmagazine.org) to help you in this important task.

Ultimately your children will have to develop their own personal faith in God. Until they mature spiritually, make it a point to help them find and sort through scientific findings that clearly disprove defective concepts and ideas.

9. Trust God to help you with your children

Preparing your children to follow Christ is a challenging yet rewarding responsibility. You have the wonderful opportunity not only to explain but to demonstrate God's way of life. Remember that no parent can be successful without God's help. Ask Him regularly in prayer to guide and direct you. Each child is unique, and God will lead you in the way to best help him or her.

If, however, your child decides to lead a secular life after reaching adulthood, don't beat yourself up over it. Although you might have done everything possible as a parent, the fact is that you can't ultimately control what happens to your child. Many variables will influence his or her decisions throughout life, and many will be out of your control.

In this case it's important to realize that God fully knows what has occurred. Ask Him in prayer to continue guiding your child. Place the situation in His capable hands and wait patiently and faithfully as He works with your child in His good time. **GN**



Current Events & Trends

by John Ross Schroeder and Jerold Aust

Raising the global alarm

The direction of international events in the time ahead of us is vitally important for all people. The Western world in particular has largely adopted a godless, secular approach to life, and we should all be aware of where this dangerous path will eventually take us.

The World in 2014, the current edition of the annual publication on the state of the world from the British magazine *The Economist*, states: "At the turn of the 21st century *The Economist* had sage words

that deserve to be read again. 'In every way that people, firms, or governments act and plan,' it wrote, 'they are making implicit forecasts about the future.' That is a fundamental fact. *Our decisions rest on expectations of what the future will look like* and how those decisions will play out in it" ("Who's Good at Forecasts?" Nov. 18, 2013, p. 89, emphasis added throughout).

From a biblical standpoint, where are present trends taking the world as we begin another new

year? What does the future hold for all of mankind? Jesus Christ plainly instructed us, "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36).

Clearly the Bible reveals the future and plainly tells us the *ultimate* outcome of present world trends, along with highlighting major occurrences along the way (see Isaiah 46:9-11). In this particular edition of "Current Events and Trends," we will take a figurative walk around specific regions of the world, flagging various areas experiencing serious to severe troubles. (Source: *The World in 2014*.)

Navigating the Middle East minefield

As things now stand, the United States has virtually ceased to be the global policeman it once was. Some observers now speak of a post-American Middle East. *The World in 2014* stated, "The big question in 2014 is how far America's rivals decide to test the resolve of the 'sole superpower'" ("No More Global Sheriff," p. 87).

Obviously the aftermath of this year's scheduled departure from Afghanistan poses considerable risks from the Taliban. Therefore, "America will hope for a 'decent interval' between withdrawal from Afghanistan and any subsequent disintegration of the political system left behind" (p. 87). Note also the article summarizing declining U.S. prestige on page 20 of this issue.

The recent deal with Iran presents yet another knotty dilemma for America and the Western world. Israel, France and Saudi Arabia are openly very skeptical about true Iranian intentions toward constructing a nuclear bomb. A blurb beneath the headline of an article by Bret Stephens in *The Wall Street Journal* expresses their frustration with the United States over this: "France, Israel and Saudi Arabia confront an administration conducting a make-believe foreign policy" ("Axis of Fantasy vs. Axis of Reality," Nov. 11, 2013).

But on Nov. 24, 2013, France went along with the United States, Britain, Germany, Russia and China in signing an agreement with Iran in which Iran agreed to halt its nuclear program for six months in return for a lifting of some sanctions. Many have hailed this a great success, while others are comparing it to the Munich agreement with Hitler before World War II. Ominously, the chairman of Iran's parliamentary committee for foreign policy and national security characterized the agreement this way the next day on Iranian TV: "After ten years, we have emerged victorious over the West . . . victorious heroes" (posted at MEMRITV.org, clip no. 4054).

Is Iran just playing for more time? Events in the not-too-distant future will tell the story. Remember that hardline Iranian leaders still want the death of America and Israel. Previously, as a *Daily Mail*

caption noted, "Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned that the country 'will not fall asleep on its watch again' as he spoke about the justification for [a] pre-emptive strike" (Oct. 16). And there has since been talk of old foes Israel and Saudi Arabia jointly striking at Iran, though the United States has warned them not to do so.

Libya poses yet another serious problem, as it continues to act more and more like a rogue state.



Burning apartment building in Homs, Syria

Oil production is down, with continuing civil hostilities causing refinery shutdowns. Various rebel groups, some of whom helped overthrow Gaddafi, are at odds with one another and with the sitting government—a government that recently established a committee to make the country's laws better conform to Islamic Sharia law.

Syria, aside from President Bashar al-Assad's continuing war with his own people (presently out of the world's spotlight), continues to be poisoned by sectarian strife between rebel groups, with Islamic jihadists apparently now gaining the upper hand.

To understand why this troubled region of the earth remains a political minefield, download or request our free booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. (Sources: *The World in 2014*, *Daily Mail*, *The Wall Street Journal*, MEMRITV.org, The Times [London], IsraelNationalNews.com.)

U.S. presidential leadership called into question

Of potentially greater concern than the Middle East minefield are the serious straits besetting U.S. President Barack Obama and his administration. Newspaper and magazine headlines, both from the United States and overseas, highlight and reflect a growing lack of confidence in American presidential leadership.

A headline from the *Financial Times* reads, "The Obama Presidency Is Not Over, but It Is Failing" (Nov. 17, 2013). The title of an Ezra Klein article in *Bloomberg Businessweek* laments, "How the iPod President Crashed: Obama's Broken Technology Promise" (Oct. 31). A London *Times* headline adds, "Weak Obama Won't Stop Iran Going Nuclear" (Nov. 19). A *Wall Street Journal* piece is titled, "Latest Troubles Imperil Obama's Pull With [the Democratic] Party" (Nov. 17). Other *Journal* headlines include "Europe Loses Trust in Obama" (Nov. 11), "Obama's Credibility Is Melting" (Oct. 23) and "The Unbearable Lightness of Obama" (Oct. 28).

The point in relating this is not to kick a man while he's down, especially one who's a national leader. Rather we should be praying for our nations and our nations' leaders. The apostle Paul tells us, "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we [Christians] may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence" (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

One of the principal problems at issue is the massive governmental health-care program being imposed on the nation (the troubled website designed to help implement it being only the tip of the iceberg). Remember that America's primary economic legacy has always been dominated by a strong national belief in capitalism and the free market. So when a socialist program of such massive scale is suddenly grafted into the U.S. economic picture, serious difficulties are certain to loom large.

This dilemma is not helped by the vast debt burden the nation currently finds itself under. (Sources: *The Times* [London], *Financial Times*, *Bloomberg Businessweek*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes*.)

European far right reemerges

During the last few years, threats to the survival of the euro have proved a principal factor in stirring up right-wing movements in opposition to European Union policies.

Fairly recently Marine Le Pen's Front National Party made substantial gains in a local election in the South of France. Also a Flemish far-right party has

Whether all this right-wing political activity will lead to extremism remains to be seen.

recently emerged in Belgium with an anti-immigrant program opposed to EU freedom-of-movement laws. Its leader seeks independence for Flanders with its six million Dutch speakers.



Marine Le Pen



Geert Wilders



Nigel Farage

Whether all this right-wing political activity will lead to extremism remains to be seen. Clearly the European right definitely bears watching! (Sources: *The Observer* [London], *Financial Times*, *The International New York Times*.)

Russia flexes its muscles

A feature article in the *Financial Times* quoted Georgian diplomat and foreign policy analyst Alexander Rondeli as joking "that while Russians may not be good at 'soft power'—the art of attraction—"they know how to do soft blackmail" (Neil Buckley and Roman Olearchyk, "Eastern Europe: Which Way to Turn?" Nov. 11, 2013).

One nation currently feeling the pressure is Ukraine. Russia has constructed 62 miles of barbed-wire fence along their common border. And the Russian natural gas monopoly Gazprom has demanded that cash-strapped Kiev pay its overdue gas bill of nearly \$900 million, threatening yet another Russian shutoff (James Marson, "Russia Warns Ukraine Over Gas Bill," *The Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 29).

Meanwhile the European Union and Ukraine are not far from closing a natural gas deal that would

free Kiev from relying on Russian gas. Clearly Brussels and Moscow are vying for Ukraine. Some see Russian bullying as driving Kiev into the arms of the European Union. Yet the EU has also been exercising a milder form of bullying to encourage Ukraine to throw in its lot with Europe by joining the EU.

Russian influence is also increasingly felt in its ever-wary neighbor Finland. Moreover, the *London Times* reported Nov. 14, "Egypt's military leaders hope to strike a \$2 billion arms deal with Russia today as Moscow seeks to capitalise on souring relations between Cairo and Washington."

But most disturbing of all are Moscow's plans to spend \$755 billion over the next decade to bolster its military. While the United States and Britain pare their defense budgets considerably, both Russia and China are substantially increasing theirs. (Sources: *Financial Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Times* [London].)

Typhoons, tornadoes and cyclones



Following on from October 2012 when Superstorm Sandy struck New Jersey and New York, leaving behind a trail of destruction, one particular typhoon in 2013 will also be remembered for its ferocity—Typhoon Haiyan, which hit the Philippines very hard on Nov. 8.

Possibly the strongest typhoon on record to make landfall, it devastated the lives of at least a million people, leaving thousands dead and thousands more hungry and homeless—with food, water and shelter

unavailable until help began to arrive later.

The UN estimated that nearly 700,000 people have been displaced. In response, the United States, Britain and other nations have sent assistance and are helping survivors to cope with the difficult and heartbreaking aftermath.

About a week later a series of twisters hit the American Midwest, wreaking destruction and leaving hundreds homeless with at least 10 dead. A cyclone soon followed in Sardinia with a leading city official calling it an *apocalyptic* storm.

In the prophecy Jesus Christ gave on the Mount of Olives in the days before His crucifixion, He foretold signs that would intensify during the time leading up to His return. He warned, "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places" (Matthew 24:7).

The Greek word translated "earthquakes" here is *seismos*, from which we derive the English words "seismic" and "seismology." But *seismos* can refer not only to earthquakes, but also to commotions of the air or water, such as gales and hurricanes.

Matthew 8:24 recounts how a violent storm overtook Jesus and His disciples in a boat until He miraculously calmed the winds and the waves. Here the Greek word *seismos* is translated "tempest" in English. Typhoons, hurricanes, tornadoes and cyclones can all fall within the meaning of this Greek term. (To understand more about the signs that will characterize conditions before Christ's second coming, download or ask for our free booklet *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*)

How can you make sense of the news?

So much is happening in the world, and so quickly. Where are today's dramatic and dangerous trends taking us? What does Bible prophecy reveal about our future? You're probably very concerned with the direction the world is heading. So are we. That's one reason we produce the *Beyond Today* daily TV commentaries—to help you understand the news in the light of Bible prophecy. This eye-opening program offers you a perspective so badly needed in our confused world—the perspective of God's Word. Visit us at ucg.org/beyond-today/daily!





Why the Massive Decline in America's Prestige?

Is America still “the land of the free and the home of the brave”? For a long time the United States was the envy of the world—even its enemies paying it grudging respect. This divinely blessed nation used to be the standard by which all other countries were compared. What happened to cause the nation’s disturbing fall from such soaring heights? *by John Ross Schroeder*

Foreign countries don’t look at the United States admiringly in the way they once did. The nation that put men on the moon, that brought an end to the Nazi threat and that came through the Cold War victorious faces increasingly difficult and threatening times as we move well into the 21st century.

Former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski asks, “Why is America’s global appeal waning, what are the symptoms of America’s domestic and international decline, and how did America waste the unique global opportunity offered by the peaceful end of the Cold War?” (*Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power*, 2012, p. 2). These are good questions, and you need to understand the answer!

Clearly many nations now view the United States with ill-disguised contempt. What has happened? Why is the nation not more like the America “chosen by God and commissioned by history to be a model to the world,” as one former U.S. president put it?

Israel was supposed to be a model nation

Millennia ago God chose ancient Israel to be His law-abiding, model nation as an example to other countries. As the Israelites prepared to enter the Promised Land, notice what Moses told them:

“Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for

this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?” (Deuteronomy 4:5-7, emphasis added throughout).

This is what God wants for the United States today. This is the way it should have been. But just like the Israel of old, America has jumped the tracks of sanity, has rejected our Creator’s directives on how to live and is beginning to really reap the tragic consequences of leaving Him out of its life. (For the biblical and historical evidence that the descendants of ancient Israel include America and Britain as well as other Western countries, download or request our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.)

Being a model nation matters not only in terms of national benefits, but also as a good example to other countries. Of course, they need a country that’s worth emulating. In Brzezinski’s words, “The world needs an America that is economically vital, socially appealing, responsibly powerful, strategi-



countries, not because of any inherent righteousness or other kind of superiority of its own (Deuteronomy 7:7-8; 9:5; Genesis 12:2-3). From its earliest days God expected the Israelites to be an example to the other nations around them, reflecting the divine blessings that would be poured out on all who worship and obey their Creator (Deuteronomy 14:2).

Clearly God expects similar righteous conduct from the United States.

Other nations take America's temperature

Today other nations are gauging recent U.S. debacles and publicly expressing their fears in anxious anticipation of the disturbing fallout. The Middle East remains a thorny case in point. American foreign policy in this explosive region has so bewildered and exasperated Saudi Arabia that the Saudis have been making loud noises about turning away from the United States to find more reliable partner nations.

Of course, one can debate the wisdom of America being so closely tied to Saudi Arabia in the first place, but it's reprehensible that strain in their relationship would come as a result of the United States being unreliable.

After witnessing America virtually aban-

eign leaders have loaned America trillions of dollars to finance Washington's spending binge. They are now incensed that the U.S. Treasury is creating billions of dollars out of thin air every month, steadily devaluing the government bonds the Treasury has sold to finance the nation's growing debt. This dubious process used to be called printing money. Now the money is created electronically, by mouse click, and the somewhat deceptive term *quantitative easing* carries the day.

Frankly, this currency inflation amounts to stealing from other countries as well as Americans themselves. Savings are destroyed, and everything costs more since more and more dollars are chasing the same goods. This helps explain why the United States will increasingly incur the hatred and displeasure of especially creditor nations if we persist in such reckless spending and fail to put our financial house in order. As Brzezinski correctly points out, "*Americans must understand that our strength abroad will depend increasingly on our ability to confront problems at home*" (p. 46).

More of America's friends and allies, such as Germany, France and Brazil, are infuriated that the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) has been caught spying on various leaders in dozens of countries, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel, by eavesdropping on their cell phones, among other things. Of course, the other countries likely spy on allies too but are not able to do so on as large a scale as the United States.

Part of Americans' overall problem lies in an appalling lack of interest in other countries across the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans. In far too many cases, *Americans neither know nor even care about foreign affairs.*

cally deliberate, internationally respected, and historically enlightened . . ." (pp. 2-3). Yet more than anything the world needs an America that is *morally upright*.

When a nation that has been divinely blessed as much as the United States increasingly turns away from obedience to God, this calls for divine corrective punishment. Our Creator mercifully forgave a repentant King David for his sins of murder and adultery (2 Samuel 12:13), but at the same time brought severe consequences on him and the nation because of the poor example this normally righteous king had set for enemy nations (verse 14). How other nations assess our behavior concerns Almighty God!

In fulfillment of His sure promises to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God established Israel as a nation for the purpose of bringing blessings to other

don long-time ally Egypt while embracing the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran, the Saudis became deeply concerned about the direction of U.S. foreign policy—to the point that on Nov. 8, 2013, the BBC reported that Saudi Arabia, seeing America wasn't serious about preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons, had reached an understanding that it could call on Pakistan for access to that country's nuclear arsenal as a counterweight to Iran's.

Likewise, long-time U.S. ally Egypt—seeing Washington treat it with hostility after President Mohamed Morsi, who represented the Muslim Brotherhood, was deposed—announced that it was seeking military aid from Russia because America was no longer a dependable ally.

It's frightening to see how quickly international opinion is turning against the United States. The Chinese and other for-

Public ignorance of world affairs

These trends have been reported fairly widely by international news organizations but have received little notice in U.S. media. Far too many Americans pay little or no attention to important current news and trends.

Part of Americans' overall problem lies in an appalling lack of interest in other countries across the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans. In far too many cases, Americans neither know nor even care about foreign affairs. The U.S. media must bear part of the responsibility.

As Brzezinski observed, "The uncomfortable truth is that the United States' public has an alarmingly limited knowledge of basic global geography, current events, and even pivotal moments in world history" (p. 52). Some years ago a youth singing group in America cancelled a long-anticipated



trip to a Scandinavian country because of a bombing incident in Rome in the far south of Europe some 1,200 miles (2,000 km) away. Europeans laughed. But the matter is more tragic than comic.

A 2002 survey showed that large percentages of young Americans could not locate on a world map such key Middle Eastern nations as Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. Events of the past 10 years may have improved these percentages somewhat, but Americans' knowledge of geography and current affairs remains in an abysmal state.

Must America continue its decline?

Notable American journalist Charles Krauthammer well knows that the present stakes are very high not only for the United States, but for the Middle East and the world at large. Daniel Johnson, editor of Britain's *Standpoint* magazine, summed up the current dilemma, stating that these things are happening "at a time when the world needs its only superpower to renew its civilisational mission" ("Decline Is a Choice," November 2013).

In this lead editorial, Johnson extolled Krauthammer's written contributions, saying, "Three times in three decades, Krauthammer has defined America's place in the world." We'll focus on the most recent of these assessments: "In 2009, he summed up the present predicament thus: 'For America today decline is not a condition, it is a choice.'"

And indeed that is what we see—a nation making willing choices to diminish its leadership role in the world—as the U.S. president put it, "leading from behind."

"Last June," Johnson continues, "Krauthammer put the matter even more bluntly: 'Obama is learning very late that, for a superpower, inaction is a form of action. You can abdicate, but you really can't hide. History will find you. It has found Obama.'"

Philip Stephens illustrated the point in the *Financial Times*: "If the experience first of Iraq and then of Libya shows the dan-



As a nation we have broken God's basic spiritual law, the Ten Commandments, across the board. *No commandment has escaped our personal and national violations.*

gers of varying types of intervention, then *Syria has revealed the awful perils that can accompany inaction*" ("America Will Not Easily Escape the Mideast Fires," Nov. 7, 2013).

Stephens began his article stating: "The Middle East is burning, and the US is getting out. There is an element of exaggeration in this observation, but only an element. *The dynamics of rising conflict and US disengagement have become mutually reinforcing. The higher the fires burn, the more Washington seems intent on turning away.*"

Frederick Forsyth adds even more perspective in his weekly column in the *Daily Express*: "Any suggestion that the West might now help the Syrians in revolt against the tyrant Assad, except with disaster aid, is as dead as the dodo. The reason is simple:

virtually the whole of the anti-Assad insurrection has been taken over by the Al Nusra fanatical extremists and their various allies and fellow jihadists.

"The Free Syrian Army is but a rump, now fighting and losing on two fronts. One is the increasingly confident of victory government army and its Hezbollah and militia allies. The other is against their so-called fellow rebels: the Al Qaeda fighters. *The West had its chance 18 months ago, dithered and finally blew it. There was a time when the rebels were winning*" ("No Stopping the Syrian Bloodbath," Nov. 8, 2013). Inaction prevailed.

We return to Daniel Johnson's editorial: "True, Obama has chosen decline. Last year, the voters chose Obama—again. *Does this mean that America has irrevocably chosen decline? Or is there still hope that*

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America may change course?” In his concluding remarks that follow, this magazine editor shows that he believes the United States will survive and see off its enemies.

But it remains for a Higher Power to ultimately decide America’s fate.

Repentance is a choice

The second of Johnson’s questions above haunts us all: “Is there still hope that America may change course?” To one degree or the other, most *Good News* writers have struggled with this same question. I am no exception.

Does God have a tipping point or a point of no return, however one wishes to express it? Clearly He does, as shown from Scripture itself. Twice in the book of Ezekiel



our Creator sternly addressed the people of Israel, warning of disaster to come on the land if its inhabitants refused to repent: “Even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness, says the Lord God” (Ezekiel 14:14, compare verse 20).

God is talking prophetically to the modern-day descendants of ancient Israel here, the lost 10 tribes (our booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* will show you where they are today). Few people understand that Israel had already gone into captivity well over 100 years before Ezekiel wrote his prophetic book. So this prophecy had to have been written for the descendants of Israel at the time of the end. But this prophecy itself does not specify exactly when that tipping point will occur. Only God can decide that.

Clearly real national repentance has to

occur at some point if the United States is to survive as a viable nation.

Former Treasury and State Department officials Roger Altman and Richard Haass wrote in *Foreign Affairs* magazine: “*The post-2020 fiscal outlook is down-right apocalyptic . . .* The United States is fast approaching a historic turning point: either it will act to get its fiscal house in order, thereby restoring the prerequisites of its primacy in the world, or it will fail to do so and *suffer both the domestic and the international consequences*” (“American Profligacy and American Power: The Consequences of Fiscal Irresponsibility,” November-December 2010).

However, greed, financial scandal, stealing funds and money mismanagement are only starters. As a nation we have broken God’s basic spiritual law, the Ten Commandments, across the board. No commandment has escaped our personal and national violations.

Another warning to repent

Having sent the 10 tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel into captivity over 100 years before, God was faced with the degrading sins of the other two tribes forming the southern kingdom of Judah. Finally He said to Jeremiah in exasperation, “Do not pray for this people, for their good” (Jeremiah 14:11). Toward the end their conduct was even worse than the previous behavior of the inhabitants of the northern nation, then already defeated and banished from their land for their many sins.

What do you do with a people gone badly awry, continually increasing in ungodly behavior? God’s emotions toward them had run the gamut. Previously He had said through Jeremiah, “Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem . . . and seek in her open places if you can find a man, if there is anyone who executes judgment, who seeks the truth, and I will pardon her” (Jeremiah 5:1).

You have to read the entire book of Jeremiah to get the full picture. In another place God said, “In vain I punished your people [the population of Judah]; they did not respond to correction” (Jeremiah 2:30, New International Version). The prophet himself saw this and cried out to God: “O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. O LORD, *correct me, but with justice*; not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing” (Jeremiah 10:23-24).

Part of being a Christian is to seek God’s

correction. As Hebrews 12:9-10 tells us: “We have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness” (NIV).

America needs divine corrective punishment—remembering that He is the merciful God of the Bible and that He takes no pleasure in punishing people.

He listened to Abraham’s persuasion and agreed that if there were only 10 righteous people left in the wicked city of Sodom, He would not destroy it. Alas, not even 10 could be found, but God did spare Abraham’s nephew Lot and his two daughters. Similarly, Moses persuaded God not to destroy the Israelites after they had made and worshipped a golden calf, sinning grievously even after God had delivered them from a harsh and cruel captivity with many astonishing miracles.

We cannot answer the question as to when the tipping point or the point of no return will occur. But the nation cannot continue forever to cavalierly play Russian roulette as if there was no God or He simply didn’t care one way or the other.

God has deep feelings for His children just like any of us who are parents do. After all, we were created in His image (Genesis 1:26-27) to be part of His family. As a loving Father He wants only the best for us, which includes turning from our childish, rebellious ways and turning toward Him in heartfelt, genuine repentance.

Why put off personal or national repentance? This is an important part of the message of *The Good News* magazine! **GN**

Learn More

You may be shocked to learn that the story of America’s astounding rise to national greatness was foretold centuries ago in the pages of your Bible. But so also was its staggering decline as a result of the nation turning its back on God and His Word, the Bible! You need to understand the whole incredible story! Download or request your free copy of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. And to understand what God desires and expects from you, be sure to read *The Road to Eternal Life*, also yours free for the asking!



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What's Behind America's Growing Dependency Society?

Has America become a nation dependent on government handouts? The evidence increasingly points that way. *by Mike Kelley*

During the first half of October 2013, another epic battle played out in Washington over the federal budget. Narrowly avoiding default, both sides decided to kick the can down the road—again. The contrast between those who believe government must provide ever more services and those who wonder how the nation will ever pay its mounting bills grew starkly defined.

Since the end of World War II, when the United States emerged as the world's greatest superpower, massive change has transformed the fabric of American society. A nation in which millions worked hard to defeat fascism and imperialism has turned into a nation increasingly on the dole.

As of early 2013 a staggering 160 million Americans (out of 325 million)—more than 49 percent—live in households receiving a monthly check from one or more government programs. Federal entitlements have expanded to include Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps, student education loans, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, and a host of other programs.

Over the past five years these programs have cost taxpayers a shocking \$3.7 trillion. This is more than the entire U.S. Gross National Product was in the early 1980s. It's more than five times what the U.S. government spent on NASA, education and

transportation during the same period.

Let's take a closer look at America's shift to dependency and what it means for the nation.

Expanding programs, expanding fraud

It all began with the granddaddy of social programs, Social Security. Enacted in the depths of the Great Depression in 1933, the original aim was to set up a plan for older workers to contribute to their retirement.

But today's glut of programs bears little resemblance to the simple program President Franklin Roosevelt had in mind. Today more than 58 million Americans receive a check each month from the Social Security Administration—a number predicted to swell to more than 97 million by 2035.

Many government programs are known for fraud and abuse. One part of Social Security, the disability insurance program (SSDI), has grown especially fast in recent years. Originally intended to pay benefits to the truly disabled, the program is being investigated for fraudulent approvals, enabling perhaps millions of able-bodied Americans to receive monthly checks of up to \$2,500 from the government.

While the vast majority of those receiving Social Security disability benefits qualify legally, fraud in the program has been well documented. A typical pattern involves older workers who have lost their jobs due to the

recent recession. When unemployment benefits run out, the next logical step for many is to claim a disability that will keep federal checks coming. If the initial claim is denied, there are always lawyers with TV ads claiming to know just how to get those benefits coming.

But the problem doesn't stop there. Frequent exposés reveal thousands of other Americans fraudulently receiving benefits, using ruses such as the names of dead people or people who have left the country. It all adds up to billions in fraud and abuse annually.

Like other entitlements, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, more commonly known as the Food Stamp program, began with a lofty purpose. America has always had an underclass of truly poor people facing chronic hunger. The Food Stamp program was enacted to provide a nutritional "safety net" for these individuals.

But the Food Stamp program has exploded, like so many other federal entitlement programs. Since 2007, the program has mushroomed from a \$35 billion outlay to more than \$80 billion in 2012, with more than 45 million Americans now getting food stamps. Food stamp rolls are growing at 75 times the rate of new job creation!

Medicare and Medicaid explosion

Almost in lockstep with America's growing dependence on government-provided food is the growing dependence on free or reduced-price medical care. Medicaid, a combined federal-state program set up to provide health-care benefits to the poor, covered an estimated 82.5 million Americans, or 27

percent of the population, as of late 2011.

An additional 46.5 million were on the Medicare rolls for elderly health care and health-care supplements. That number is rising rapidly as millions of baby boomers reach retirement age.

Medicare rolls are growing due to an estimated 3.6 million retiring baby boomers being added each year. A continued soft economy, with higher than normal unemployment, is producing what some observers are calling a permanent underclass, most of whom rely on Uncle Sam for their health care.

Here, too, widespread fraud and corruption compounds the problem. Medicaid fraud, which usually involves a hospital, nursing home, health-care professional, ambulance service or pharmacy overbilling Medicare, has grown into a \$30 billion problem, or roughly 10 percent of the program's cost. State-administered Medicaid programs are especially fraud-ridden. New York, for example, budgets more than \$50 billion of

recession and slow recovery have basically given up looking for work. Some have apparently done the math, asking themselves why they should work when they can have as great or greater equivalent income with food stamps, free health care and unemployment benefits for up to two years.

So it's not surprising that the percentage of the adult population working has fallen to 63 percent, the lowest percentage since 1978. Over the past five years, more than 10 million U.S. adults have left the labor force. It's a bad downward trend, and many economists see no indication this is improving.

Economists blame failure to create jobs and the rapid pace of retirements of baby boomers as two reasons for the falling labor participation rate. And a third reason they now give is more Americans going on Social Security disability, with 8.8 million Americans receiving Social Security Disability benefits—a number that has doubled since 1995.

Could it be that many Americans have

disrupted the lives of millions, bringing hunger, deprivation, and the loss of homes, farms and businesses. As the Depression dragged on in the early 1930s, Americans began to look to government for a solution.

No longer was the role of the federal government limited to keeping the peace and maintaining national security. Now its job, in the eyes of millions, was also to stamp out poverty, provide old-age pensions and health care, pay for college educations, maintain a basic level of nutrition, support illegitimate children, and on and on. The increasing role of the federal government gained more traction with President Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" of the 1960s, which was promoted as the way to eradicate poverty (in spite of almost \$15 trillion spent on anti-poverty programs since then, the U.S. poverty rate remains essentially unchanged).

Over the past 30 to 40 years a country that once prided itself on self-reliance became addicted to government aid. A 2008 study by the Pew Research Center revealed a shift in preference toward a more socially activist role for the federal government, with millions seeing it as government's role to aid the disadvantaged.

The report also noted that this coincided with a diminished role of religion in daily life. More than half said the government should help more needy people even if it adds to the nation's debt. This was up from just 41 percent who felt this way in 1994.

Have many Americans simply grown tired of working or see not working as a more attractive financial alternative?

its \$121 billion state budget on the program, and estimates that fraud costs it as much as \$18 billion of that amount.

Decades of dependence on Medicare and Medicaid helped pave the way for the newest health-care entitlement, the Affordable Care Act, otherwise known as Obamacare, the first major step towards instituting nationwide socialized medicine.

Working on a largely European model, Obamacare continues to remove health-care decisions from doctors and forces millions of basically healthy Americans to buy health insurance to extend coverage to some 42 million Americans who haven't been covered by any health insurance plan. To encourage participation, Americans earning up to four times the federal poverty level are to be given a federal subsidy to buy insurance.

The law's requirements have polarized Americans unlike virtually anything that has come before it. Millions resent being forced to buy health insurance or facing fines if they fail to do so. And other millions of insured citizens are likewise being forced to turn to government "health exchanges" for coverage at rates much higher than they were paying previously.

Why bother to work?

In the face of generous federal benefits, many Americans who lost jobs during the

simply grown tired of working, or see not working as a more attractive financial alternative?

Major shifts in American attitudes

These trends reflect a fundamental change in attitude. A nation that traditionally prided itself on hard work and self-reliance now looks increasingly to Washington as the source for supplying all needs. Uncle Sam has become the "rich uncle" to many.

Seemingly lost in all this social change is the diminished role of the family. Since the dawn of civilization, people looked first to their family, and then to a lesser extent to their neighbors and community, for help when hungry or sick or destitute.

This strong family and community influence was long a part of America, when rural folks would assist each other in clearing land, building houses and raising crops. Families looked after not only their own, but others as well. If families had to leave home for a time, they could count on neighbors to look after their property.

But the central role of the family began to erode rapidly in the 20th century. Beginning with President Franklin Roosevelt's "New Deal" of the 1930s, American attitudes towards governmental assistance began to change. The Great Depression at that time

Has America reached a tipping point?

Has America reached a tipping point? Is the nation's growing dependence on government programs—with half of American households getting a check from the government each month—at the point of no return?

At his inauguration in January 1961, newly elected President John F. Kennedy issued a famous challenge to his fellow Americans: "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country." Sadly, millions have reversed that into "Ask not what you can do for your country—ask what your country can do for you." And to them the answer is—*plenty!*

Free food, free housing, free cell phones, free education, free health care, free money, and on it goes. So long as it's free, why not?

But as the saying goes, there's no such thing as a free lunch. Eventually the bill comes due. America's national debt recently passed the \$17 trillion mark—up from \$10.6 trillion only five years earlier. But that figure pales in comparison to the federal government's total unfunded obligations



for Medicare and Social Security, currently estimated at \$43 trillion to as much as \$126 trillion, depending on which set of economic assumptions are plugged in.

At the latter figure, each American taxpayer is on the hook for a staggering \$1.1 million! But even at the lower number, each taxpayer's share is some \$375,000.

Obviously this is an unsustainable path, driven by far too many people who feel entitled to "free" government benefits paid for by the government forcibly taking from their producing neighbors—and abetted by

unscrupulous politicians and government officials who have learned that the sure way to get votes is by promising ever more benefits from the public treasury.

Such things are clearly not God's way. Yes, God commands love toward neighbor, and He instituted laws and instructions designed to care for those in difficult circumstances (see "Dependence, Independence and Helping Those in Need").

But He surely doesn't endorse a society in which half the citizens live off the labors of the other half, with a government incur-

ring massive and unsustainable debt that can realistically never be paid back. This is nothing more than government-endorsed (and enforced) theft—a blatant breaking of the Eighth Commandment, "You shall not steal" (Exodus 20:15).

Where will this end? Sadly, without a major change of heart, the United States will follow the pattern of other great empires that have gone before—disappearing, as the saying goes, not with a bang but with a whimper, victim of its citizens' own spiritual blindness and greed. **GN**

Dependence, Independence and Helping Those in Need

Jesus Christ said in Matthew 26:11, "The poor you have with you always." Does this mean we ignore those less well off, or that we acknowledge the poor and do what we can to alleviate their suffering?

The context of Christ's statement was that a woman had just poured a vial of expensive oil on His head. Some of His disciples were indignant at what they thought was waste, declaring, "This oil could have been sold and the money given to the poor." Christ upbraided their behavior: "Why do you trouble this woman? She has done a good work for Me." And He went on to explain that what she'd done was fitting, effectively anointing His body for burial (verses 7-12).

Was Jesus denigrating the poor? Was He saying there are more important things than helping them? What should be our attitude towards charity and helping those in such circumstances?

God's Word makes it clear we should help those truly in need, such as widows and orphans (see James 1:27). Notice 1 John 3:17: "But whosoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?"

Yet Scripture nowhere makes a case for income equality—recognizing that talents, blessings, and time and opportunity are not equally distributed. Still, there is no denying the obligation of those who are financially blessed to make a reasonable effort to help those truly in need.

When the province of Judea, home to thousands of Jewish Christians,

experienced a drought, Paul called on the more prosperous Christians in other areas to come to their aid. Notice Paul's clear instructions in 1 Corinthians 16:1-3, where he directs that a collection of food and other needed goods be set aside so he could personally see to it that this aid would be sent to Jerusalem.

But the Bible also makes another clear case—that we must *provide for ourselves* if we are able. The same apostle Paul who gave orders for a major food drive for famine-stricken Christians in Judea gave another command to the church in Thessalonica: "For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: if anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

Paul scolded those he termed "busybodies"—who spent their time spreading gossip and meddling in the affairs of others rather than working productively: "Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread" (verse 12). He also wrote that we should work as though we were working for Jesus Christ and not merely for other human beings (Colossians 3:22-23).

And it is not wrong if our work leads to wealth. God's Word gives us many examples of righteous people such as Abraham who achieved wealth through diligent effort, the use of wisdom and the blessings of God. He became quite wealthy, with vast herds of livestock and many servants. God had blessed him greatly. We know that Job possessed vast wealth before his trials

(Job 1:1), and afterward God blessed him with even more (Job 42:12).

So what might be our standard as we grapple with this question? The Bible teaches that Christians should work, be productive and strive for a good standard of living. It also teaches we should help those in financial difficulties. There's no contradiction here. What's important is that we strive to find the right balance, and the Bible provides key principles to help us in doing so.

One of those keys is *moderation*. Notice Paul's teachings on balance and moderation: "And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things" (1 Corinthians 9:25). He refers to the physical as well as spiritual principle of moderation in everything we do, just as an athlete conditions his body through moderation in food and drink. God's Word teaches

on His ability and authority to forgive: "But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered and said unto them, 'Why are you reasoning in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, "Your sins are forgiven you," or to say, "Rise up and walk"?' (Luke 5:22).

When considering giving aid, consider whether the aid is truly needed or whether it is really the best way to help. Many today are truly needy, but society is full of those who masquerade as needy to prey on the benevolence of others.

The United Church of God, publisher of *The Good News*, recognizes the need to help others and follows up on that need through projects that teach self-reliance and "paying it forward" to help others. From helping to supply and staff a clinic that provides medical services for more than 10,000 in a poverty-stricken village

When considering giving aid, consider whether the aid is truly needed or whether it is really the best way to help.

that we should balance our charitable contributions and direct help with other priorities.

Another key is *discernment*. A person or group of people may seem to be needy, but to borrow a scene from *The Wizard of Oz*, a look behind the curtain may reveal a reality very different from what the person or group presents.

Christ set the example of discernment in His many encounters with the religious leaders of His day. He had the ability to perceive their thoughts, as He did when some confronted Him

in Malawi to installing concrete floors to replace dirt floors in Guatemala, to providing livestock to help plow fields and provide milk and income to needy farmers in several nations, we strive to reach out with our limited resources to help where help is needed.

No doubt about it, it is our responsibility to help those in need. Christians who are blessed financially should share with those who are truly needy. But use moderation and discernment, godly principles that, along with our generosity, will help ensure we are doing the right thing to help others.

Crucial Lessons From Knowing God as Our Creator

The entire universe stands as witness to the awesome mind behind its existence. It was clearly created by a Creator, and that Creator labels any who would deny this as a fool (Romans 1:20; Psalm 14:1; 53:1).

This study is not designed to convince readers that all of nature was created by God and not the product of mindless evolution. We have other material that covers that (download or request our free booklets *Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?* and *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?*).

Rather, this study is for those who already believe and know that God is our Creator. It is written to help you build on that foundation and learn some profound lessons. We hope you will come away with greater understanding of, awareness of, and adoration for our awesome God.

How God reveals Himself

► Does our Creator expect us to learn about Him from His creation?

“For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being *understood from what has been made*, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Romans 1:20-21, New International Version).

The evidence of an all-powerful Creator and many of His attributes are clearly seen *by those who are willing to see!* But many do “not like to retain God in their knowledge” (Romans 1:28). That is mainly because they don’t want anyone telling them what they can and cannot do, including God.

► Is what we see enough to understand God and His ways?

“How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (Romans 11:33).

Thus, God must intervene to help us grasp what He wants us to know. As pointed out above, God is invisible to us. He does reveal much about Himself through creation, but there is far more that we need to understand.

Indeed, God reveals Himself to us in two ways. The foremost way is through acting or communicating to enable others to perceive. For the most part this comes through God’s written revelation, the Bible—“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God . . . that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)—and spiritual help to give us understanding.

The other way is what we’ve been discussing—the evidence of creation, because it was “God who created *all things* through Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 3:9, emphasis added throughout). The

complexity of our planet’s life in all its forms is evidence and proof of a supremely intelligent and wise Creator. There is a cause for every effect, and the cause of creation is God!

It’s not necessary for every person to make a formal study of creation, but it’s important that in our thoughts we continually make the connection between the creation and the Creator.

We can be impressed with visible things and fail to give due credit to the invisible Creator of those things. We must be far more impressed with the Creator than the creation. The apostle Paul spoke of those who “worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator” (Romans 1:25, NIV). That we must never do!

The Creator deserves honor and praise from those who exist because of Him

► Do even angels worship God because He is the Creator?

The 24 angelic elders in heaven say, “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created” (Revelation 4:11).

An angel said “with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’” (Revelation 14:7).

If even the mighty angels of the spirit realm worship and adore God because of His role as the Creator, should we not do the same?

► Did God command a regular remembrance of His role as our Creator?

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work . . . For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:8-11).

God wants His people to rest and refrain from normal work activities each Sabbath day (see our free booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest*). While we are more relaxed each Sabbath, one of the most valuable things we should do is reflect on God’s creation. When we’re able, it’s inspiring to go outdoors, examine the things God has made and rejoice in the wonders we see.

Think about these lines from the hymn by Isaac Watts, “I Sing the Mighty Power of God”:

*Lord, how Thy wonders are displayed, where-e’er I turn my eye,
If I survey the ground I tread or gaze upon the sky.*

*There’s not a plant or flow’r below, but makes Thy glories known,
And clouds arise and tempests blow, by order from Thy throne.*



Seven important lessons

Once we know that God created everything, that knowledge should shape our thinking and guide our actions. We should ask ourselves: What implications should I draw from that conclusion?

Let's consider seven great lessons that God's creation teaches us. When we are highly aware of these lessons, we are glorifying God as our Creator.

► Lesson 1: The creation should teach us constant awareness of our Creator and reverence for Him.

"I will lift up my eyes to the hills—from whence comes my help? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1-2).

"Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, until He has mercy on us" (Psalm 123:1-2).

"Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things [the heavenly bodies], who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name" (Isaiah 40:26).

Psalm 147:4 reaffirms that God named all the stars.

It's not enough for us to *occasionally* acknowledge God as Creator. We should regularly look *beyond* the visible creation to the invisible God. The invisible spirit world is more real, more powerful and more permanent than the material world we see. May everything we see remind us of Him whom we don't see!

Indeed, God is the Designer, Artist, Architect, Engineer, Creator, Lifegiver, Lawgiver and Sustainer. Meditate daily about your Maker.

► Lesson 2: The Bible and creation teach us much about God's desires and concerns.

"Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good" (Genesis 1:31).

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Psalm 19:1).

"Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all the depths; fire and hail, snow and clouds; stormy wind, fulfilling His word; mountains and all hills; fruitful trees and all cedars; beasts and all cattle; creeping things and flying fowl; kings of the earth and all peoples; princes and all judges of the earth; both young men and maidens; old men and children" (Psalm 148:7-12).

Creation teaches us that our Creator never does shoddy work. Every creature is a masterpiece, because that's the Creator's nature! Clearly, God loves beauty, harmony, careful attention to detail, precision, accuracy, symmetry, balance and humor. So we should appreciate and practice these virtues.

God is the role model for Ecclesiastes 9:10—whatever God does, He does it with His might and does His best.

Obviously, God loves variety. Someone said that God must love beetles because He made so many of them. God made great variety among and even within species! The whole world is God's zoo and circus with fascinating creatures and comical animal acts. One of the thrills of travel is seeing the different flora and fauna and topography in every part of the earth. Doesn't this tell us that we should appreciate variety, including the variety of people's personalities?

We also see that God is practical: Everything works! Everything has its purpose and fits harmoniously into the earth's web of life. Many pairs of creatures have a symbiotic relationship. This teaches us cooperation, teamwork and interdependence.

► Lesson 3: The Bible and creation teach us of God's great love for us and all mankind.

"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth'" (Genesis 1:26).

"What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? . . . You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet" (Psalm 8:4-6).

"Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds?" (Luke 12:24).

God supplied us with an operator's manual, the instruction book for life, so we need to read the book! In fact, it is only through the Bible that we can learn the reason for our existence.

What an incomparable honor—to be created in God's image! And what love and generosity in giving us the earth and everything on it to use and enjoy! As undeserving as we are, God takes very good care of us.

Our gratitude should forever compel us to love God in return. "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

► Lesson 4: The Bible and creation teach us to take care of God's property.

"Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to *tend and keep it*" (Genesis 2:15).

"Or don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have from God? *You are not your own*, for you were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, *which are God's*" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, World English Bible).

"Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2:4).

The Creator of everything is the Owner of everything. Therefore, as stewards and caretakers of God's property, we should "tend and keep it" very carefully. God would have us conserve our resources rather than be wasteful or unnecessarily destructive.

"A righteous man regards the life of his animal" (Proverbs 12:10). We should have the heart of a good shepherd, not the attitude of a "hireling" who "does not care about the sheep" (John 10:11-13). A caring shepherd tries to rescue every sheep that goes astray (Matthew 18:11-13). We must dutifully provide for those under our care (1 Timothy 5:8).

Keep in mind that people are much more important to God than animals. It's sinful to be a pantheist or to worship "created things rather than the Creator" (Romans 1:25, NIV).

► Lesson 5: The Bible and creation teach us to look to our Maker for instructions.

"Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the LORD your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess" (Deuteronomy 6:1).

"And it [a copy of the Scriptures] shall be with him [Israel's human king], and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he

may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes” (Deuteronomy 17:19).

“You are good, and do good; teach me Your statutes . . . You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies . . . Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:68, 98, 105).

Who best understands a product? The inventor or manufacturer. Similarly, our Creator knows best. He is the expert, with perfect understanding of His creation. He understands us much better than we understand ourselves, so we need to trust His guidance.

God supplied us with an operator’s manual, the instruction



book for life, so we need to read the book! In fact, it is only through the Bible that we can learn the reason for our existence. (For a clear explanation of why you were born, please see our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?*)

► **Lesson 6: The Bible and creation teach us to rely on our Maker for help and healing to solve every problem.**

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7).

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Philippians 4:6, NIV).

“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (James 5:14-15).

Since God designed and made everything, He knows how to repair everything and solve every problem. He gave us a lifetime guarantee in the sense that we can go to Him for help and healing at any time.

When people get into trouble, they tend to try everything else before trying God. When no cures work people will say, “You’re in God’s hands.” Well, how about relying on God *from the start* for His guidance, help and healing? This does not mean we should not then do what we can, such as seeking treatment.

God has given us a marvelous immune system; our bodies automatically try to heal themselves. In addition, God often miraculously heals those who pray for His healing. David summed up God’s love and mercy, saying it is God “who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases” (Psalm 103:3).

Of course, we also need God to heal us of all kinds of spiritual

and emotional problems. God “heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (Psalm 147:3).

► **Lesson 7: The Bible and creation teach us who our Master is—the Ruler we must obey.**

“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?” (Deuteronomy 10:12-13).

“Observe and obey all these words which I command you, that it may go well with you and your children after you forever, when you do what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 12:28)

“But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). The word “Lord” means Master or Ruler.

Who’s in charge? The Creator and Owner of everything! The Master defines what is right and wrong and commands us to do what is right. Our attitude toward God’s authority should be a positive “Yes, Lord!”

We are God’s servants and children. God makes the rules. We are to obey our Father through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ—out of love and loyalty and for our own good.

God’s instructions must be *applied*. God commands us to *follow* His instructions.

God’s laws *reveal the nature and character of God*. By obeying His laws, *we are learning to think and act like Him*.

God’s generosity, mercy and willingness to forgive whenever we are sincerely sorry for our sins can be summed up in the biblical concept of grace. But grace is not permission to sin. God expects us to keep trying our best to obey Him.

God’s laws include huge rewards for obedience and huge penalties for disobedience. One of the greatest penalties is the absence of God’s blessings. The ultimate penalty for those who stubbornly refuse to obey is eternal death rather than eternal life.

Never forget

We are “creatures,” meaning created beings. We must be constantly aware that we must give account to God for all our thoughts, words and actions. We must never feel so independent and self-reliant that we fail to depend on God. As Jesus told His disciples, “Without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

The prophet Hosea wrote, “For Israel has forgotten his Maker” (Hosea 8:14). We must never do that. Awareness of our Creator should be the foundation of our worldview, outlook and daily thoughts. Let’s do our best to remember these crucial lessons from knowing God is our Creator!

Again, the creation itself can help us in this. For example, we see so many different kinds of plants, trees, flowers, animals, birds, fish, insects, etc., yet in our prayers we probably tend to speak only of God’s creation in general. With so much to take in, we tend to lose the childlike fascination and awe at God’s wonderful creatures. We suggest that quite often when you look at flora and fauna around you, you thank God for individual creatures.

Each prayer can be silent or spoken, simple and reverent, like, “Thank you, Father, for that lovely flower!” In fact, if you’re able we suggest you start right now with a glance out the window or a walk outside. Walk and talk with your Creator! **GN**



Follow Me

Beyond Our Personal Patmos

The apostle John was in exile on the island of Patmos when he received the vision he recorded as the book of Revelation. His glimpses of heaven reveal an important key for dealing with the problems we face on earth. *by Robin Webber*

Most of you are familiar with the opening lines of the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 5:9-10). These words, taught during Jesus Christ's Sermon on the Mount, may match our sincerest desire, but too often the sheer gravity of circumstances here below can draw our attention away from remembering Jesus' admonition as to where to focus our attention.

It's often been said, "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other

plans." When our life seems derailed by trials, it can hinder our vision of God sitting on His throne, transcendent above our overcrowded fishbowl down here. It's all too easy for our hearts to become isolated from God's promises for our ultimate spiritual well-being.

The book of Revelation shows that we must keep our focus in the right place to bear with the hardships of life and ultimately experience the blessings God has in store for us.

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The last book of the Bible shows that we must keep our focus in the right place to bear with the hardships of this life and ultimately experience the wonderful blessings God has in store for us.

Exile and revelation

The apostle John was present when Christ taught about prayer during the Sermon on the Mount, and he was reintroduced to the power of Jesus' words in his time of need nearly 60 years later. Toward his life's end he wrote in Revelation 1:9, "I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of

Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ."

Most reliable sources indicate that John was exiled on this tiny Aegean island off the western coast of modern-day Turkey during the turbulent persecution of Christians under the cruel Roman Emperor Domitian.

Consider for a moment what may have been running through his mind as he looked down a craggy cliff to the churning waters crashing against the rocks below. Here he was, isolated on this remote island, unable to carry out the duties committed to him by his beloved Lord and Master decades earlier.

What thoughts did John have as he considered his state? Did he wonder where God was, if he had been abandoned to end his days in exile after giving so much of His life to serving His Master and spreading the gospel?

Perhaps you've had similar questions plaguing you at times. It may seem that at times we're also cut off and alone, exiled to our own personal Patmos!

Whether such questions were on John's mind then or are in yours right now, we do know that John was given reassurance about the future—reassurance that through him has also been given to us: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God [the Father] gave Him [Christ] to show His servants—things which must shortly take place" (Revelation 1:1).

Christ was going to share with John the broad sweep of events that the world and His Church would experience in the time

ahead, culminating in the climatic appearance of "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1).

Much of this heavenly vision would be unfathomably joyous, while other portions could cause utter heartache as Christ reveals what would happen to God's true servants in this age. So He lays a foundation of hope lest this astonishing disclosure be devastating to John and to others receiving the message.

Gaining a heavenly perspective first

Christ knew how to best reveal to John how His Father's will would "be done on earth as it is in heaven." Before revealing the future, He gives John a glimpse of what "in heaven" entails, opening a window on something wonderful to anchor our existence below.

This was to be the foundation of all revelation that would follow. That is, "first things first." It was as if Jesus, the risen Christ, was saying "Follow Me" not only by teaching us what to pray, but what to experience with our entire being when approaching the presence of "our Father in heaven."

God invites John to gain a heavenly perspective of what's ageless beyond our fleeting human existence and trials (compare Colossians 3:2; 2 Corinthians 4:17-18; Romans 8:18-23). Let's follow along and understand how we might move beyond our "personal Patmos" that may be isolating us not merely from others, but from God.

The revelation commences with the sound of "a loud voice, as of a trumpet," declaring, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last" (Revelation 1:10-11).

Jesus Christ begins to unveil what the Father gave Him to communicate by personally disclosing His eternal existence—encompassing everything that has been, is and will yet be. He and the Father had no origin but simply *exist*, beyond the bounds of time and space, and are the Source of all other life.

In this vision, Jesus appears in the midst of the seven lampstands (verse 13) symbolizing the churches that were being challenged in the first century, as well as



The visions that the apostle John received on Patmos not only revealed the future, but helped him—and us—focus our mind and thoughts on the One who will bring it all to pass.

all God's people who would follow down through the ages to our time. He's not an absentee savior or cosmic bystander, but as the Good Shepherd He is in the midst of His spiritual flock even when we are unaware of His presence.

A snapshot of the roles of Christ

Here we are given a snapshot of God's heavenly throne with a description of Jesus as "One like the Son of Man" wearing a garment that reached down to His feet, a golden band encircling His chest (Revelation 1:13).

It's here that God wants us to accompany John and approach His throne with the picture firmly in mind of One who has been like us in the flesh (as the Son of Man), but is now garbed in a gleaming robe that points to His role as our King and High Priest and God's ultimate heavenly Messenger.

This picture of God's throne above describes Christ as One who has "in his right hand seven stars, [and] out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength" (verse 16). The stars signify angels or messengers of God's people (verse 20), the sword is God's Word (see Hebrews 4:12), and His blazing brilliance is the radiance of divine glory (see Hebrews 1:3).

Here John—and we—face the reality that God has placed Christ in absolute control of the universe. He has a grasp of all and has the power to carry out divine judgment on His Father's behalf.

Notice also that the first words Christ mentions after revealing Himself are some

that we can never hear enough: "Do not be afraid" (verse 17). He says this as He lays His right hand on John, showing deep personal care and friendship.

Why are we to not be afraid? He goes on to declare again: "I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore . . . And I have the keys of Hades [the grave] and of Death" (verses 17-18).

It is a claim that He alone can make, having existed in both worlds of life and death and now owning both! He's no stranger to the gravity of the world's pulls and the

isolation of abandonment.

This claim echoes what He had declared as the God of Israel in the Old Testament (see John 1:1-3, 14; 1 Corinthians 10:4), stating then: "Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure' . . . Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it" (Isaiah 46:9-11).

Approaching the unapproachable

The great Revelator, Jesus Christ, continues in Revelation 4 to open up God's throne room to John and to us. John describes the vision: "Behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald" (verses 2-3).

Here the power, glory and holiness of God's nature and attributes are captured in a scene of precious jewels that dazzle and shimmer so brightly as to be nearly blinding—described elsewhere as "unapproachable light" (1 Timothy 6:16).

It is the same throne David prayed toward when He said of God: "You are very great; You are clothed with honor and majesty, who cover Yourself with light as with a garment, who stretch out the heavens like a curtain" (Psalm 104:1-2).

Notice that John's vision of this scene "in

heaven" is stamped with a rainbow, which may harken back to the rainbow after Noah's Flood (Genesis 9:11-17), perhaps signifying God's promise of tempering His judgments in the harrowing prophecies being revealed to John (and see Ezekiel 1:28).

Revelation concludes with the establishment of "a new heaven and a new earth" in which there is "no more sea"—no more of the barrier that had kept John confined on Patmos—with God the Father and the New Jerusalem coming down to the new earth (Revelation 21:1-3).

Ultimately there will be no barriers between God and those who truly seek Him as their Heavenly Father, who hallow His name by what they do and not merely by what they have heard, and who yearn for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

This same passage captures God the Father declaring, in similar manner to Christ's opening words in Revelation: "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts" (verse 6). Indeed, God sees things He has planned as if they already are (compare Romans 4:17), and He sees *you* in that picture with Him.

The invitation is at hand for you as much as for the apostle John. Christ clearly states: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and He with Me" (Revelation 3:20).

The key to keeping that door open is found in Jesus' opening words, which reveal that we heed His call of "Follow Me" by first focusing our attention on "our Father in heaven" before looking around down here. It's the key that opens up the book of Revelation. It's the key that helps us to, in the words of Hebrews 4:16, "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." **GN**

Learn More

We have so much to learn about God! This article and the book of Revelation give us a glimpse of His power, might and majesty. But the Bible reveals much more about our Creator and Heavenly Father! To learn more, download or request a free copy of our booklet *Who Is God?* today!



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How Is God's Work Supported?

Jesus Christ told His followers to proclaim the gospel throughout the world, teach those whom God would call and care for His people. How did He expect that work to be funded? *by John Ross Schroeder*

It's undeniable the main motivation of many religious charlatans out there seems to be personal profit. This tends to put people off supporting worthy religious causes. Yet the work of the Church of God does have monetary needs. And the need for that definitely did not end with the conclusion of the apostolic era.

Jesus Christ instructed His apostles and in principle all of His followers who would come afterwards, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15, New International Version). And He further commissioned them, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20, emphasis added throughout).

So the Church of God today still has an ongoing mission to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom of God to the world and help those who respond become Christ's disciples. This is a big job, and God has instituted the method of financing it, with many participating. That method is tithing, the setting aside of a tenth of our income to Him.

Ongoing need for preaching the gospel

Jesus did not begin His Church in the first century only to see it perish in the second or thereafter. Christ knew that in the main His apostles would be martyred, but He also knew that their teaching would continue down through the centuries. In prayer the night before His death, Jesus said, "I do not pray for these alone [His disciples at that time], but also for those who will believe in Me through their word" (John 17:20).

Just before being martyred, the apostle Peter promised in his last letter, "Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always

have a reminder of these things after my decease" (2 Peter 1:15). The apostolic teachings and writings have been preserved for us down through the ages in the pages of the New Testament.

God the Father sent His Son into the world with a message of hope and eternal salvation. Christ gave the commission to share that message directly to His specially chosen 12 apostles. They preached the gospel of the Kingdom, established Church congregations and ordained elders and deacons who would continue to spread the good news and serve God's people. There would always be an ongoing need for teachers and pastors to proclaim the good news of God's coming Kingdom and spiritually guide and care for those who come into the fellowship of the Church.

Although few in numbers, the Church that Jesus built is very much alive today, actively preaching and publishing the true gospel (to learn more, download or request our free booklet *The Church Jesus Built*). God continues to add members to the present Church as He calls them to salvation (see John 6:44, 65; Acts 2:39, 47), whether through preaching on television, on the Internet, in printed publications or in person.

Shining God's light and reaping His harvest

Satan the devil has filled this world with darkness of every conceivable kind. He is "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4). The apostle Paul labeled our time "this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4). The devil has influenced today's mass media to promote evil or sin—the contravening of God's laws—throughout the world.

As a whole our present generation has virtually lost touch with God and, as a tragic consequence, gone badly awry. In ancient times our Creator personally lamented the apostasy of the nation of

Judah, exclaiming, "My people have forgotten Me days without number" (Jeremiah 2:32). How true today!

Yet Christ told His disciples: "*You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden . . . Let your light so shine before men*, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:14, 16). God's Church today must be visible. It also must take God's precious gospel message to the nations. The apostle Paul wrote, "Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16). The same holds true today.

After the apostles had been chosen and personally taught by Christ, He began to focus their attention on God's spiritual harvest of people to be saved: "Behold I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest. And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life" (John 4:35-36).

However, the apostles were not to do this alone. Educated and qualified elders would be urgently required to help reap this spiritual harvest in the midst of a hostile world. Jesus plainly instructed: "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest [God the Father] to send out laborers into His harvest" (Matthew 9:37-38).

"The work to which I have called them"

In the ancient Syrian city of Antioch (Turkish Antakya today) there were a number of prophets and teachers (Acts 13:1). God instructed them through His Spirit:

"As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, 'Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul [later Paul] for the work to which I have called them.' Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away" (verse 2-3).

With God's full blessing, Paul and Barnabas then began to spread the gospel to various cities on their travels (Acts 13:6, 14, 51; 14:6-7, etc.). In fact the first-century apostles and evangelists (preachers of the gospel) took the good news to the known civilized world.

This evangelistic mission was sometimes called “the work” (Acts 13:2; 15:38). Today we still refer to it this way or as *God’s work*.

The work God entrusted to Christ’s disciples in Jerusalem nearly 2,000 years ago must go on—and it still must be financed today. What is God’s method for this?

The law of tithing

Is the financial law God revealed long before in the Old Testament no longer applicable today, as many contend? Did Jesus cancel tithing—the giving of a tenth of one’s income over to God?

Must those involved in preaching the gospel, teaching those whom God calls and pastoring congregations of God’s people, rely solely on individually determined freewill offerings, as important and helpful as they are? The widow’s mite, a powerful example of giving such an offering (Luke 21:1-4), should humble us all, and God and His elders remain very grateful for it and for all freewill offerings.

Yet our Creator Himself revealed tithing as part of His pre-Mosaic teaching to the ancient patriarchs (Genesis 14:18-20; 28:20-22).

This financial practice continued when the divine laws were codified for ancient Israel (Leviticus 27:30; Numbers 18:24, 26). And clearly tithing remained in full force and effect at the end of the Old Testament period (2 Chronicles 31:11-12; Nehemiah 10:38; Malachi 3:8-10).

God had instructed Moses to write these statutes and laws down in the opening books of the Bible. King David summed it up: “He made known His ways to Moses” (Psalm 103:7). And the last chapter in the last book of the Old Testament as arranged in most Bibles tells us, “Remember the law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb [Mt. Sinai] for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments” (Malachi 4:4).

Tithing in the New Testament

Sadly, most people who identify themselves as Christians assume that Jesus Christ abandoned or nullified many Old Testament teachings. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus Himself clearly stated: “Do not think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill [or fill to the full]. For assuredly I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle [the smallest marks in Hebrew writing] will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of these least commandments, and teaches men so, shall

be called least in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17-19).

Jesus also stated, “And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail” (Luke 16:17).

Although Jesus rebuked the religious leaders of His day for neglecting the weightier matters of the law—justice, mercy, faith and love—He still directly supported tithing (Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42). Christ also told the Pharisees to “render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21). The tithe belongs to our Creator. It is not ours.

But of course you cannot travel to heaven through space and give your tithes directly to God. He has always had His representatives on this earth to receive them. First it was Melchizedek, to whom Abraham paid tithes. (This priest-king was actually the preexistent Christ, as explained in our free booklet *Who Is God?*) Then it was the Levitical priesthood. And now in this age tithing is again to Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:1-17)—that is, to the High Priest Jesus Christ through His earthly representatives in the Church of God.

The apostle Paul clearly taught the application of the tithing system today. In 1 Corinthians 9:13, he refers directly to the tithing system: “Don’t you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar?” (NIV). The next verse continues, “In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel” (NIV). Paul shows that the same tithing system continues for God’s work today and that it was commanded by Jesus Christ.

The carrying out of God’s work today

In carrying out the commission Jesus gave to proclaim the gospel and care for His people, the United Church of God publishes and freely distributes this magazine *The Good News*, the *Bible Study Course*, more than 30 booklets, and many reprint articles. The television program *Beyond Today* proclaims the gospel on many stations in America, Australia and Canada. We also maintain websites on the Internet, provide elders who teach and care for various Church congregations throughout the world and maintain summer camps for our youth. Some of our elders answer biblical questions from our readers.

All of these activities cost a lot of money.

Church members, coworkers and donors meet these expenses as God enables them. We cannot carry out this work without their help, and we deeply appreciate their tithes and donations. They are fellow-workers helping to proclaim Christ’s gospel.

Of course, we could do a lot more if we had a substantial increase in funds. We regularly ask God to lay it on the hearts of our readers to contribute depending on their personal circumstances. Ultimately this is a work of faith, as we believe collectively with Paul that “God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8).

God does bless people who give generously (verses 6-7), and He does not neglect the tithe payer (Malachi 3:8-10). Blessings may not immediately appear, but in due time they will come if we continue to obey God. Over the years many have shared their grateful testimony with us in this regard.

A word of qualification: We do *not* expect people to give what they don’t have. Some may have to survive on small pensions. Tithing is for people who earn money. Freewill offerings may come from anyone, but necessary personal and family obligations must not be neglected.

Above all, the heartfelt prayers of those who cannot contribute financially—and of those who can—are deeply appreciated. “The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results” (James 5:16, New Living Translation).

At the end of the day, Jesus said that “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). That great principle of God helps keep the Church alive and functioning today! **GN**

Learn More

Biblical topics require time and study. Tithing is no exception. Here is a comprehensive but reader-friendly publication that covers the subject in both Old and New Testaments. Download or request our free booklet *What Does the Bible Teach About Tithing?* And we do understand that you would want to know more about any Church you are considering supporting. Another of our booklets is titled *This Is the United Church of God*. It too is free of charge.

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God Is Calling— Will You Answer?

God is calling you to a special relationship with Him like no other. Answering that call will change your life, enriching it in the present and leading you into eternity! *by Beyond Today host Gary Petty*

Kermit Tyler's response to one telephone call changed the course of history.

A man operating a new technology called radar telephoned Tyler's workplace about a strange, massive blip on the screen. The switchboard operator told the caller that there was nothing he could do about it and that no one else was in the office on a Sunday morning. It was then, however, that the switchboard operator saw Lieutenant Tyler there, so he informed him about the radar blip.

Tyler knew there was a flight of planes due to arrive at a nearby airfield. He went to the telephone and told the radar operator, "Well, don't worry about it."

The date was Dec. 7, 1941, and the blip on the radar screen was the first wave of Japanese planes on their way to bomb the unsuspecting and unprepared U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, bringing America into World War II.

Has your answer to a call, or not answering a call, ever affected your life? Let's direct our attention to the most important call a person can receive.

The calling to become God's elect

Jesus Christ foretold a time of increasing troubles, with "wars and rumors of wars," "famines, pestilences and earthquakes" (Matthew 24:6-7). This, He said, would ultimately lead to devastation and suffering on a global scale: "For then there will be great tribulation, such as not has been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21).

He further announced, "And unless those

days were shortened [cut short or stopped from running their course], no flesh would be saved [alive]; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:22). Jesus isn't returning to destroy the earth, but to save it. He will save the world for the sake of the elect. Jesus proclaimed



Japanese aircraft prepare to leave the carrier *Shokaku* to attack Pearl Harbor.

"Well, don't worry about it." Missing or not understanding the importance of a call could have devastating consequences.

that He would "gather the elect from the four winds," meaning from all corners of the earth (Matthew 24:31).

Who are the elect? To be one of the *elect* simply means to be *chosen* by God. This choosing process begins for a person when he or she receives a "call" or "calling" from God.

And it's important to realize that we do

not initiate this process—*God does*. We can't come to God the Father and Jesus Christ of ourselves. Jesus clearly said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44; see also verse 65). And this drawing is compelling.

We might imagine God's calling somewhat like a ringing telephone. Of course, God's calling typically works without any audible sounds. It's a ringing of something inside of your mind and conscience. At the core of your being you begin to understand a need for a relationship with your Creator

and to follow what He says. You start gaining a sense of God's ways and His plan. And you begin to experience a desire to answer the call.

In Jesus' prophecy about the Great Tribulation, He said that at His return He would receive the elect from the four winds of the earth. In Revelation we find another prophecy about those who are gathered to Christ at His return. They are described as "called, chosen, and faithful" (Revelation 17:14).

These people will not only have answered the call, but will have maintained an understanding of the *importance* of the call.

God is calling people to become His children while living in a confusing world. When you recognize and answer God's call, you must *surrender your life* to Him for His purpose. When you are willing to give up



your stubbornness, your selfishness, your need to control, your need to self-medicate, and allow God to run your life, only then will God choose you to be one of His elect.

Called, chosen, faithful—to be faithful involves producing the life-fruit of authentic Christianity. It involves remaining true to your calling as a disciple of Jesus Christ and producing fruit in your life consistent with being led by God's Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23; Romans 8:14).

Sowing seed, producing fruit, remaining faithful

There's an old fable about two city-born brothers who decided to take a trip to the countryside. They were shocked to find farmers throwing perfectly good wheat into empty, plowed fields. The brothers decided that farmers were wasteful, maybe even a little crazy.

One brother returned to the city while the second one stayed to explore the strange ways of country folk. That autumn the city brother received a letter. The brother who stayed in the country raved about how the individual seeds from the wheat sown in the spring produced endless fields of stalks with each stalk containing many kernels of wheat. The farmers, who had sown the seeds, then tended the fields and were now reaping the fruits of their labors.

What seemed like lunacy in the spring was producing something amazing in the autumn. This story contains an important spiritual lesson: God sows His seeds *because He wants to produce spiritual fruit in your life*. This fruit requires that you respond to God's calling and remain faithful to His calling.

To remain faithful to God you must believe in Him and in the Bible as His Word. This belief must grow into trust. This trust must lead to obedience to God and His commandments. Life-changing faith is more than simple belief in God's existence, though many think that's all we need.

Consider as parallel: Can you imagine an adulterous husband claiming that his wife should accept his sexual liaisons on the basis that *his belief in her* should be enough proof of his faithfulness? That's absurd! But isn't this how many people treat God? Acceptance of God's existence can't turn unfaithful actions into faithful ones.

Being faithful to God means trusting in His love, His goodness and His wisdom

so much that you are willing to follow His instructions even when you don't understand or when obedience is uncomfortable. Faithfulness involves sacrifice and ongoing commitment in the face of fear, trials and opposition from others.

Again, we must all bear godly fruit. With that in mind, you should undertake a prayerful study of the teachings of Jesus Christ contained in the Gospels and then compare His teachings to the present fruits of your life! Ask God to open your mind to understand His calling.

As you begin to study the real teachings of Jesus Christ you will discover instructions that affect every aspect of your life. Authentic Christianity isn't a set of suggestions or nice sayings about indefinable feelings called love—but instructions from God explaining *how love works*. When you discover a command, then you need to immediately step out in obedience.

Jesus said, "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much" (Luke 16:10).

How many times have you made a resolution to start a diet, or pray more often, or study the Bible more, or be a better husband or wife? How many times have you put it off to "tomorrow" or "until I'm ready"?

Faithfulness isn't something you begin tomorrow. It would be like saying, "I'll be faithless towards God today, but when I get up in the morning then I'll decide to be an authentic Christian."

If God says to stop dishonest business practices, don't excuse yourself with the bogus argument that "business is business." Step out in faith right now and start obeying. If God says to stop having sex out of marriage, don't excuse yourself with "but my boyfriend might leave me." Step out in faith right now and start obeying. If you realize that God wants you to stop misusing His name in profanity, don't wait to change. Step out in faith right now and start obeying!

Real Christianity is the process of being called and chosen and remaining faithful.

The parable of the sower

Returning to the imagery of farmers sowing seeds in the countryside, we learn about how God's calling works from Jesus' parable of the sower. Jesus told the story of a farmer who was sowing grain. In first-

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century Judea, farmers would walk through a prepared field throwing wheat onto the soil so that it would be absorbed, germinate and grow into stalks.

Jesus described how some seeds fell by the wayside and birds ate them. Some seeds fell on stony ground and sprouted, but couldn't mature because there was no depth to the roots. Other seeds took root, but thorns grew up and the wheat died. Still others fell on good soil and grew into healthy stalks.

The seed in this parable represents the Word of God, and the spreading of the seed portrays His calling. The four different types of soil represent four different ways people respond to God's calling.

How does this 2,000-year-old parable apply directly to your relationship with God? To answer that question you need to ask yourself, "Which of these four responses is the way I have been responding to God?"

In this parable Jesus taught that not everyone who hears the Word of God will be a true follower of that Word. Shockingly, this parable also teaches that not everyone who claims to be a follower of Jesus will be one of the elect who are called, chosen and faithful!

When you are confronted by the parable of the sower, Christ requires that you examine the authenticity of your Christianity. How is the seed of God's Word growing, or *not* growing, in your life?

Seed by the wayside

Let's look at the first response mentioned by Jesus: "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside" (Matthew 13:19).

Is Jesus describing you? Is your response to God's call, "I know God exists, and one of these days I'll get my life straightened out, but I'm just so busy"? Or: "Jesus loves me so He really doesn't care about my lifestyle. All I have to do is believe."

Notice it is the "evil one," or Satan, who convinces people to reject God's calling by taking it lightly. Authentic Christianity is more than a hollow profession without a corresponding change in lifestyle. Otherwise, you turn the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, into a cheap pass that somehow allows you to continue following Satan as the god of this world while receiving salvation from the true God.

Think about how farcical that is. What

you are really saying is, "As long as I believe in God and accept Jesus, I can live as Satan wants me to live, and God say it's okay."

In Christ's parable we find that this kind of cheap grace is *not* okay with God. God's calling requires you to respond. He is calling you to abandon the empty pursuit of immediate gratification for a better life as one of His elect.

How many excuses do you give to keep the seed of God from growing in your life?

Seed on stony ground

Continuing in Jesus' parable of the sower, He said: "But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles" (Matthew 13:20-21).

How many excuses do you give to keep the seed of God from growing in your life?

Some people are initially very happy to learn about God's truth and to feel closer to God through starting to follow Him. But when remaining committed to God's call becomes difficult, when it means striving to overcome deeply entrenched sin, when it means being out of step with family or friends, they give up.

What about you? Do you dabble in the Bible, but your actions and attitudes reflect little of what the Bible teaches? When you have to actually *live* your faith, instead of just professing it, do you crumble like a house of cards?

I understand that these are hard words. In the parable of the sower Jesus taught that it is God who plants the seed, but it is the type of soil that allows the seed to germinate and grow. What kind of soil are you?

What is so important to you that it's worth a half-hearted, uninspired, uncommitted, unfruitful response to a call from the Almighty Creator God?

Seed choked by thorns

The third kind of response in the parable is symbolized by seeds choked by thorns. Jesus taught, "Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful" (Matthew 13:22).

There are people who answer God's calling only to become sidetracked with money, status or the old adage that he who wins is he who has the most stuff in the end. Are you one of those people who play church and pretend to be true followers of Jesus but whose daily priorities reflect nothing more than a concern for personal needs and wants instead of outgoing concern for others?

At this point I hope you're beginning to feel a bit uncomfortable. A real encounter with the Word of the Almighty God is *supposed to make us uncomfortable*. If you want to be an authentic Christian, one of God's elect, then you need to examine your Christian concepts and practices. Do they stand up to the teachings of Jesus Christ? Do they stand up to the parable of the sower?

Jesus taught that many will respond to His Word but that the Word won't grow in

their minds, hearts and lifestyles. If you want your life to be more than bad soil where the seed of God's Word is wasted, then you need to do some serious examination of your assumptions about Christianity and how those ideas stack up against the teachings of the Founder of Christianity.

Seed on good ground

Finally, it is the fourth type of response that Jesus commends in the parable: "But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (Matthew 13:23).

These types of people respond to their calling, are chosen by God, and step out in faith. They *do something about it*. Their calling is more than just feelings and a religious experience. It's a *transformation of mind and heart, motivations and actions*.

If you are beginning to understand the truths of God and feel that you are being drawn to follow what you are learning, then God is likely calling you to salvation at this time. Will you answer the call, be chosen and remain faithful? Will you surrender to God and allow Him to produce thirty-, sixty- and a hundredfold in your life? You can be assured that there is no issue more pressing in your life than this! **GN**



Letters From Our Readers

“Are You Afraid of Commitment?”

You make it sound so easy in your article “Are You Afraid of Commitment?”—“Pray to God and He will make it possible for you to do whatever you want with His blessing.” But sometimes commitment comes at a cost. From when I first went to stage at nine years old, I dreamed of a career in theatre. At 29 years old it was beginning to open up for me. Producers were actually calling me to offer me roles, and I was invited to join the top theatre group in the region. But just when it seemed that my dream could be fulfilled I stumbled on evidence, in the supernaturally accurate fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecies, that the God of the Bible is real.

That led to the understanding that God’s commandments should be obeyed, all 10 of them, and that the vast majority of people who call themselves Christian routinely disobey the Fourth Commandment to observe the seventh-day Sabbath. So I had to choose to either go my way or go God’s way.

Since then I’ve slipped and fallen far too many times in my walk with God, and I’ve often missed the theatre too, but almost 40 years on I still have no doubt that I made the right decision. But that commitment did come at a cost. God does not always make it possible for us to do whatever we want to do with His blessing. Sometimes we have to choose between God’s way and our own.

Reader from Queensland, Australia

Our staff was very impressed with your letter, and we couldn’t agree more that commitment comes with a cost. The article did not intend to imply otherwise, but was not focusing on that aspect. Jesus Christ told us to sit down and count the cost of discipleship (Luke 14:26-33). But God’s blessing is worth the cost. He will reward us in many ways in this life and ultimately in the resurrection of the just.

Bible Study Course

Your magazines and the *Bible Study Course* are marvelous and biblical. I always look forward to receiving them and read them from cover to cover. I will be very sad when I come to the end of your study course. Please do another!

Mrs. E.B., Swindon, England

The *Bible Study Course* is truly enlightening. I have a BA degree in theology-religious studies and find your course more challenging and enjoyable than my university studies. I am also a Church of England reader and have used articles from *The Good News* magazine as the basis for many sermons over the last 20 years. Please send the next lesson ASAP.

M.T., Mitcham, England

The Good News

I am 60 years old. An older lady in the next town gave me four copies of your magazine *The Good News*. I enjoyed them immensely and recognize the magazine as a reliable source of truth, understanding and information for today’s world. It is my hope that I may be placed on your mailing list. Thank you for your service for the glory of the Lord and may God bless all of your endeavours in the future for the salvation of this lost world.

M.S., Marshfield, Missouri

I don’t know who first gave you my address, but I will be forever grateful for all the great information you have provided. You have helped me understand the Bible way beyond anything I ever learned previously!

J.S., Burnsville, Minnesota

Please accept my gratitude for your *Good News* magazine. It is such a blessing in my life. It gives me understanding, encouragement and hope—and is a substantial help in drawing closer to God. My son has sent me written thanks for the booklets I have sent him [in prison]. He expressed gratitude for the benefits he’s received and has encouraged me to send more. Perhaps these booklets will minister to more men than just my son. Thank you for all the Bible-based help you give me.

C.B., Hartsell, Connecticut

Thank you very much for sending me *The Good News*. It is such a blessing to receive knowledge and understanding of God’s Word and His plan for us, especially considering my incarceration. Now when my fellow prisoners come

to me and say, “Have you heard the bad news about this or that,” I simply reply, “No I haven’t, but have you read *The Good News*?”

A.D., Tennessee Colony, Texas

Thank you very much for the truly wonderful *Good News* magazines you’ve been sending me through the years. The articles are certainly inspiring, insightful, captivating and solidly Bible-based. Please remember that the United Church of God and *The Good News* team are always in my prayers, even as you keep shining your light for Christ and His glorious Kingdom through this tremendous ministry. Thank you for making that difference for God in many lives everywhere.

B.J., Malaysia

Letters from Australia

Thank you for sending me the booklet *What Happens After Death?* My sister is a nurse, and she has a very hard time dealing with death and helping family and friends to deal with it. It really helped her.

Reader from New South Wales

Thank you for the materials that you have sent me. I have learned so much about the Bible by simply reading your publications and referring back to the Scriptures. God is good. He has led me to your ministry, and I cannot thank Him enough. Daily I see how amazing God is and His goodness and care for everyone who believes and accepts Him.

Reader from New South Wales

Please accept my small contribution for the many magazines you have so selflessly sent. I have been a Christian for many years, and your magazines have taught me so much in my walk with our Lord. Keep up the good work, and many thanks for your guidance.

Reader from New South Wales

Letters from Canada

This letter is in appreciation for your thoughtful, scholarly, yet down-to-earth approach to the Bible and faith and prophecy matters. I enclose this (overdue) donation.

Reader from Ontario

Thank you very much for *The Good News* magazine which you are sending me. I am very much grateful. Enclosed is a cheque as a gift. May God bless your ministry always.

Reader from British Columbia

About the Sabbath

I wish to talk about your Church and the teachings you believe. I belong to the United Methodist Church. Our pastor also receives *The Good News* and has told me in our discussions that most of your teachings are spot on. I’ve asked him how, with all the different denominations in the world today, can we know which one is right when they all worship God and His Son? He says that all perceive the teachings of the Bible differently.

He doesn’t have a problem if people want to celebrate the different annual biblical festivals, but doesn’t believe we should be keeping the Sabbath. I was raised as a Lutheran (Missouri Synod) before becoming a Methodist years later. The only teaching I’ve known on the Sabbath is that it was changed at Pentecost. I’m kind of confused on this and the arguments for and against it.

B.D., Cedar Springs, Michigan

*We can only suggest that you request and prayerfully study our free booklets *Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest*, *The Church Jesus Built* and *The New Covenant: Does It Abolish God’s Law?* All three booklets address the issues you raise. If you have specific questions, one of our letter-answering staff will be glad to address them. You may also wish to reread the first letter above.*

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Valentine's Day

What's Wrong With Showing Love?

Valentine's Day has long been hugely popular as a romantic tradition despite its ancient and unseemly origins. So what's wrong with celebrating this holiday? *by Dan Dowd*

Valentine's Day is all about showing "love," giving a card or flowers or chocolates to a loved one. All of that's good, right? *Wrong.*

Valentine's Day is big business. According to the National Retail Foundation, Valentine's Day for 2012 added around \$17.6 billion to the U.S. economy—making retail spending for this day the second-largest behind Christmas.

For a lot of people it's *the* holiday to express your love to someone special. According to Kemberly King, a business instructor at South University, young adults ages 25 to 34 spend the most on Valentine's Day gifts. Interestingly, men will outspend women—almost 2 to 1—with the biggest categories for

all spending being restaurants, candy, romantic getaways and flowers.

A quick Web search for the origins of Valentine's Day will give you the basics of the accepted history of the day. A deeper search will acknowledge its pagan origins. *The Good News* has published a variety of articles on both of these aspects of the holiday (just do a search for "Valentine's Day" at www.GNmagazine.org).

While Valentine's Day is the most promoted holiday after Christmas and Easter even among traditional Christian churches, it is definitely not a holiday with true Christian values.

How can "love" be wrong?

There's nothing wrong in showing love to others—after all, isn't that the most valued Christian characteristic? But

what's been lost in how we go about it, and how we worship God for that matter, is whether we are actually following what God teaches in the Bible.

It's like an automobile manufacturer telling you to put only gasoline in the fuel tank, but then you decide that diesel fuel is just as good! It just won't work.

Here's a quick review of the background of Valentine's Day—before exploring a deeper point about this holiday.

By most accepted historians, Valentine's Day was an adaptation by the Catholic Church of the ancient pagan Roman celebration of Lupercalia, a fertility festival. The Catholic Church updated and connected it to a "Saint" Valentine sometime late in the third century A.D. (though there is some confusion as to who this person actually was). It really took off commercially as a holiday in the late 1800s, promoted as a day to show your "love" to others—especially romantic love to your special someone.

So what's wrong with that? Here's the

problem: Lupercalia was an immoral fertility festival also featuring gluttony and drunkenness. At the end of the festivities young men would draw the name of a young lady from a box, and the two were considered a pair (sexually and otherwise) for the coming year.

As a festival, Lupercalia was dedicated to the Roman god Pan, recognized as the god of fields, groves and wooded glens—and pictured as having the hindquarters, legs and horns of a goat. This pagan deity was connected to fertility and the season of spring. None of what is connected to the feast of Lupercalia is worthy of a Christian's observance.

But what's wrong with a little paganism?

What about showing love on Valentine's Day if I'm not doing it for pagan reasons? Isn't that okay? No, because the expression of that kind of "love" is still

God's way is true love

Showing love as God instructs is *not* wrong—romantic love included. It's a good thing to express your love toward others through a card, flowers, dinner out or any number of other ways. But don't do it under the trappings of a pagan holiday like Valentine's Day! If someone is special to you, then do those things throughout the year rather than waiting until February 14th.

Our worship of God must first and foremost be according to His truth (John 4:24). Carryovers from pagan worship don't honor Him!

God is personified by the characteristic of love (1 John 4:8). Godly love is genuine outgoing concern for others as God would love them—not as a selfish love. Divine love is reflected in keeping God's commandments (1 John 5:3), including the Ten Commandments and instruction

When we merge pagan teachings with what God instructs through the Bible, we weaken the truth and violate God's clear command.

rooted in a former pagan holiday. True Christians must not adopt pagan festivals as holidays, for they are to strive to please God in everything they do.

Even when you think you're innocently observing a holiday like this, you're still advancing the origins and meanings of the day—especially from God's perspective, as He certainly knows where it came from. God said not to do this. He told the Israelites entering the pagan land of Canaan:

"When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods" (Deuteronomy 12:29-31, emphasis added).

When we merge pagan teachings with what God instructs through the Bible, we weaken the truth and violate God's clear command.

like that in Deuteronomy cited above.

True Christians should desire to faithfully observe God's own Holy Days found in the Bible (see Leviticus 23 for a list of them). Celebrating holidays like Valentine's Day in opposition to God's instruction does not honor or obey Him—no matter how well intentioned or innocent we believe it to be.

It *does* matter to God how we worship Him. He expects us to understand the difference between what He has declared holy and the profane teachings, customs and traditions masquerading as godly worship (Ezekiel 22:26). **GN**

Learn More

What are the origins of our most popular holidays? For a review comparing traditional religious holidays to God's Holy Days found in the Bible, download or request your free copy of the booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?* Be prepared for a few major surprises!

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"We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven . . . We have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God . . . We have become . . . too proud to pray to the God that made us."

— Abraham Lincoln

What's Ahead for the United States?

Is the world's most powerful nation—the United States of America—overlooked in Bible prophecy? Why are relatively small powers like Egypt, Syria and Lebanon mentioned, while no nation recognizable as the United States is found? What



about other major English-speaking nations such as the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia?

In fact, many prophecies *do* mention these nations. But, without a proper understanding of history and the Scriptures, few can identify these countries and discover what lies ahead for them.

The publishers of *The Good News* have produced an astounding, eye-opening booklet, *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. This publication takes you on a remarkable journey through history and Bible prophecy to reveal an incredible story with sobering implications for the major English-speaking nations.

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