

UNITED NEWS



NEWS OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF GOD, AN INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION • P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027 (513) 576-9796

Vol. 23, No. 2

UCG.ORG/MEMBERS

MARCH-APRIL 2017

Spiritual Stability in the Church in East Africa

by John Elliott

Merrie and I have recently returned from our 35th visit to East Africa over 14 years, where I oversee UCG's operations in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia, Mauritius, Rwanda and Burundi. UCG East Africa has grown to about 30 congregations and Bible study groups now meeting in five countries, served by six pastors and two assistant pastors. UCG East Africa is registered in Kenya, and the Rwandan government has just certified receipt of a UCG registration application there. We currently own four Feast sites, three additional church halls and hold two annual United Youth Camps.

Highlights of this visit included an exciting United Youth Camp held along the shore of Lake Victoria with 91 campers in attendance. The Got Kachola, Kenya, Feast site venue offered teens from around the region a chance to visit the largest African lake, experience boating and participate in aspects of commercial fishing practices firsthand. Daily activities included volleyball, team building, Chris-

tian living, campfire, journalism, various games, daily hymn singing and kitchen prep. Pastor Joel Owouti and his staff of 10 did an outstanding job of teaching and encouraging our youth to live God's way.

Mid-trip we held a ministerial conference with our eight elders and their wives, followed by a semi-annual UCG-EA National Council meeting. This coincided with the raising of four elders to the role of pastor. They are Joel Owouti, Kriphas Ongori, Wycliffe Chiriswa and Simon N'gan'ga. Each has been assigned a church circuit with multiple congregations and related responsibilities, including some pastoring in other countries within the East Africa region.

Leadership development in the region has been a priority for more than a decade. A semi-annual two-day leadership conference was held in Nakuru, Kenya, with 40 of our established leaders and several potential new leaders from across Kenya and Rwanda. I led an examination of the terms "pastor," "shepherd" and "hireling," along with



Photo by John Elliott

The campers and staff at the United Youth Camp in Kenya.

their biblical implications. We reviewed the biblical concepts concerning God's "sheep," beginning with David and moving through the New Testament. We delved into what the term "leader" con-

notes and identified many biblical leaders: the good, the bad and the unavailing. Interactive breakout sessions compiled

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Are You Poor in Spirit?

by Milan Bizic

Jesus stood on the hilltop facing the crowds, taking in their expectant stares. Filling the hushed silence He began His teachings with these words: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3).

Blessed are the poor in spirit. Are you poor in spirit? What does that even mean?

It's tough to imagine how being poor in spirit is desirable. After all, shouldn't we be rich in spirit instead—mighty champions of faith and virtue?

In English it can be a little difficult to catch the nuance of what Jesus was saying here. When the gospel of Matthew was written in Greek, a deliberate word choice was made that gets lost in translation.

There are two words for "poor" that could have been used in this verse, and seeing which was chosen here gives us a better look into what Jesus was really talk-

ing about when He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

The first word that was an option to be in this verse is *penes*, which refers to a person who lives in poverty despite having a small amount of income. In other words it refers to someone who lives on the very edge of destitution, each penny going to provide minimal shelter, food and clothing. Today we might think of subsistence farmers in the developing world who survive by virtue of their work but have no margin of wealth. Anything less than what they currently have would mean starvation.

The second possible word choice, and the one used here in Matthew 5:3, is *ptochos*. This word denotes extreme poverty of the sort experienced by those on the absolute fringes of society. *Ptochos*

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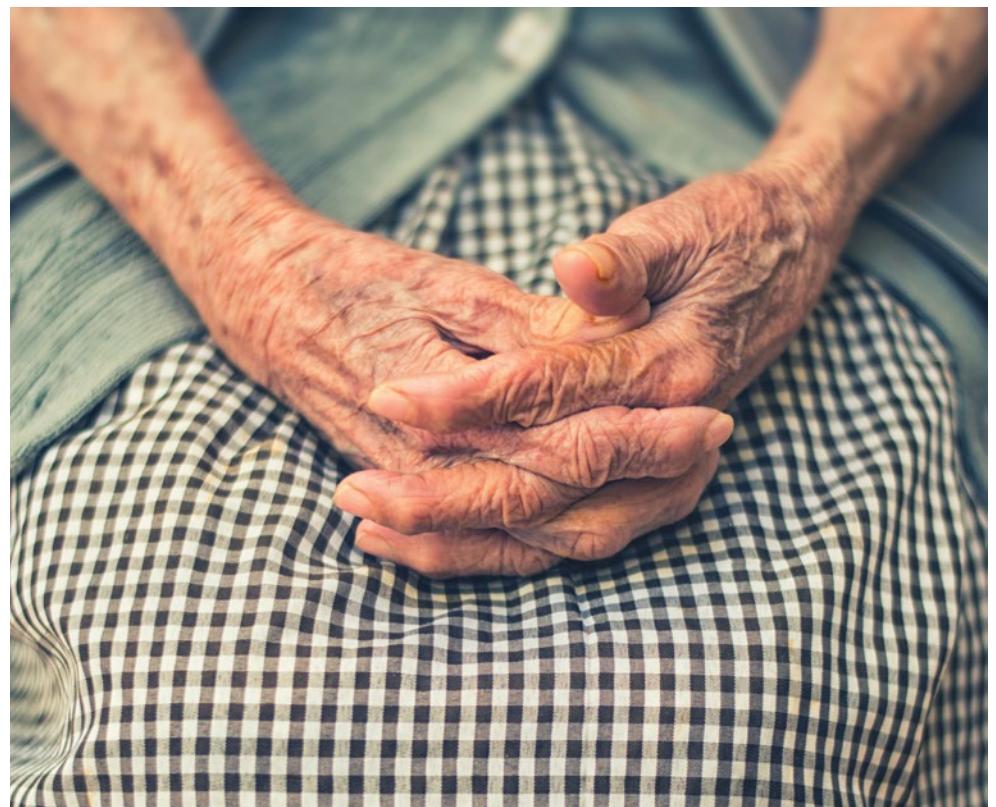


Photo by Cristian Newman/Unsplash



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BY THE NUMBERS

476

thousand dollars pledged for new Beyond Today studio.

UYC 2016 Reports

Winter Camp

Wisconsin—Dec. 25, 2016-Jan. 1, 2017

The south-central region of Wisconsin is called the Kettle Moraine. This is where the UYC Winter Camp was held. It is in beautiful, rolling-hill terrain that helps facilitate a number of wonderful outdoor activities. This year we had 78 campers and 45 staff and all had a wonderful time living God's way of life!

Winter Camp this year was from Dec. 25, 2016, through Jan. 1, 2017. God blessed us with snowy weather going into camp, which allowed us to enjoy great outdoor winter activities. The indoor activities focused on the Christian living themes and allowed for plenty of fellowship time.

Our activity schedule included an all-camp amazing race on the first day of camp, as well as team building, dance class (with two camp dances), winter field sports, game room, open science center, tubing and an arts and crafts class. Snowboarding was a big hit again with the campers, as was the dance class. We were able to enjoy tobogganing and broomball for the first time in several years due to the ice being thick enough to play on. New this year was paintball, which when combined with orienteering made for an exciting and enjoyable activity that gained rave reviews!

The UYC theme this year was "Guided by God's Word," and it was a focus of the

morning compass checks, the Christian living classes and other biblical instruction. Aspects of this theme were also reinforced at many of the activities and other conversations throughout the day.

Once again Winter Leadership Camp was held concurrently with Winter Camp. It was our fourth Winter Leadership Camp. This year we had 16 young adults participating in this camp from all areas of the country! They served alongside activity staff and counselors in addition to actually teaching a class on defending your faith to the teens! They also enjoyed activities as a group and attended additional Bible classes, seminars and Q&As focused on leading in the camp setting, their local congregations and life in general. They had many opportunities to lead and serve, including giving speeches and sermonettes, planning and hosting the camp dance, serving snacks daily to the campers, being dining hall monitors and helping with security. They also had access to extended conversation with the ministry about many different aspects of life. They were an amazing group of young adults and exemplified the give way of life!

Winter Camp offers a unique camp experience unlike any of our other camps. Come be with us in 2017 and see for yourself!

Dan Dowd



Top photo: One of the dorms at the orienteering and paintball activity.

Bottom photos: Campers and staff enjoying Winter Camp to the fullest!

Brazil Youth Camp report

Brazil—Dec. 26-30, 2016

Twenty-five children and teens (12 male, 13 female) attended the second-ever youth camp in Brazil. The camp was conducted from the evening of Dec. 26, 2016, until the afternoon of Friday, Dec. 30, 2016. Due to the combined efforts of United Youth Corps, Good Works and a generous private donation, the young people and adult staff accompanying them were blessed to be able to travel two hours by chartered bus from their homes in the village of Maloca de Moscou and neighboring Guyana, to the lovely setting of Eco Park, just west of Boa Vista.

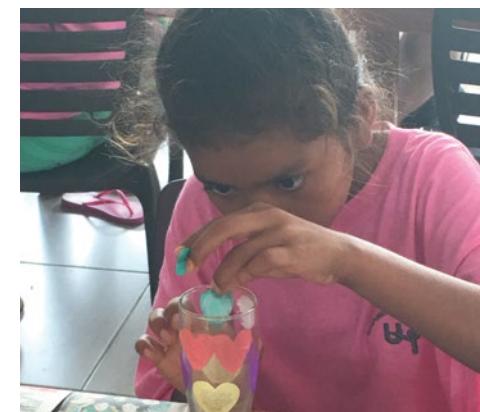
Eco Park is a well maintained water park that enabled us to have many exciting activities that would not have been possible in the village, such as swimming, water slides, canoeing, kayaking and water volleyball. Additional activities included soccer, sand volleyball, capture the flag, and the owner of Eco Park even fabricated a gaga ball court just for our use!

Every morning, the campers and staff would walk about a half mile from the sleeping quarters to the main park facil-

ity. Everyone spent the day in the main park and then walked back to the sleeping quarters in the evening. On Tuesday and Wednesday evening, we made use of the indoor game room, where campers and staff enjoyed a variety of card games, billiards and ping-pong. On Thursday evening, we had a dance including many of the popular line dances at our U.S. summer camps, but the Latin beat music really seemed to be a big hit. An impromptu limbo dance contest saw some pretty flexible people, as the bar got down to only about 18-24 inches above the floor!

Just before and just after lunch, during the hottest part of the day, were the Christian living classes and also an arts and crafts activity that also taught basic table manners and etiquette. The morning compass checks and Christian living content was the same material used in the U.S. summer camps. All of the content was translated into Portuguese, and the classes were instructed by the elder Arlindo Lima and a young adult staff member, Edison Eduardo.

Len Martin



Top photo: Group of all staff and campers who attended camp this year.

Bottom photos: Campers enjoying activities at camp.



Victor Kubik
President

“Forward!” That’s what we call this column. Its purpose is to keep us moving onward in our life’s journey as well as in doing the mission of the Church.

But we all well know that this path of life is not completely linear. There are moments of ecstasy and triumph. But then there are times when we have setbacks, hardships or when we go backwards or sideways in life’s journey. That happens. Is it failure?

Absolutely not!

In fact, coping with adversity and setbacks that we will certainly face is essential for becoming successful. This is true in our personal life or in the collective life of the Church. Setbacks have a therapeutic effect on producing the inner tensile strength of character and resilience. In moments of adversity our true value and strength is shaped, defined and forged.

Racing through life without testing and by rising too quickly without trial can pro-



Photo by Morgana Bartolomei/Unsplash

duce a person who becomes vulnerable to real-life circumstances. I once heard a commencement address by a well known television news commentator to an Ivy League graduating class. She told them to pray that they not rise too fast in their profession for this very reason. I have seen people who have risen too quickly and not having the character, tools and wisdom to meet life’s predictable challenges. Even in the ordination of elders, one of the prerequisites in 1 Timothy 3:6 is that one

should not be too new a person rising to this honored position: “Not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil” (1 Timothy 3:6-7).

When asked what it would take to become one of His disciples, Jesus replied: “And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27). The cross represents the

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From The COUNCIL

God’s Gift of Grace



by Aaron Dean

Two months ago Michelle and I were in Roseville, California, for the birth of our daughter and son-in-law’s first child. God gave Grace on Thanksgiving Day, a true gift since it was a national holiday and everyone was off work and available. Obviously you cannot time these things, but I was thankful I could be there. This probably wasn’t the “grace” you expected from the title, but we often face the unexpected.

Our wait wasn’t long after being shooed away by the doctor for Crystal to start more serious contractions. We were told to go to the waiting room for an expected hour or two wait at best, only to be called back in after about 10 minutes. The doc-



Photo by Nathan Anderson/Unsplash

tor believed her own estimate and wasn’t prepared when the nurses said, “doctor, get back here immediately.” She hardly got her gown on before little Grace made her arrival after about three contractions, with Joe coming close to having to deliver his first child.

I wondered at the glory of God and how he gives us the gift of family and of life. He intended our physical life in so many ways

to reflect what he has in store for us. Truly He lets us learn about Him and His plan by allowing us to marry, create a union and truly become one flesh though the birth of children. We get to have the experience of the gift of giving life—just as he will give us eternal life.

Yes, it is only physical life we give, but it is

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Stay in Tune With Your Creator

■ Five ways to help your children become less reliant on technology, and more reliant on God.

To parents of teens and teens: Welcome to this ongoing series of articles written with you in mind. These “hot topic” articles will specifically address current cultural issues and the challenges that you may be facing as a family and most importantly, how to deal successfully with them in light of the Bible.

by Jim Tuck

With the rapid advancement of technology, the world has accelerated, bringing about incredible breakthroughs in science and industry. We realize our children need to be adept at using technologies to be successful in their jobs and function in this society, while at the same time knowing they need to be able to connect with God.

If you go into a restaurant, you see people glued to the screen of their smartphones, not looking at or conversing with the person across from them!

Dr. Jeremiah Weinstock of the University of Connecticut, an expert on Internet teen gambling, believes that between 4 and 7 percent of all teenagers suffer from a gambling addiction that involves clinical depression, huge debts, disruption of relationships, and/or involvement with organized crime (“Teen Addiction to Online Gambling,” www.crchealth.com).

Social norms have shifted, changing from needing to be in the same room with friends and others to spending more time on social media, videos and music. How can we encourage them to tune in to the most important information available, the knowledge of the Creator of the universe?

The prophet Daniel recorded during the time of the end “many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase” (Daniel 12:4). As a parent, it is difficult to navigate the challenges of this information age. What steps can we take to teach our children to connect with our Father in heaven?

Along with keeping our children healthy and safe, our greatest desire is to give them the tools they need to have a relationship with God. Here are five ways we can help our children have a relationship with God.

1. Unplug From the World

Be diligent about the observance of God’s Sabbath. As parents we can use this time to disconnect ourselves and our children from the media of this world—instead connecting with each other, and encouraging them in their relationship with God. All of us need some “quiet brain time” to think. It is a ploy of Satan to keep our minds constantly occupied with phones, music, videos, etc.

“And you he made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once

walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:1-2). Constant bombardment of media can keep us from having quiet time to ask the most important questions about life and to study in order to find the answers: Does God really exist? Why am I alive? What is my purpose on earth? Is God’s Word really truth? These questions are essential for our children to ask—and learn to answer—to have a foundation of understanding about truth and life.

The Sabbath is the perfect time for parents and youth to take time to do family Bible studies. The Church has many resources to help guide parents (search “teen Bible study guides” on UCG.org). Help make a relationship with God a priority in their lives. Be sure they are at Sabbath services and involved in teen Bible studies and other church-oriented activities.

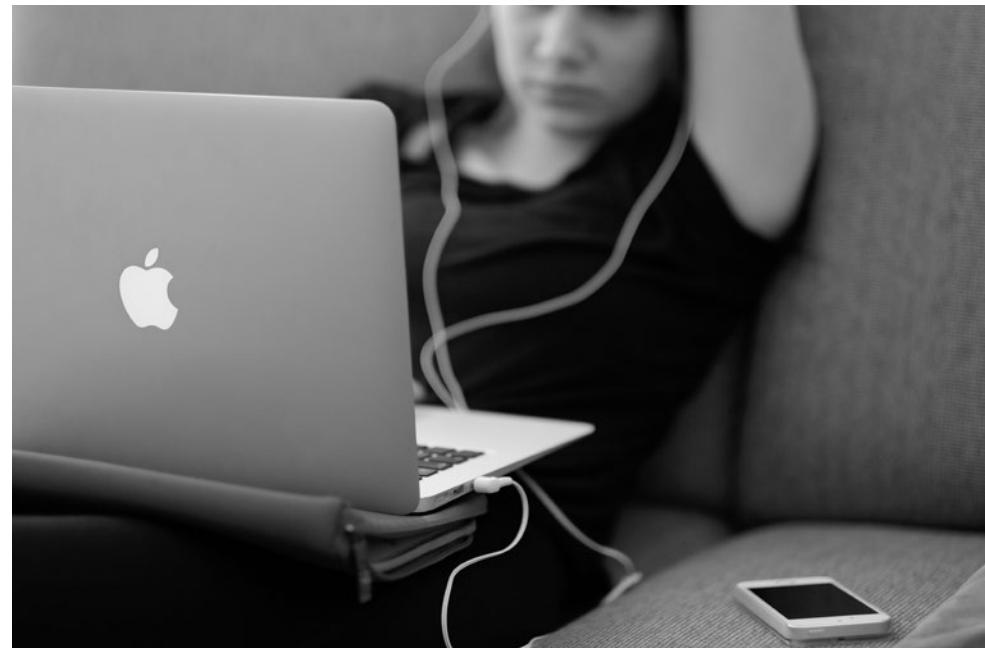
2. Instant Isn’t the Answer

Depending on what statistics you read, over the course of the last 10 years the average attention span has dropped from 12 minutes to a staggeringly short five minutes.

Our minds are hit with so much information so fast, and our world is moving at such a rapid pace, it is hard to put on the brakes. Teaching our children to slow down and enjoy learning the Scriptures can not only teach them God’s way of life, but can also encourage them to learn the principle of working for the things that really matter.

Theodore Roosevelt once said: “Nothing in the world is worth having or worth doing unless it means effort, pain, difficulty . . . I have never in my life envied a human being who led an easy life. I have envied a great many people who led difficult lives and led them well.”

There are no shortcuts to achieving financial success, or to having an enduring, loving marriage relationship, a long-lasting friendship, or a meaningful relationship with God. Learning about God takes effort. Learning God’s way takes time. Patience is needed to read the Scriptures—patience with ourselves, and patience with God to give us under-



standing. “But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:4).

3. Get On the Wavelength of God’s Love

When parents show their children unconditional love through the ups and downs of life, it teaches them how God loves us through difficulties and triumphs. When we strive to practice the characteristics of God’s love found in 1 Corinthians 13, they will learn to emulate these qualities as well: “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, it is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.” There is nothing that tunes us into our Father more than understanding His love, which is what He is (1 John 4:8).

God has been very merciful to us in forgiving us, teaching us, and correcting us at times. God corrects every child He loves and receives (Hebrews 12:6). Our children will make mistakes, and we lovingly set them back on the right path.

4. Don’t “Google It,” Seek God’s Word for It!

King David wrote, “The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God” (Psalm 14:2). David said he knew more than the “aged” because he dwelt on God’s law (Psalm 119:99-100).

The Bible holds the answers to the most important questions of life: why God created mankind and our potential to have eternal life and to become a part of God’s family.

Direct your children to God’s Word to find principles in the Bible to help solve the problems they face. Encourage them to read the Proverbs. One or two verses in Proverbs a day can help direct their lives and give them answers in everyday situations.

5. Take a Reality Check, Step Into God’s Creation and Out of the Digital World

Sometimes we are mesmerized by the wonders of technology, but the Bible speaks of the glory of God expressed by His creation. David said, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Psalm 19:1).

The apostle Paul wrote, “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead [divine nature], so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20).

Immersion therapy in God’s creation is necessary in the world we live in. Sometimes it’s good to turn off the Wi-Fi and tune into the wildlife of God’s creation. A perfect place for our youth to see God’s wonderful creation and experience a myriad of activities apart from the sway of technology is United Youth Camps. Not only will they have the opportunity to learn how to become more like Christ, they will be able to do so without the normal influence of the world. They will be in the company of those who are seeking God and His ways.

With the “The Zone” we strive to create a place at youth camps where teens can be in a positive, safe and fun environment every day of camp. United Youth Camps along with the other points mentioned above can help keep our teens on track and “tuned in” to the Creator of the universe. **UN**

Announcements



Grace Adelyn Trone

Born: Nov. 24, 2016



Auties Benny Edward Abrell

Jan. 20, 1934-Jan. 19, 2017



Joan Carol Mengershauser

Sept. 7, 1932-Aug. 23, 2016



Marvin McDonald Page

Aug. 26, 1934-Sept. 13, 2016

Births

Grace Adelyn Trone

Joseph and Crystal Trone of the UCG Sacramento congregation are happy to announce the birth of their first child, Grace Adelyn Trone. God gave Grace at 12:16 p.m. on Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 24, and she weighed in at 7 lbs., 14 oz., and was 21 in. long. Grandparents Drew and Lydia Trone and Aaron and Michelle Dean were elated to be there to welcome their new granddaughter.

Obituaries

Auties Benny Edward Abrell

Auties Benny Edward Abrell, a longtime member in God's Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, died on Jan. 19, 2017, at the age of 82. He was born on Jan. 20, 1934. He passed away one day before turning 83. Auties was baptized in 1960 during a baptizing tour in Indiana. At that time he attended the Holy Days in Chicago, Illinois. He retired from Warren Township school system after 11 years.

He is survived by his wife of 27 years, Sandy. Sandy is a member in the Indianapolis, Indiana, United Church of God congregation. He is also survived by two children, Mary Wright and Betty Dailey, five stepdaughters and one stepson. He was preceded in death by two children, John Abrell and Rebekah DeShong, and his stepdaughter, Lennie Baker.

He was a wonderful, devoted husband, father and grandfather, and he will be greatly missed by his family and brethren.

Joan Carol Mengershauser

Joan Carol Mengershauser was born Sept. 7, 1932, in Armour, South Dakota, the first-born of six children. The family grew up on a farm and were part of a close-knit community.

Joanie played trombone all through high school and graduated from Parkston High School in 1950. Since her parents had not been able to continue their schooling past eighth grade, they always encouraged each of their chil-

dren to obtain a college degree so they would have more opportunities in life. Joanie did just this when she graduated (at the top of her class) with her registered nurse (RN) degree from St. Joseph Hospital School of Nursing in Mitchell, South Dakota. Joanie married Robert Fergen Oct. 22, 1953.

They had six children: Mark, Peggy (Morgan), Dave, Kenny, Patrick and Lisa (Arner). They lived in Rapid City, South Dakota, and came into the Church in 1970 and were an integral part in helping establish the local church. Bob was an elder, and Joanie was a deaconess. Joanie was a gracious hostess and loved hosting dinners. She believed in having a "cake around the corner" and had homemade pie or cake with coffee ready to brew for anyone who may drop in at any time.

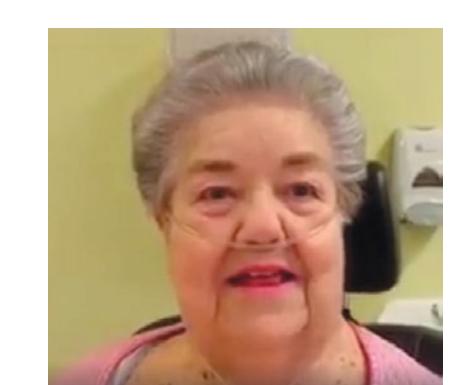
In 1980, they moved to Pasadena, California, and lived in the Southern California area until 1989 when they moved and settled in Tri-Cities, Washington. They celebrated their 50th anniversary in 2003, three years prior to Bob's death in 2006. She is survived by her six children, 11 grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren.

Marvin McDonald Page

Marvin McDonald Page, 82, passed away Tuesday, Sept. 13, 2016, at his home.

Born Aug. 26, 1934, in Robeson County, he was a son of the late Matthew Page and the late Florence Brewer Page. Mr. Page was a retired plumber and a member of High Point United Church of God where he was very active. He loved his family, gardening, and his grandchildren and great-grandchildren were the highlight of his life.

Mr. Page is survived by his wife of 63 years, Jimmie Daniels Page of the home; daughters Bonnie Todd and husband Alan of Seven Lakes, Jennell Taylor and husband David of Charlotte and Marshan Weifenbach and husband Steve of Winston-Salem; brothers Jimmy Page and companion Mary of Fairmont; sisters Gladys Johnson and husband James of Marietta, Helen Marie Porter and Shirley Wetherington both of Jackson-



Peggy Elam Poole

June 30, 1939 - Jan. 10, 2017



Arvid V. Simmons Sr.

Sept. 12, 1950 - Nov. 18, 2016

ville, Florida; six grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

In addition to his parents, he was predeceased by his brother, Milton Page.

Peggy Elam Poole

Peggy Elam Poole, 77 years of age from Troy, North Carolina, died on Tuesday, Jan. 10, 2017 at the Autumn Care Center of Biscoe, North Carolina.

Peggy had one daughter and two sons and was preceded in death by her husband Hoy. Both Peggy and Hoy were long-time members of the Church of God. She attended services and was an active member at church activities until her health deteriorated. Peggy liked to collect cookbooks and little lamps. Her favorite Bible verse was Psalm 23.

Peggy was a very friendly and outgoing person who seemed to know most of the people at the nursing home where she lived. A highlight of Peggy's week was to listen to Sabbath services on the phone.

We will miss Peggy, but we are thankful that she is no longer in pain but is resting and awaiting her resurrection.

Arvid V. Simmons, Sr.

Arvid V. Simmons, Sr., age 66, passed away peacefully on Nov. 18, 2016. He is survived by his lovely wife of 37 years Gloria Mastin Simmons; children Arvid Simmons, Jr. (Tiffany), Robert Simmons, Sr. (Shana), Jessica Simmons, Brandi Axt (Tyler); grandchildren Dasonie, Tirzah, Robert Jr., Cheyenne Simmons and Barrett Axt; sisters Chrystella Witherspoon and Clarice Ramey Benford (Freddie);

several extended family members and friends.

He is preceded in death by father, Robert L. Simmons, and mother, Leara J. Simmons.

Arvid was born Sept. 12, 1950, in Nashville, Tennessee. He was educated in the Nashville public school system and attended Tennessee State University. He dedicated his life to the people in his community as an insurance sales specialist. Arvid was a "music man." He was a member of the United Church of God and served as music coordinator and choir director. He loved making others laugh with his bubbly personality. Arvid loved to sing, serve the church by speaking, and he even cleaned the church bathrooms. He also enjoyed taking care of his yard and plants. His greatest pastime was spending time with his grandchildren. He was loved dearly and will never be forgotten.

Announcements: Send us announcements from your local congregation! Have your pastor review what you write, and send it in to UN@ucg.org. We're looking for 100- to 300-word articles and photos with captions. Please double-check the spelling of names, and include the author's and photographer's names. **E-mail is preferred**, but we will also take physical mail as well! Please include a self-addressed envelope if you'd like photos returned.

Honoring Retiring Ministry Wil & Sue Berg

Baptized on Aug. 25, 1955, employed by the Worldwide Church of God in November 1958, graduated from Ambassador college June 1961, ordained by Herbert W. Armstrong on Trumpets, Sept. 11, 1961, and retired from United Church of God on Jan. 1, 2017, Wilbur Berg, now 90, has served God's Church for over 58 years.

First working in the Church files and mailing departments, Wil became a senior writer in the personal correspondence department who answered doctrinal questions for many years. He also worked in the special services department that helped young men establish their conscientious objector status. For a time, he was an assistant to the director of Church administration in Pasadena and a member of the doctrinal and divorce and remarriage committees. In more recent years, he served on several UCG doctrinal task forces, was a member of the *Ministerial Journal* review team, wrote articles for Church publications, and composed hymns and choir music (available on request).

His pastoral duties included Hawaii; Long Beach, California; Blackfoot and Twin Falls, Idaho; and Jackson, Wyoming. In more recent years he has pastored the Idaho Falls, Idaho; and Dubois, Wyoming, congregations.

After Wil's first wife of almost 50 years died (Garland Gay Gould), he married Susan Blumel, and they recently celebrated their 14th anniversary. Both ladies attended Ambassador College (Sue graduated in 1974), and were/are known for their dedication, service and love for God's people. Wil had four children with his first wife (one son died), and has seven grandchildren.

Wil and Sue have been heavily involved in the Church's Challenger Camps in Wyoming's Grand Teton National Park, and the more recent Challenger Programs in the Wind River mountains. Over the years their Dubois, Wyoming, home has been the base camp staging area for hosting campers and staff, providing lodging, meals and organizational support.

When reflecting back on decades of service Wil and Sue Berg shared a few thoughts for achieving greater love and unity in the Church:

Wil Berg: "Jesus emphasized the 'weightier matters of the law' (Matthew 23:23)—such as the love of God and man, righteousness, justice, truth, mercy, faith and peace. To obtain God's blessing as well as greater unity and peace in His Church, we must practice these standards.

"Also, remember and follow Jesus' statements: 'By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another' (John 13:35; 15:12) and, 'If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love' (John 15:10). Even when people abuse and disagree with us, we must love, bless, do good and pray for them (Matthew 5:44).

"Beloved, if God loved us, we also ought to love one another' (1 John 4:11). God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). To be counted worthy to stand before the Son of Man at His coming (Luke 21:36), we must become love as God is love (1 John 4:17) and follow Jesus' instruction to reconcile our differences (Matthew 5:24)."

Sue Berg: "I feel very blessed and am thankful to have found in Wil a husband who loves God, the brethren, and with whom I share many common interests. Serving as a pastor's wife has been a recent role for me, but each of us can make a difference in local congregations and communities if we seek and are led by God's Spirit, wise mentors, and are friendly and approachable.

Friends and family shared these sentiments:

Mark and Michelle Mickelson: "Wil and Sue are close personal friends and the good times we have enjoyed together are many. Our family was staying with Wil and Gay in Dubois when I left to climb the Grand Teton for the first time. Since then UCG's many Challenger camps and programs have always been heavily supported by the Bergs. Wil also has an insatiable desire to



understand Scripture—our many hours of profitable conversation have repeatedly centered on the meaning and application of some series of Bible verses. Many travelers and guests have enjoyed the benefits of their hospitality."

Carl and Mary Carmichael: "Mr. Berg is an amazing man. At 90, he still hunts big game and cross-country skis, among other unlikely things. As his sister once remarked, 'He is like the Energizer Bunny.' In the 22 years we have known him, he has been dedicated to his tasks, single minded in his approach and responsive to the needs of others. Mary and I have been enriched by knowing and working with Mr. Berg, and are looking forward to celebrating his 100th birthday."

Roland and Dianne Clark: "For 40 years God has blessed us with a close relationship with the Bergs. Wil has been a dedicated minister with a strong love of the brethren and desire to teach, and he has continued to grow in seeking to understand the truths in God's Word over the years."

Dan and Val Deiniger: "Mr. Berg's years of dedication to God's people and fervent study of God's Word resulted in a man filled with unique insights and wisdom

in applying God's way in an increasingly complex world."

Nathan E. and Cherine Berg (son, daughter-in-law): "To me, Dad was a 'Rock of Gibraltar' as our church went through stresses and strains over the years. He has always maintained a positive and optimistic view, and is always looking to the future, especially to the Kingdom. Although they live far away from family, Dad always takes special interest in his seven grandchildren, often calling to see how they are doing."

Nathan Berg (grandson): "He is a real people-person who knows many brethren in the Church, and always shows an interest in others and helping others."

Austin Berg (grandson): "This is a man who has built a strong and caring family, that spends time together whenever possible, and appreciates each person."

After Retirement:

The Bergs will remain in the Dubois area to continue serving the scattered brethren in their region, host future Challenger West camps, and pursue their biblical interests and studies.

Lisa Fenchel



Up and Coming

The Atlanta and Buford, Georgia, congregations are happy to announce the annual Young Adults/Singles Weekend and Family Dance the weekend of March 24-26. Please join us for a spiritually uplifting weekend full of fellowship, fun, and fantastic dancing! The weekend will kick off with a Friday evening mixer for singles and young adults, followed by Sabbath services and a family dance. The weekend will end with a group activity for all ages at

Singles Weekend and Family Dance

Stone Mountain Park!

Sabbath Services and dance will be held at the Norcross Cultural Arts and Community Center at 3 p.m. Following the service, individuals and groups will break for dinner at nearby restaurants.

The family dance is open to all ages! The theme of the dance is "Dancing Through the Decades."

Tickets

Attendance at the dance will require

advance registration. Prices below:

Singles—\$15 per person

Families—\$12 per person with a maximum of \$50 for families over four (4) individuals*.

*Please note that this applies to members living in the same household, not extended family members.

Check the website to find information on how to purchase tickets.

If you want to stay nearby, we recommend Courtyard Marriott Norcross/Peachtree

Corners for hotel during the weekend: This hotel is located 1.4 miles from the location of services and the dance.

Additional information and Contact:

For more information contact Philip Aust at (770) 529-1690, or by e-mail: at philip_aust@ucg.org. You can also get more information at: www.ucg.org/members/news/atlanta-young-adults-singles-and-family-dance-weekend.

Honoring Retiring Ministry

Robert & Valerie Berendt



“How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!” (Romans 10).

On Jan. 28, the UCG Edmonton congregation celebrated the beautiful journey of Robert and Valerie Berendt, messengers for Christ, as they retired from the pastoral ministry. A photo tribute, spanning 50 years and many milestones, featured an animated pulpit on wheels with a rapidly scrolling odometer! Very conservatively, strictly counting only pastoral travel by car, our “odometer check” registered a driving distance easily exceeding 4 million kilometers (2.5 million miles)—or 100 laps around Earth’s equator—accident-free! However only God can measure the spiritual distance covered by this couple, ministering to His people through joy and sadness, weddings and funerals, baptisms and anointings, ordinations, blessings and trials.

Heartwarming tributes were received from North America and Europe as Robert and Valerie finished their 100th lap.

Robert is described as a “people’s person” who contributed an awareness of church life in Europe and Canada, providing some “Canadian cool” during his recent two terms on the Council of Elders. Chairing the Doctrine Committee, he was a courageous leader devoted to the truth of God, but remembered for his warm personality, encouraging words, energy and zest for life.

Robert, a high school teacher, with his wife Joan and young family, joined the Edmonton church as it formed in 1964. Family camping adventures to the Feast in Squaw Valley California led to graduation from Ambassador College Pasadena in 1970 and ordination into the ministry. After pastoring for 13 years, Robert’s wife Joan died in 1983. Robert feels he was blessed to marry Valerie in 1987, and for the last almost 30 years Val has been at his side. Valerie, born in Malawi, from England, also has a university degree in education and a previous career as a physiotherapist.

“Der fliegende Pastor (the flying pastor)—that is what our Church brethren in Bavaria and Austria called pastor Berendt during his years serving the German-language regions,” relates Paul Kieffer. Robert and Valerie Berendt did not actually fly through the air, but they were constantly navigating the Autobahn and the Bundesstraße to serve two or three congregations per Sabbath between Nuremberg, Munich, Salzburg and Vienna. “We liked your Canadian German,” wrote one member, “. . . from the bottom of my heart I say thank you for serving us, serving the church and in the end serving God . . . Even over in Canada you have always looked after your flock in Germany and Austria.” They visited scattered individuals from Italy to Croatia where they delivered a carload of humanitarian aid during civil war. Their Bibles were regularly inspected by skeptical East Bloc border guards as they coordinated the Feast in Brno, Czechoslovakia, during unique times culminating in the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Back in Canada, even longer drives were routine, across British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and into Quebec and New York state. Wrote Mike Caputo: “You pastored, you wrote, you served on the Council of Elders, and on the Canadian board. You and your wife Val risked your lives travelling long-distances to serve God’s people, at times in dangerous conditions. No one really knows the fullness of your sacrifices but you and Jesus Christ, who most probably wrote the word ‘faithful’ beside your names in His book of remembrances.”

Robert grew up in the Rocky Mountains and for decades organized annual hikes there with large groups of Canadian teens, typically scaling a mountain peak on an ambitious 20-mile trek through wild back country. Robert and Valerie taught skiing

for winter camps and canoeing for summer camps in Germany.

Robert’s enthusiasm for ice hockey generated popular church hockey tournaments. Robert and Valerie would also take hockey equipment over to Germany for their winter camp. Members in Germany recall their Canadian pastor’s speed-of-light skating ability and his playful prophecy that the “shining sea like glass” before God’s heavenly throne hints that ice hockey may well be the official sport of the world tomorrow, with an explanation that body checks in hockey are simply expressions of brotherly love!

“Once an elder, always an elder,” and they will continue to assist. However, even Levites were instructed in Numbers 8 to “retire from the regular service” by age 50. We rejoice that for Robert (apparently blessed with the vitality of Moses) 80 seems to be the new 50, and he and Valerie plan to enjoy even more hockey, hunting, fishing, snow and water skiing and kayaking together. “Now is a time to reflect upon all the ways God has used your services, and all the people you have reached over more than half a century,” wrote Bob Dick. “I hope in retirement you will have additional time for you and Val . . . Take a few more hikes, stop more often to smell the roses and don’t stop playing hockey.”

In retirement, Great Opa and Val Berendt may take an occasional “joy ride” but will reside in Edmonton where their beautiful journey began, assisting and celebrating past and future spiritual milestones with family which spans four generations, now including four great-grandchildren and three more expected this spring!

Rick Berendt

Visiting East Africa

Continued from page 1

various elements of godly leadership coupled with holy righteous character. While Merrie met with the ladies and discussed being women of godly character, Moses Nyaira addressed the men about aspects of character necessary for Church leadership. An interactive session with everyone explored and documented many of the serious challenges extant in the Church today. We then explored which problematic matters are the responsibility of Church leadership to address and which are the responsibility of others to handle.

Opportunities were also made to spend one-on-one time with each of our senior administrative staff, discussing and assist-

ing with various issues that arise in the normal course of doing God’s work here. Annual budgets were finalized, along with strategic planning for the coming fiscal year. Several congregations were visited on Sabbaths and weekdays, allowing one-on-one time en route with the pastors who serve them.

Monte Knudson serves effectively as my assistant. He and his wife Susie have visited Kenya with us about five times since 2003. This past August, Mr. Knudson began making his own visits to Kenya with regularity. He and Antonio Ndung’u have just finalized plans for a Feast site on the coast near Mombasa. This provides international visitors a unique opportunity for international elders and brethren to attend the Feast with us with affordable beachfront accommodations right on the



John Elliott at church services in Africa.

Indian Ocean.

All the leaders and brethren from across East Africa send you their greet-

ings. Remember them as your brothers and sisters in God’s family. **UN**



Local Church UPDATES

Cincinnati Family Dance Weekend



Photo by Duane Phelps

Young adults at the snowboarding activity over the Cincinnati family dance weekend.

The Cincinnati East congregation held the annual Cincinnati family weekend on Feb. 10-12. The weekend started off with a Bible study by Mike Phelps, ministerial trainee, about how Paul was able to connect to people in preaching the gospel. After the Bible study everyone enjoyed the dessert social filled with many sweet treats and engaging conversations.

On Saturday, a combined church service was held at 3 p.m. at a nearby hotel to accommodate both a.m. and p.m. services as well as any guests visiting for the weekend. There were 280 who attended services. The Cincinnati East ensemble played during hymns, and Corbin Rose and Lindsay Wildt sang for special music. Everyone enjoyed more fellowship after services.

Later a special dinner was served.

Many people enjoyed even more time to connect with brethren and family over delicious food. And in the evening, starting at 7:30, the annual Cincinnati dance was held with David Kovalchick as DJ. After the dance many people stayed some time after to socialize some more.

Even with the unusual warmer weather this year in the mid 40s and 50s throughout the day, the annual snow outing activity at Perfect North Slopes in Indiana went on as scheduled, with about 16 enthusiastic snowboarders and tubers participating. Snow tubing was a sliding success, and snowboarding was again a big hit this year. There were a couple wipeouts and one lost hat (which was later recovered), but everyone had a great time and everyone is already planning to attend again next year.

Linda Merrick



Up and Coming

Southeast Regional Formal

The UCG Southeast Regional Formal will be held on April 15, 2017, at Cumberland University's Baird Chapel in Lebanon, Tennessee.

The catered dinner starts at 6 p.m. with the dance following from 7:30 p.m. to midnight. The registration deadline is March 24, 2017.

The fee is \$20 per person which includes dinner, dance, snacks and drinks. Payment will not be accepted at the door. Please check out the Facebook page 2017 UCG Southeast Regional Formal for registration forms and senior bio form.

Midwest Teen Prom

Registration is now open for the 2017 Midwest Teen Prom in Columbus, Ohio. This annual event for teens, 12-19 years old, will take place on March 25. All details can be found on the website.

Roy Waterhouse

For more information:

www.midwestteenprom.com

Annual Nashville Bingo Night Continues the Tradition

The annual Nashville congregation bingo night has always stood out from all the enjoyable social events held here. And that's in no small part because of Arvid Simmons, beloved local member, who made it a tradition to tell (bad, silly, pedestrian, and did I mention bad?) jokes while he called out the numbers. At least once each year he'd start telling a joke but tell the punchline too soon, then laugh at his mistake as he realized what he had done, but finish the joke anyway (which was often funnier than if he had nailed the joke). It was all part of his charming and enjoyable schtick.

This year, his recent and unexpected death hung over the lead-up to the bingo evening—"who can fill the shoes of this gentle, humble, self-deprecating, hilarious man?" But all apprehension melted away as callers took turns carrying the torch. One used the same joke book Arvid used, others used their own brand of humor, but all of them engendered a positive spirit of joy.

The local members donated prizes to be won, and as the evening went on (and it seemed the same small group of people kept winning over and over—seriously, those cards are rigged), the number of winners allowed in between each card-



Photo by Mitchell Moss

clearing was increased until the tables lay bare of most of the choice prizes.

We all take heart in knowing that we'll see Arvid's smiling, laughing, joyous face again. But until then, we carry on in his affable tradition of telling bad knock knock jokes at bingo night each year in Nashville.

Mitchell Moss

Garden Grove's 50th Anniversary Celebration

On Dec. 31, 2016, the Garden Grove, California, congregation hosted a memorable 50th anniversary celebration of the Church of God in Orange County with 160 in attendance. The very special event was held in our usual rented facility's fellowship hall in Garden Grove, spruced up festively with a themed banner, balloon decorations, gold-colored table centerpieces, memorabilia and photo displays spanning five decades. Approximately 160 shared the celebration with us.

Our jam-packed day began with regular services at 2:30 p.m. Robin Webber, copastor and pastor from 1994-2001, and Mario Seiglie, pastor from 2001 to the present, gave inspiring split-sermons.

The Garden Grove congregation hosted a special (and scrumptious) dinner in the attractively decorated fellowship hall upstairs. The meal featured mouth-watering pot roast prepared by Jesse Api, one of our Garden Grove members—plus chicken, side dishes and salads furnished by our Garden Grove members. Anniversary cake and other desserts capped off the meal.

The evening program began with an



The Webbers and the Seiglies pose for a photo at the celebration.

hour program of reflections. Presenters were Jean Updegraff with an overall history, then several with reflections of their time in our church area: Knute Josifek for the early years beginning in 1967, followed by Dan Salcedo, an elder who began attending in 1971, then Robin Webber and Mario Seiglie with reflections on their time periods here.

Our members and guests left that evening with warm memories of a day full of joy, happiness, and much fellowship with friends past and present. We thank the many in our congregation who prepared and worked so diligently to make this event the memorable success it was.

Jean Updegraff

How Do You Get a Handle On Recurring Sins You Can't Seem to Get Under Control?

by Mitchell Moss

Your whole crew is together, having an awesome time. Friends you don't normally see are in from out of town, you are at your favorite restaurant, enjoying what is maybe your favorite meal of all time. After finishing your meal, you all go back to one of your homes to continue having fun. Most of you stop on the way and pick up something to drink. The host sets out snacks and puts on some music. The hours fly by as you talk and laugh and share your time together. One drink, two drinks, three drinks—what time is it? Oh, okay, a fourth drink then. Time to leave, your spouse hasn't had anything, so he or she drives you home.

You're not an alcoholic. But how many times have you done this? Why is it that sometimes you're very responsible with alcohol, and others it's like you're at a 21-year-old's college frat party? How do you get a handle on this once and for all?

I use this story as a stand-in for any repeated, difficult-to-overcome, habitual sin you may struggle with. The substance of alcohol makes things tougher—it damages your ability to make good decisions while you're under its influence—but so many sins can hold just as powerful a grip on us through chemicals we don't literally consume through our mouths but instead are naturally produced and get released directly into our bloodstream. Lust, anger, adrenaline, jealousy, greed (and how often are they compounded by the alcohol you do consume, be honest). Everybody has their “cross to bear”—the habits and sins that you died to at baptism (Galatians 5:24; Romans 6:4-7) but which keep haunting you from their watery grave. To be Christian is to seriously reckon with these sins and to yoke yourself to Christ, who overcame the world on our behalf (John 16:33; 1 John 5:4), making possible the Spirit-led transformation we want so desperately at times—and which at other times we don't want so much (again, be honest).

So you've examined yourself and have identified a sin that you know you need to crush, but it's just so resilient (because it feels good in the moment). The cold blue light of day brings guilt and shame and repentance. But it should also result in strategy to overcome.

Consider this my hard-earned list of first steps to take in the struggle with sin. Because like anyone I have overcome

some sins with a high hand, confident in my growth and grateful for the repentance God has granted me. But with that growth comes recognition of other sins looming in my life, in need of their own day of reckoning. Start your own sin-crushing endeavor here.

1—Pay Close Attention to What Your Heart Is Feeling so You Know When You Are Being Tempted to Sin

It seems like an obvious point to make, but how many times have you found yourself wondering “How could I let myself get to this point?” That usually happens because you weren't paying attention in the lead-up to the sin. It's critical to remain aware of your feelings at all times because sin almost always starts in your heart (Jeremiah 17:9)—even before any thoughts can form, or your conscience can even alert you to the temptation. The heart skips a beat when you see that notification on your phone; the adrenaline rushes into your bloodstream before you can throw that insult back; the lustful desire swells before you even type anything into Google.

We get ourselves in these situations where our noblest intentions don't stand a chance. But too often we're only in those situations because we aren't paying attention to the small decisions we make along the way that get us there.

What is the sin in your life that makes your conscience tug on you ever so gently, but you choose to ignore it until it's too late? What's the thing you feel guilty about afterward and know you need to stop, but can't seem to get a firm grip on until it's too late? These things start in your heart—and contrary to the world's refrain to “follow your heart,” you need to learn to identify what your heart is feeling so you can choose to not follow it into sin.

Honestly evaluate what types of feelings lead to your sin. What are you feeling during the sin? What do you feel like immediately after the sin? What do you feel the day after the sin? Reflect deeply and be honest about those feelings, then write them down. Do this as soon as humanly



Photo by Ben White/Unsplash

possible so that everything is still fresh in your mind.

2—Pay Attention to When You're Most Tempted, and Take Note of What the Circumstances Are

A lot of sins are unthinkable in the daytime when you're at work, school, or around other people, but at night when you're on your own, they beckon you almost ceaselessly. Others are the kind that take place no matter where you are or what time of day it is because they take place in your heart and mind. Some only take place when you're around certain people. To overcome, you have to take note of these things.

In step 1, you took note of and wrote down your internal circumstances for evaluation. In step 2, you write down and remember as many details as you can about the external circumstances. What time of day is it? Where are you? Who are you with? Are you alone? Are you hungry? Are you tired? Are you in a good mood or bad one? How long has it been since your last temptation? Have you recently had a negative interaction with somebody? Have you been drinking? Have you been watching something in particular? Have you been listening to something in particular? Get really specific.

We get ourselves in these situations where our noblest intentions don't stand a chance. But too often we're only in those situations because we aren't paying attention to the small decisions we make along the way that get us there.

Evaluate this and the first list together. Think about each circumstance—both

internal and external—and recall other times you gave into this sin. You can start to identify patterns of behavior, feelings, people, places, times and other factors that are conducive to this sin. Then you can be actively aware of these circumstances in real time as they're happening next time. You can choose to stop yourself and heed that voice in your head.

3—Share the Most Revealing and Intimate Struggles You Have With Someone You Trust

It's easy to rationalize things to yourself, and as time goes by and you continue to struggle with your private sin, you can even become numb to its seriousness. You rationalize things that a month ago you would've never pictured yourself as capable of doing. Many people only come to their senses once they've hit rock bottom. We can't trust ourselves to be objective. We know every detail of our lives so intimately that we tend to brush off this or that little lapse of judgment as being a one-off. All the while our spiritual condition worsens.

So tell someone you deeply trust about your struggle (James 5:16). They can help cut through the mist of subjectivity. If you tell them how you were feeling, where those feelings led and the sin that resulted, they can help you look out for those circumstances. If they're with you and see the patterns of behavior you've identified, they can directly take action to intervene. If they're not with you, you have to reach out to them so they can

Please see page 10

The Small Things

Anonymous

One of my favorite scriptures is Zechariah 4:10. Zerubbabel was rebuilding the temple, and there were those who were finding fault with the project. Even Zerubbabel seemed to be having difficulty staying on task. It was a job that was important, and yet God had to remind him not to despise the day of small things.

This scripture reminds me of my youth. Having grown up in the Church I knew right from wrong. I knew what God expected out of me, but much like the prodigal son, I chose to leave and go out into the world to discover for myself what life was all about.

When I returned, I was not alone. I carried in my arms a child. I was a young, unmarried mother, walking through the doors and into the middle of what once had been my congregation. I wanted to raise my child in the only place that I knew would provide him with the answers to life, the Church.

I knew it wasn't going to be easy, but at times it was more difficult than it had to be. It was a different time, many years ago, and being in my situation was something that caught the congregation off guard. It took several months for them to accept me as part of their congregation and to embrace me and my child. There were times when all that kept me moving forward was knowing that God was there and it was the right thing to do.

During that period of time, I was made aware that many considered me to be a threat to the youth, and some made it their mission to protect the young people from me. Others took it upon themselves to use each Sabbath to lecture me on childrearing, while there were those who refused to speak to me at all. I was shunned and isolated by many.

They had expected more out of me, and I had let them down. But there was more

to the story. Much like the prodigal son, God had already forgiven and accepted me. My child was as loved by me and by God as any child would be. I knew I was where I belonged, and although there were those who were waiting for me to leave once again, I had no plans of going anywhere.

I look back and see that God was working everything out. Maybe He was testing me to see if I had what it took to stick it out no matter what happened. Maybe it was just a matter of giving the congregation enough time to understand the right way to respond. All I know is that He was there, and He was working in me, even though it was difficult for others to see it at the time.

During all the turmoil, there was a man who was stepping up and doing his best to provide an example to the congregation. This local elder showed compassion and acceptance. Each Sabbath he would look me up and ask how things were going, or if I needed anything. He always made a place for me and my child to feel accepted. It was during one of our many socials that he invited me to the front of the hall to participate in a skit, which was fun and left everyone laughing. It was during that social and due to his efforts, that the walls seemed to come down between me and the congregation. My child and I were invited to join the people my age, at their table, and we began to build trust and friendships.

As the world crumbles around us, the Church may begin to see more prodigal sons returning from their journey into the world. Like me and my child, they will need love and acceptance. They will need to know that our congregations are safe places to become the kind of Christians God intends for them to be. They will need one thing from you: your love and acceptance. They will need you to set that



Photo by Noah Hinton/Unsplash

example for others.

Don't despise the day of little things. Much like during the time of Zerubbabel, it is easy to look at someone and feel as if their lives would have been much better if they had not fallen into a sinful life. It might be easy to look at their rebuilding and question its value. Let's not question the day of little things, the day of new beginnings, the day of rebuilding.

God said that the rebuilding of the physical temple was not by the might or power of men, but by the Spirit of God. If God is rebuilding those who return from this world, the spiritual temple, how much more should we rejoice in their return and give them every opportunity to continue to grow.

I am grateful to God, that He had mer-

cy on me, my child, and our lives. I am grateful for the work that He has done in my life. During the day of small things, I was a young unmarried mother who just kept putting one foot in front of the other, even during those difficult times. Today, I am happily married to a wonderful God-fearing man, the mother of three, and the grandmother of one. My husband and I love our congregation and the people who make it feel like home. My rebuilding, along with yours, continues every day. For me, it began with acceptance, forgiveness, and love.

If I could leave you with one thought, it would be this: When the door opens and she walks in, all she needs from you is your love and acceptance. God is doing a good work. Rejoice in the day of the small things. **UN**

Recurring Sins

Continued from page 9

take whatever indirect action is available to intervene. The key is immediacy as much as possible, with the goal being they hold you accountable for what you do. In other words, they don't let you get away with anything—you do that for yourself enough already.

One thing to remember when confiding is that it has to be with someone you trust not to share your struggle with others, of course. But also it must be someone who loves and cares for you enough to stop you

from continuing in the sin. False compassion is helping you rationalize your sin, letting you off the hook for the guilt you rightfully feel in the aftermath. Or seeing it happen in real time but failing to take bold steps to put a stop to what they're seeing (Proverbs 24:11-12). Keep in mind the reverse scenario: If someone asked you to truly help them overcome their sin, how guilty would you feel if they reached out to you and you didn't do what it took to stop it from happening again? Make it clear to whomever you confide in that you expect them not to take your stupid excuses, but instead to punch you in the

gut (metaphorically speaking, of course).

These steps are, of course, only a step on the path toward complete repentance. There is much to be said about learning to yield to God's Holy Spirit, the process of not just killing the bad works of sin in our lives, but also replacing it with the good fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:19-24), and many other deep spiritual points for consideration. We can thank God that, in His grace, He only reveals our sins to us in small doses. So there are probably sins in your life that you don't even recognize yet—things your conscience doesn't even know to tug at you for—because God is

working with you to grow and mature in other areas before He shows them to you.

None of this is to make the Christian life sound brutal or exhausting, however. I hate it when people do that, because as with anything, the hard work you put in makes your life far more satisfying than you could've imagined when you were waffling around. Yes, it may be difficult, and yes there will be hardships you would never have imagined, but coming through on the other side always results in a deeper, more lasting and more sincere grounding in the grace and peace of God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. **UN**

Poor in Spirit

Continued from page 1

is a colorful word, bringing to mind the image of a beggar in rags, crouching at the street corner, hand extended, eyes to the ground, hoping for the smallest mercies anyone can offer him.

According to Jesus, this is how we need to see ourselves in relation to God. It's not about carnal self-loathing. It's about recognizing how great God is and how insignificant we are apart from Him. It's the same lesson Job learned when God appeared in the whirlwind to reveal Himself. In response to the awesome power of God's presence Job said: "Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You? I lay my hand on my mouth. Once I have spoken, and I will not answer; even twice, and I will add nothing more" (Job 40:4-5, New American Standard Bible). Job recognized by God's greatness that in comparison he was nothing. Seeing yourself

"It's not about carnal self-loathing. It's about recognizing how great God is and how insignificant we are apart from Him."

as you are in relation to God is when you start to develop true humility. It's the start of learning what it means to be poor in spirit toward God. He is the great Creator of all, and you are His creation, subject to His will in all things.

Soon we'll all be joining together to take part in the annual Passover service in which we remember the sacrificial death of our Savior Jesus Christ for us by partaking in the symbols He instituted at the final Passover of His human ministry—bread and wine.

Poverty of spirit is implicit in the act of taking that small piece of bread and that small sip of wine, the body and blood of Christ. When you take the Passover you

affirm that you are incapable of spiritual wholeness and righteousness in and of yourself. It's a recognition that, in seeing yourself in comparison with God, you fall far short of the riches of His character. You stand in His sight as a beggar, pleading for mercy and for just the smallest piece of what He has to offer you.

And in return the Lord of all offers not just a few pennies out of His riches. He offers His entire Kingdom to you as a gift—and more than a gift, an inheritance, as He claims you as one of His very own children. This is a miracle beyond measure and all by the grace of God—there is nothing in us that produces such a wonderful reality. It all comes from God and His infinite love for those He is calling to be His children.

I said earlier that poverty of spirit begins when we recognize how insignificant we are before the great God who created all things. But the flip side of recognizing how insignificant you are

apart from God is that it also shows us how incredibly significant you are with God and because of God. When you're poor in spirit, humble before God and totally reliant on Him, you open yourself up to receive the riches of His Spirit. That's how we find our true value: by recognizing that we are totally dependent on God and then giving our lives to Him as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1).

I ask again: Are you poor in spirit? As we approach the annual Passover service let's make sure we ask ourselves that question. If we recognize God's greatness, and our insignificance in relation to Him and our hopelessness without Him, then we will also recognize just how wonderful His plan for us is. Jesus is returning, and He is bringing the fullness of the Kingdom of God with Him. He wants to share it with us. Let's be humbled by God's grace and generosity toward those who can offer nothing in return. **UN**

The Joy of Setbacks

Continued from page 3

trials and setbacks that one must face. In Jesus' Olivet Prophecy about end-time events He confirms this: "But he who endures to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13).

A Christian's life is characterized in several places in the book of Revelation as "overcoming." One such passage is Revelation 3:21: "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne." Overcoming is to be victorious. And that means to be faithful to Jesus Christ to the end, keeping that faith and that belief intact in spite of all the trials and temptations of this world. The "cross" of, for example, poor health, financial challenges, or broken relationships, will not deter your faithfulness to our Lord because we

Jesus Christ divested His Eternal state to become human and die for mankind. Only through His suffering and death could you and I be redeemed and be granted forgiveness of our sins and then be given eternal life.

know that Christ will be faithful to us and deliver us as it is mentioned in the references in Revelation.

Jesus Himself set an example for us in suffering and enduring hardship for a greater purpose as described by the apostle Paul:

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:5-11).

Jesus Christ divested His eternal state to become human and to die for mankind. Only through His suffering and death could you and I be redeemed and be granted forgiveness of our sins and then be given eternal life. Christ invested totally in this process, but it required His stepping down from the fullness of His divine state. That was a setback. That was His cross. But it resulted in the greatest gift that you and I and all mankind could receive. In the end

He overcame and was victorious.

So take a closer look at the trials you may have to bear. Use disappointments, setbacks and trials to learn and grow. What can you take away from a setback? Is there something you can do differently? What part of the circumstances are you responsible for and how will you remedy them? Are you relying on Jesus Christ to help you overcome through prayer and asking for His guidance in His Word and active intervention in your trial?

Going "forward" as this column advocates often requires that we manage the "crosses" of life. The greatest achievements are molded in the crucible of adversity because that's where you demonstrate your worth.

General George Patton is credited with saying, "Success is how high you bounce when you hit bottom." There's truth in that as we go forward! **UN**

Grace

Continued from page 3

exactly the type of what He is going to give us when our spiritual development is complete and He sends His Son back to earth as part of His plan to increase His family. Jesus, even as a 12-year-old said to His physical parents, "Do you not know that I must be about my Father's business?"

Indeed God was Jesus' Father in His very conception physically when His Spirit impregnated Mary. He was always God's Son while on earth, and with His resurrection to spirit life He returned to His place in God's eternal family. The "birth," better known as the resurrection, happened very quickly.

Only God can give spiritual life, but He gave us the next best thing to understand who He is, how He cares for us, and what He wants for us; gifts that come from having and growing a godly family.

When we make a covenant with God at baptism, through true repentance, accepting Christ's sacrifice for our sins and have hands laid on us and receive His Spirit, we are begotten to start our journey. It is a journey in many ways not unlike little Grace's journey of growth in Crystal's womb with constant concern and care by

her parents. With this spiritual begetting, we also should realize we too must develop and "be about our Father's business," and that our "birth" will be instantaneous at Christ's return. Just as in Grace's birth, we also do not know exactly when that will be.

Little Grace developed properly and completed her growth to be born on that Thanksgiving Day surrounded by family cheering and loving her. Sadly, many babies today are not wanted, and their journey is stopped through abortion. That is Satan's society of choice, to stop any hope of a future potential member of God's family and any understanding of the joys of God's plan.

Life is a gift, and is God's greatest desire and blessing for us. I love our God who lets

us live the pattern of what he intends for us. The closer we follow God's plan and His laws of life, love, marriage and family, the better we and our children understand the blessing of physical and spiritual life. Only God can give spiritual life, but He gave us the next best thing to understand who He is, how He cares for us, and what He wants for us—gifts that come from having and growing a godly family.

While the world is trying to destroy the family, we have the opportunity to do it God's way. It is an uphill battle, but the effort is of immeasurable value. Men and women were created to understand God and the joy He wants for us, with and through the ability to give life. Truly God gives grace in more ways than one. **UN**

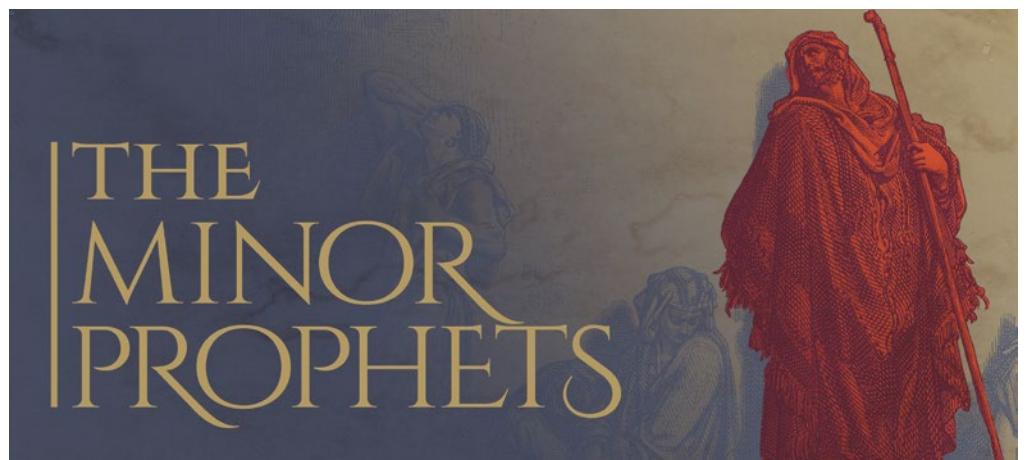


What's New In MEDIA?

BEYOND TODAY

Television Airing Schedule

Title	Host	Literature	Airing Period
<i>The Moment You Die</i>	Darris McNeely	<i>What Happens After Death?</i>	Mar. 5-11
<i>How to Quit Porn</i>	Steve Myers	<i>Overcoming Pornography Addiction</i>	Mar. 12-18
<i>Lord, Help Me Believe</i>	Gary Petty	<i>You Can Have Living Faith</i>	Mar. 19-25
<i>The Biblical Food Laws: Does God Care What You Eat?</i>	Steve Myers	<i>What Does the Bible Teach About Clean and Unclean Meats?</i>	Mar. 26-Apr. 1



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- Mar. 21:** *America: The Time Is Now!* St. Louis, Missouri/Troy, Illinois
- Mar. 25:** Midwest Teen Prom, Columbus, Ohio
- Apr. 9:** Passover service
- Apr. 10:** Night to be Much Observed
- Apr. 10-17:** Days of Unleavened Bread
- Apr. 15:** Southeast Regional Formal, Lebanon, Tennessee.
- May 6-8:** General Conference of Elders Annual Meeting, Cincinnati, Ohio
- May 9-11:** Council of Elders Meeting, Cincinnati, Ohio



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