



TIDINGS

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GOD'S POWERFUL HAND IN THE PHILIPPINES



Lucas Genner (Buenos Aires Ecclesia, Argentina)

Miramar, Argentina

"When I see how big the ocean is, I always see the greatness of God, and this inspires me to love Him even more."

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OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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Volume 85, Number 4 / April, 2022



IN THIS ISSUE

Philippines — God's Powerful Hand in the Philippines, Dave Jennings . . .	172
— A Thirst for Truth, Rudolfo Jimeno	175
— An Overview of Our Philippine Community, Dave Jennings	178
Exhortation and Consolation — Five "One Thing" Messages, Rudolfo Jimeno	184
Life Application — Integrity (Part 2), Nathan Badger	186
Music and Praise — Favorite Spiritual Songs, Jessica Gelineau	192
Exposition — Martha: Her Gift of Responsibility, Larynette Hinds	198
— God Gave us Zoom, Russell Patterson	202
First Principles — We Become What We Worship, Richard Morgan	204
Teaching and Preaching — The Philippine Bible Education Centers, John Elton	209
— The Philippines: A Fieldworker's Impressions, John Elton	211
Ecclesial News and Updates	213
Thoughts on the Way — Does God "Draw Us?", George Booker	214



GOD'S POWERFUL HAND IN THE PHILIPPINES

By Dave Jennings

OUR community has increasingly become global. From continent to continent, God's Truth is being embraced, and ecclesias are growing. It is the great pleasure of the *Tidings* to share these stories with you. This issue will focus on our dear brothers and sisters in the Philippines and how our merciful God brought truth to this nation of 7,600 islands. In our December 2021 issue (*What You Need to Know About Africa*), we shared the incredible growth of our community in Africa. In many ways, this is a similar story.

Some have commented since the December issue that the incredible response to the Truth in Africa has been a bit of a “wake-up” call for those of us living in North America. It is obvious that God is still calling out a people for His Name. The gospel message is as attractive today as it was two thousand years ago, despite poor response to our preaching work today in our own communities in the West. This represents a strong exhortation for us to increase our own determination to bring wholesome Bible truth to the communities we live and work in. But how can this happen in North America? Perhaps we can find some clues in the areas where the Truth is on fire!

The consistent message in Africa and the Philippines is that the Truth grew by **individuals** sharing their passion for the gospel to those they interacted with. Formal preaching has been supplemental to this and has had its place. But the Truth was spread in Africa and the Philippines by brothers and sisters who had the Word of God burning within them.

We may remember from Scripture that Legion, after his healing, prayed that Jesus would allow him to join him in his preaching campaign. But the Lord's message to him was to “*Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.*” (Mark 5:19). I think we all would agree this represents the great opportunity in our ecclesias—individuals proclaiming their passion for the Truth to all who would hear.

While the Philippines does not represent the exponential growth through baptisms that we have seen in the African continent, it does represent a moving and encouraging story for us to consider. You'll see in this story the results of one or two people taking small steps to preach the Word. What started with a small mustard seed being sown by a faithful sister has now blossomed into thriving ecclesias and Sunday Schools.

In this issue, we include a personal account of the beginnings of the Truth in the Philippines, an overview of the community in the Philippines from Bro. Peter Wassell (ACBM), an exhortation by Bro. Rodolfo Jimeno (page 184), the story about the interesting work being done with Bible Education Center outreach (page 209) and the reflections of an Australian Fieldworker after serving in the Philippines (page 211). On our social media sites (*Tidings* Facebook, *Tidings* Instagram and *Tidings* Twitter), we will also feature several videos about how the Truth developed in the Philippines and some activities of the present ecclesias.

Pedro Jimeno

The commencement of the Truth in the Philippines began in 1956 with a man named Pedro Jimeno. Pedro, who was then in his mid-50s, had been associated with the Church of God, the Seventh Day Adventists and the Filipino Philadelphia Church. He found the teachings of these groups to be departures in several areas from what he saw when he read his Bible. His fascinating story is told in the following article by his son, Bro. Rodolfo Jimeno (*A Thirst for Truth*). Please invest the time to read Bro. Rodolfo's account of how his father found the Truth, starting with a crumpled Christadelphian preaching leaflet found on a roadside drain, with the word "KINGDOM" clearly visible in large print. The Kingdom had been the topic which he had been turning over in his mind as he was seeking for truth.¹ It demonstrates how God works with those seeking Him and how He involves other believers to assist.

Today, just 66 years after Bro. Pedro Jimeno discovered the Truth, there are nearly 700 brothers and sisters in the Philippines, matched by an extremely promising Sunday School program, with nearly 1,000 young people. Bro. Pedro fell asleep in the Lord in 1974, but he left a legacy of the pursuit of truth, which remains to this day in the Philippine Islands.

The Philippine Archipelago

The Philippines has a long history with Christianity. Spanish and Portuguese explorers first landed on the archipelago about 500 years ago, followed by Spanish colonization in 1565. Under the sign of the cross, these explorers and colonists enforced the substitution of Catholicism, instead of the Filipino pantheon of gods, spirits, creatures and men that guarded the streams, fields, trees, mountains and their houses.²

Protestantism didn't get introduced to the Philippines until after 1898, when the Spanish-America War ended and the US acquired the Philippines in the Treaty of Paris (December 1898). During the US colonial period, Catholicism was disestablished as the state religion, allowing Protestant missionaries to begin preaching. As you might expect, the major Protestant denominations began to take hold over the coming years.³

While this *Tidings* issue certainly can't capture all the wonder of God's work in the Philippines, I do hope you'll enjoy reading these articles and that you will find them to be helpful as you seek to serve our God in your own community.

Dave Jennings

¹ Owen, Stanley, *Into All the World*, 1998

² Religion in the Philippines, Jack Miller, Center for Global Education, 2014

³ *Ibid*

SPECIAL

A THIRST FOR TRUTH

By Rudolfo Jimeno

Alamada, Philippines

ONE Saturday morning in 1956, Pedro B. Jimeno and wife Norberta, went to Dagupan City, a 25-mile distance, to attend a meeting of the sect “Philadelphia.” Before entering the hall, Pedro saw a leaflet lying near the door. He picked it up and kept it. He had known later that an American woman (Sis. Mildred Brockdorf, Washington, D.C. Ecclesia) with her

son came earlier to attend, for she thought the sect was Christadelphian. After knowing it was not, she had left immediately for Manila to the American Embassy where she worked. At home, Pedro read the leaflet. He was elated because it was regarding the Kingdom of God on earth, a subject he yearned to know more about. Formerly, he was a member of the Church of



Early baptisms in the Philippines

God, the Seventh Day Adventists and the Philadelphia Church. He was not fully convinced by their beliefs in heaven-going and the Trinity. Now, he thought he had found the truth, so he wrote to Evelyn I. Banta from Ukiah, California, which was the name and address he saw on the leaflet, asking for literature. She replied and sent many reading materials on Christadelphian doctrines, including a program for Sunday meetings.

Pedro read every piece of literature sent. He understood and fully agreed to what he read. God's plan for salvation and the gospel became clear to him and he was no more confused. In his joy, he shared what he called the pearl of great price to others.

After a year, Pedro informed Evelyn that he wanted to be baptized. Evelyn responded by telling Pedro to answer a series of questions that she sent

to him. She was satisfied with his answers, and so she taught him how



Sis. Mildred Brockdorf, Washington, DC

the baptism should be done. Pedro was immersed in a creek near his house by Andres Beltran. After a few days, Pedro baptized Andres and his wife, as well as Pedro's wife. More baptisms followed and a formal meeting was held in Pedro's house each Sunday morning.

Brothers and sisters in the USA were so happy of the birth and progress of the ecclesia. Sisters Evelyn Banta, Dorothy and Rachel Whitehouse, Evelyn Rohloff, Myrtle Rizzi, Freda Gillete and Irma Clark, and brethren Alvan Brittle, Joseph Banta, Robert Lloyd and Charles French were prominent in providing support during the infancy stage. After the infancy period, the Australian Christadelphian Bible Mission took over the responsibility of caring and supporting the ecclesia with five branches. The new arrangement worked well, and the brothers and sisters increased in number. Now, 20 ecclesias and over 50 Sunday School

centers are found all over the country.

Before Pedro fell asleep in 1974, he saw the baptisms of Rodolfo, Isaias, Prescilla, Rebecca, Evelyn and Betty, his children by his wife Norberta, and Esther and Susana, his daughters by his first and second wives. His fifteen grandchildren are all members of God's household of faith.

Through God's steadfast love, mercy and truth, what was started more than 60 years ago is still very much alive and active. What a tremendous joy, comfort and strength the providence of God truly is. Glory be to Him.

*Rudolfo G. Jimeno,
(Bayambang Ecclesia, Philippines)*

*Bro. Rudi is the eldest son of
Bro. Pedro Jimeno*



Bro. Rudolfo and his family



SPECIAL

AN OVERVIEW OF OUR PHILIPPINE COMMUNITY

By Dave Jennings

The Australian Christadelphian Bible Mission (ACBM) assumed responsibility many years ago for the support of the Philippine Islands. Bro. Peter Wassell, who is now the ACBM link brother for the Philippines, kindly has provided us with an up-to-date picture of ecclesial life in the Philippines.

How many baptized believers are in the Philippines now? How frequently are baptisms occurring? What are the estimates of unbaptized Sunday School members?

There are 690 brothers and sisters in the Philippines. Over the past five years, there have been 168 baptisms, averaging about 34 per year. The total number of brothers and sisters immersed is much higher than 690, however, some have departed the faith

and many others have either become inactive or are traveling abroad to seek work.

There are about 1,000 Sunday School students attending organized Christadelphian Sunday Schools. The majority of these come from non-Christadelphian families. One of the challenges for Sunday Schools in the Philippines is the retention of students until they reach their later teens, so that they can learn the first principles

of the Truth in preparation for baptism. Unfortunately, a significant proportion of students from non-Christadelphian families lose interest as they grow older.

Could you please describe the Christian landscape in the Philippines and what our own brothers and sisters found attractive about the Christadelphian faith? What has worked best in spreading the Truth?

The Philippines is about 83% Catholic, with 11% being from other Christian religions, and 6% Muslim (mainly in the southern Philippines—Mindanao). Catholicism, and its traditions, are mixed with superstition. This is a big part of the Philippine culture, and this does present its challenges when preaching the Truth, as family groups have a strong influence, and Filipinos are dependent upon each other.

Given the largely Christian population, the Bible is generally respected as the Word of God, though the vast majority would not be familiar with its contents. Challenging commonly held (but erroneous) Christian teachings with Bible teachings is one way that sparks interest in learning the Bible. This has proved to be the major attraction of those who have converted to the Truth from “outside” while the strong family unit around the Word has seen growth from within.

Converts to the Truth have come through various ways. The main pathways to the

Truth have been largely by direct communications with those whom they interact. Brothers and sisters share the gospel with family and relatives, acquaintances at work or college and with students from non-Christadelphian families attending Sunday School. There has also been preaching activity by some more active ecclesias, involving travel to different villages to conduct regular Bible studies.

Where are the largest ecclesias today and how many are urban (large cities) and more rural? Does urban vs. rural have impact on the ecclesias?

While there are many islands in the Philippines, they can be grouped into three areas: Luzon (the main northern island), Mindanao (the main southern island) and the Visayas (the islands in between Luzon and Mindanao). There are 14 ecclesias in Luzon, four ecclesias in Mindanao and three ecclesias in the Visayas.



The Ecclesias in the Philippines

Most of the ecclesias, as well as the concentration of brothers and sisters, are in provincial or rural areas. There are four large ecclesias with more than 80 members each. These are all in rural areas. Two of these ecclesias are in central Luzon, one of which is at Bayambang, where the Truth first started in the Philippines, and two are in central Mindanao.

Seven (or one-third) of the 21 ecclesias in the Philippines are in cities or urbanized areas, but only account for about one fifth of the Christadelphians in the Philippines. Most of the members of the ecclesias in Manila (the national capital and largest city in the Philippines) and the surrounding area have moved to the city to find work. Likewise, in the main island of Mindanao, the members of Cagayan de Oro City Ecclesia mainly come from provincial areas for work in the city.

The large cities are not conducive to the spread of the Truth, as there is less discretionary time available for brothers and sisters, due to work and travel time during peak traffic, especially in Manila. For these reasons, opportunities to come together as an ecclesia, apart from the memorial meeting, are limited in Manila and

is therefore also not healthy for the growth of ecclesias.

Could you please describe the fraternal exchange on the islands? Do they get together for Bible Schools, fraternal gatherings, etc.?

Prior to the advent of COVID-19, and restrictions affecting travel and large gatherings, the normal calendar for combined events consisted of the following:

- Biennial Youth Conferences for young people from all over the Philippines were held in December. Visiting Fieldworkers and young people also attended to provide support and encouragement. The interaction between young people from other countries and the Filipino young people is an association that is spiritually beneficial to both.
- Biennial Regional Family Fraternal Gatherings, (Bible Schools) In alternate years to the Youth Conferences, were also held in December. Brothers and sisters from Visayas and Mindanao would attend the Mindanao Family Fraternal, while brothers and sisters from Luzon would attend the



Youth Conference in the Philippines

Luzon Family Fraternal. Regional Family Fraternal Gatherings help reduce the travel costs and enable more brothers and sisters to attend. There would be about 220 brothers and sisters, young people and children attending the Mindanao Family Fraternal, and about 350 attending the Luzon Family Fraternal. These events are supported by Fieldworkers, who also provide a study leader for one of the sessions and provide an excellent opportunity to renew and strengthen friendships with all in attendance.

- Each year a Mindanao CYC study weekend would be held in April for young people from Mindanao and the Visayas. A Luzon CYC study weekend would also be held in April or May for young people from Luzon. Again, this is an opportunity for Fieldworkers to attend and support study groups and spiritual growth.
- In addition, from time to time, there have been special events like **Maintaining Healthy Ecclesias workshops** for senior brethren representatives from each ecclesia, a **School of the Prophets** activity for a limited number of young brethren and a **Daughters of Zion** activity for a limited number of young sisters representing all ecclesias. These are supported by Fieldworker visits providing study leaders, spiritual advice, and group discussion.

During the pandemic, it has not been possible to hold these combined events in person. Instead, they have been held

virtually, via Zoom, continuing with the same schedule. Where possible, ecclesial groups gather in their own halls to join the event, and this enables them to also enjoy spiritual association and fellowship around the Word and socializing.

The circumstances and make up of ecclesias vary across the Philippines. Some ecclesias are very well established, while other ecclesias are small and isolated in distance from other ecclesias. In some isolated ecclesias, it is the work of a few remarkable sisters that really keep the ecclesia going. It is these smaller or isolated ecclesias that need help and support.

There are several brothers and sisters from the older generation that only had a very basic education, and therefore that can be a limiting factor. Nonetheless they are faithful to what they know. The younger generation has had a lot more opportunities to learn, with Youth Conferences and Study Weekends. It is pleasing to see younger brothers and sisters growing in maturity and taking on responsibilities in the ecclesias.

Visiting Fieldworkers from Australia really enjoy and spiritually benefit from the fellowship in the Philippines, where there are some very spiritually mature brothers and sisters with a very good Scriptural understanding. We feel at home and united with them. Because of this, most of the preaching and conversions from the world have been done by capable brothers and sisters. Fieldworker visits have become more pastoral, and supportive of established ecclesias.

Are there special challenges now being faced? For instance, has COVID had a major impact there? Is poverty an issue across the ecclesias?

Aside from the COVID-19 pandemic, the main welfare needs in the Philippines are with medical, hospital and surgical costs. Much of the welfare assistance of this nature comes from the ACBM in Australia, through the Bible Education Center work, but must be regulated or governed by need, and ecclesias and families are encouraged to contribute what they can towards any costs. As with other Mission areas, we are careful to ensure that a dependency on welfare is not encouraged.

The pandemic began in 2020 with a two-month nationwide lockdown, imposed by the government. This meant that many brothers and sisters could not work. Financial assistance was provided to acquire basic needs during that time as there was no or limited government assistance for those out of work.

During the Delta variant of COVID-19, in the third quarter of 2021, several brothers and sisters were infected. Five brothers and sisters died, four of them elderly with underlying health conditions. The other one was a 26-year-old brother with a young family. Financial assistance for hospital, testing and funeral costs from Australia was provided during this time.

The pandemic has, however, opened some opportunities. The use of Zoom has allowed brothers and sisters, particularly those in isolation, to access meetings and Bible classes that they could not otherwise have done so. For example, one ecclesia in the Philippines sponsors a Bible class via

Zoom on Thursday evenings, which is open to brothers and sisters from all over the Philippines (sometimes also from overseas) to join. There is a selected topic series for the classes, such as the parables of Christ, or the miracles of Christ. Speakers are from many different ecclesias.

There are some areas such as in Metro Manila, which have not been able to have face to face meetings during the entire pandemic. They have had to rely on virtual meetings. The option of being able to join a mid-week Bible Class (though virtual) was not something which was available before the pandemic. On a monthly basis, brothers from Australia provide the exhortation for the Manila Ecclesia. This same pattern has been introduced by other ecclesias in the Philippines.

What do you believe to be the major challenges and opportunities in the Philippines for preaching and development of ecclesias?

We believe there is potential to expand preaching opportunities in the Philippines. The main limitation is human resources—the limit of people’s time due to work requirements.

For preaching in rural areas in the Philippines, there is a need to travel to areas where there is an interest, and then to continue with follow-up. For example, one ecclesia in a rural area is particularly active this way. If there are members who have relatives in another village with whom they would like to share the gospel, several brethren will go to that village and hold a Bible study in the relative’s place, with people in the village also being invited to the Bible study. If there is an interest shown, they will go back and follow-

up with more Bible studies on first principle topics. If there is no interest shown, they will go to other villages. Sometimes the relatives themselves have shown little interest in the Bible talk, but other people in their village have become interested, and that in time has produced fruit. This requires a willingness to travel to sometimes remote villages and a persistence with follow up studies. We have also found that it requires leadership, with one or more local brethren taking the initiative to teach and lead others. The expenditure is for fuel and food costs, which is funded by ACBM. Because of the circumstances, an ecclesial vehicle has also been purchased to support travel to other villages. The brethren in that ecclesia are mainly farmers, so their work is seasonal. But in between planting and harvesting there is time available for preaching.

For preaching in the cities, the demand on people's time places a limitation on the time available to preach. There are also many competing alternatives for people's attention in the cities.

Unfortunately, a re-occurring problem in the Philippines is that some young people marry outside the Truth. While there are many young people in the Philippines, a lot of them might be related to each other in one ecclesial area. Traveling to another ecclesia to establish a relationship with a partner from there is not that easy because of the tyranny of distance and the affordability of travel. It is a different circumstance than first-world countries where young people have time and money to move around freely. This emphasizes the importance

of combined events (e.g., CYC Youth Conferences and Study Weekends) where young people can meet to mix.

Because of the poorer circumstances that exist in the Philippines, there tends to be more of a focus on just surviving. This leads some to work abroad to support their families and that can mean the husband and the wife being away for two years at a time before returning for a short holiday break. This is common in the Philippines, as there are up to 12 million Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). Working abroad may help the family for the physical needs but may not be helpful for their spiritual needs.

On the other hand, quite a few younger brothers and sisters have acquired a college education and have been able to gain reasonable paid employment. However, this employment is usually in the city where costs are higher, and time is limited.

Summary

Our thanks to Bro. Wassell and the ACBM for their steadfast work in the Philippines and sharing this great story with our readers. May the Lord continue to bless the brothers and sisters in the Philippines and especially nurture the young people in their very large Sunday School groups.

We will continue with reports, such as these first two on Africa and the Philippines, in future issues. Future stories will include Latin America, India and Pakistan and the large number of Iranian brothers and sisters now in the UK. We are so blessed to live in these times. Surely, the time will be short before our Lord returns.

FIVE "ONE THING" MESSAGES

By Rudolfo Jimeno

Camalig, Albay, Philippines

RECORDED in the Bible are five "one thing" messages which will teach us successive steps toward possessing immortal life in the Age to come.

The first "one thing" is in Mark 10:21: an answer of the Lord Jesus to a man who asked him *"What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"* As a Jew, he was reminded of the laws given to Moses. *"Master, all these have I observed from my youth,"* he replied. So true because the Lord *"loved him"* and told him what he lacked. *"**One thing** thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come take up the cross and follow me."* The man need not worry. There is the Lord's assurance that *"every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or lands for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred fold*

and shall inherit everlasting life." (Matt 19:27, 29). He failed to give the Lord his heart, which the Lord would want him to give. *"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."* (Matt 6: 21).

The second is in Luke 10:41-42 when the Lord visited Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha. The Lord loved them, and they loved him too. To please the Lord, Martha *"was cumbered about much serving,"* so much so that she requested the Lord to tell Mary she needed her assistance in the kitchen. But the Lord has other food more important in his mind. *"Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. But **one thing** is needful, and Mary hath chosen the good part."* That good part was that Mary *"sat at Jesus' feet and heard his words."* (v. 39). A good part indeed, which we should prioritize. As Peter once said,

"To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." (John 6:68, 69).

The third occasion is found in John 9:31, 33: **"One thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see."** Although the healed man knew that by his confession he would be cast out, or ostracized, he had great courage. He told his enemies the truth and did not hide his faith. *"God heareth not sinners, but if any man be a worshipper of God and doeth his will, him he heareth. If this man (Jesus) were not of God, he could do nothing."* What a weighty testimony! Like him, we must **"earnestly contend for the faith"** (Jude 1:3) and be **"ready to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."** (1 Pet 3:15). That way we are not blind.

The fourth refers to the main goal of Paul in life. Evidently, he imitated his Lord, for the Master has also a central goal in life as revealed in Hebrews 12:2. Paul, at first, before he was called by the Lord to his side was a persecutor of the Lord's followers. But once he was called by the Lord, he obeyed wholeheartedly and had changed completely his actions and beliefs. He said, **"One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."** (Phil 3:13, 14). Like Paul, our goal must be clear in our heart and mind so that we too will fight a good fight of faith, finish our course and keep the faith. *"Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing."*

(2 Tim 4:7-8).

The fifth example is about a hope that burned in David's heart. **"One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple."** (Psa 27:4). David loved the habitation of God's house, and the place where God's honor dwells (Psa 26:8). In 1 Timothy 3:15 we read that the house of God is the ecclesia which is **"the pillar and ground of truth."** Let us copy David's attitude toward God's house.

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. (Heb 10:22-25).

By God's mercy and truth, we shall enjoy forever a stay in God's house, to be built by the man called Branch. It will be a temple for all nations (Zech 6:12-13, Isa 56:7) in God's coming glorious Kingdom. Like David, let us love everything concerning God.

*Rudolfo G. Jimeno,
(Bayambang Ecclesia, Philippines)*

PART 2



INTEGRITY

By Nathan Badger

“I Will Not Remove My Integrity”

JOB had a lifelong mission: “Till I die, I will not put away mine integrity from me.” (Job 27:6 ESV). His whole life he devoted himself to being a man of integrity, and this helped save the lives of himself and his friends. For this reason, God urges us to “consider my servant Job.” (Job 2:3). He wants us to develop and retain this same integrity.

In last month’s article, we explored the meaning of the word integrity and six of its key ingredients, as defined and illustrated by God in His Word: Knowledge, Conviction, Behavior, Consistency, Innocence and Character. These ingredients also anchor our English definition of integrity. This month we will reflect on their practical life application.

Honesty

What behaviors are integral to integrity? David illuminates several

in Psalm 101 where he declares “I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.” (Psa 101:2). This word “perfect” is the Hebrew word *tome* and is often translated as “integrity.” It is the very same word used to describe the “integrity” of Job (Job 2:3, 2:9, 27:5).¹ Thus, David paralleled his life mission with Job’s: it was his deepest desire to be a solid example of godly integrity, especially within his own house.

How did David do this? Verse seven gives us a clue when he asserts “He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house; he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.” Verse four expands on these problems: “A froward heart shall depart from me, I will not know a wicked person.” The word “froward” means “false, crooked, twisted or distorted” (Strong’s). David underscores a fundamental behavior of integrity: honesty and truthfulness. Integrity is incongruous with dishonesty. It was

undesirable to David to have anyone live or serve in his house who would be dishonest, untrustworthy, or a liar. He knew that this behavior, in whatever form, was completely contrary to God's commands (Lev 19:11).

David encourages us to develop honesty and truthfulness as the very core of our being. We live in a world full of lies, manipulation, slander and deceit. God is appealing to us, through the example of David, to distance ourselves from this caustic behavior and to reflect on the depth of our integrity. Are we truthful, honest, non-manipulative, and transparent with others? Have we ever participated as a false witness against an enemy, or a brother or sister? Do we associate with, or even aid and abet others who do not tell the truth? David was not willing to practice these behaviors in his own life, and just importantly, was unwilling to associate with those who practiced them: *"I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not cling to me."* (Psa 101:3).

If we do not tell the truth, life becomes a crooked and corrosive environment for ourselves and others. It does not save lives but only serves to tear the very fabric of our relations with others and our God. Mark Twain allegedly observed "If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything."² Honesty makes life much simpler, less stressful, and much more enjoyable.

What Do We Do When No One Is Watching?

This is a question worthy of self-reflection! David prompts us to think about this in verse one: *"I will set nothing wicked before my eyes."* What

we actively choose to put in front of our eyes, is part of integrity.

More importantly, what do we set in front of our eyes when we feel no one is watching? Whether in daily life, on the computer or Netflix. It is easy to avoid material that is violent or immoral when others are aware, but much more difficult when we are alone or do not feel others are aware. What are we watching? What are our kids viewing or playing? What do we ignore or gloss over because "It was still a great movie," "I already hear that at work every day," or "It's just a video game?" Godly integrity is an internal compass or a steady rudder that directs us when everything around us pulls us in a different direction, especially when we are alone.

David also addresses secret slander in verse five: *"Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, Him I will destroy."* Slander is making false and damaging statements about someone else. It is akin to the gangrene of lies. It spreads and destroys the trust of neighbors. It undermines friendships and relations. How can our relations be a refuge, or even a unique example, if we act the same as the world around us and permit damaging rumors to propagate like the waves of a storm? Particularly if it is done "secretly," or behind someone's back. David treated this behavior seriously and was willing to remove anyone from

If we do not tell the truth, life becomes a crooked and corrosive environment for ourselves and others.

his courts that was cowardly enough to be destroying someone else's character.

Integrity is doing the right thing even when no one is watching. This includes how we behave at work, at home, at school, in AB meetings, at Sisters Class, at CYC and on social media such as Snapchat and Facebook. It means we avoid bribes, file truthful taxes and do not steal.

If we must hide what we are doing, we may be behaving without integrity and in a way that we know is wrong and against our convictions. If we only practice integrity when we know someone else is aware, this is hardly the ingredient of consistency we observe in the life of David or Job. If we are acting just to please someone else, or to keep up an image, our character is deceptive and false. The ultimate judge of integrity is God, and we must remind ourselves regularly that He can see all things.

Consistency Means Inside and Outside

Our English word integrity evolved from the Latin adjective integer, meaning "whole, undivided, sound, or complete." In math, an integer is a whole number with no decimal or fractional part (e.g., 1 or 44, not 0.79 or 341/8). Therefore, integrity is not part or part-time. Integrity is fully, wholly and all the time. Today, we might also use the word consistent, which is one of the

[The sacrifice] represented the person who offered the sacrifice and was meant to impress on the person that God wanted them to offer their lives as sacrifices with integrity.

ingredients of integrity we identified earlier.

In Psalm 101 God uses a Hebrew word closely tied to the idea of integer and integrity to emphasize the consistency of David's life. In verse two David says, "I will behave myself wisely, in a perfect way." In verse six, he says, "I will walk within my house with a perfect heart." Both words translated "perfect" are the Hebrew word *tawmeem* which means "complete, entire, whole, undivided, or full."³

This same lesson of wholeness and consistency was taught by God to Israel using an object lesson. Throughout the Old Testament, He instructed them to offer sacrifices that were "without blemish." (e.g., Exod 12:5; Lev 1:10). This phrase is stressed over ninety times and is almost always the same Hebrew word *tawmeem* that we find translated as "perfect" in Psalm 101:2. In other words, God wanted the children of Israel to offer sacrifices that had integrity. When the priest inspected them, they were to be whole and complete. Not damaged, without disease, and unblemished. A perfect, whole sacrifice.

More importantly, the sacrifice held a personal and practical lesson. It represented the person who offered the sacrifice and was meant to impress on the person that God wanted them to offer their lives as sacrifices with integrity. Likewise, our Father wants our lives to be living sacrifices (Rom 12:1) that are consistent, complete, and whole, just like those approved by the priest. Consistency means inside and outside.

Consistency was an important ingredient of David's integrity. He strove

to have integrity every day, in every circumstance, with every person, wholly, completely, and always. It was not a part-time exercise. It was a full-time commitment in his life, as it must be in ours.

David also strove to have integrity inside and outside: his thoughts matched his actions. An apple is not an apple just because the sign at the grocery store says, "Apples for Sale." It may look like an apple, smell like an apple, and feel like an apple. But if it does not taste and have the texture of an apple, it is not an apple. The inside is just as important as the outside! They must agree or we would have nothing to do with them. Likewise with integrity. Our inside needs to be consistent with our outside and vice versa. Our behavior must match our inner thoughts. And our words must match our actions.

Conviction Invites Challenge

Even if we live life with integrity, we will face situations that severely challenge our convictions. Jesus leaves no doubt when he warns "*you will be hated by all for My name's sake.*" This may mean others treat us poorly, humiliate, take advantage of, or even physically and mentally abuse us. However, if we hold fast to our convictions, and do not give up, Jesus also assures us "*He who endures to the end will be saved.*" (Matt 10:22).

Many Bible characters endured severe challenges, held fast to their integrity, and in the end, helped save the lives of



themselves and others. Noah is an inspiring example. God saved eight people because of his faithfulness and conviction. Do you recall how God describes him? In Genesis, we read "*Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations.*" (Gen 6:9).

The word "*perfect*" is once again *tawmeem*. When our integrity is thrust into the fire, do we match the conviction of Noah?

During the darkest days of Job's life, his wife challenged him to abandon his integrity: "*Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die.*" (Job 2:9). But Job refused to crack and would not let go of his integrity (Job 27:5-6). Although it was tempting, Job refused to speak lies or act deceitfully (Job 27:4). He would not give up striving to act righteously (Job 27:6) and was not willing to behave like a hypocrite (Job 27:8) or invest in the "*the portion of the wicked man and the heritage of oppressors.*" (Job 27:13). Instead, he placed his life into the hands of God and trusted that, because of his integrity, God would judge him righteously: "*Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know mine integrity.*" (Job 31:6). This gives us hope that our Father will also judge us justly if we stick to our convictions.

Like Job, David also held fast to his convictions during challenges, despite making some serious mistakes. In Psalm 26, David communicates his assurance that God could see and

would reward him for this conviction: *“Judge me, O Lord; for I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the Lord; therefore I shall not slide.”* (Psa 26:1). In the following verses, he continues: *“But as for me, I will walk in mine integrity: redeem me and be merciful unto me.”* (Psa 26:11). David recognized he had failed miserably at times. But these verses show he continued to trust that God could still redeem him and be merciful to him. These assurances were like snow tires in a blizzard. They prevented him from “sliding” or giving up. The development of David’s integrity was a process, as it is with us. If our conviction loses traction at times, God assures us that He is still with us and will help us, despite slips and falls.

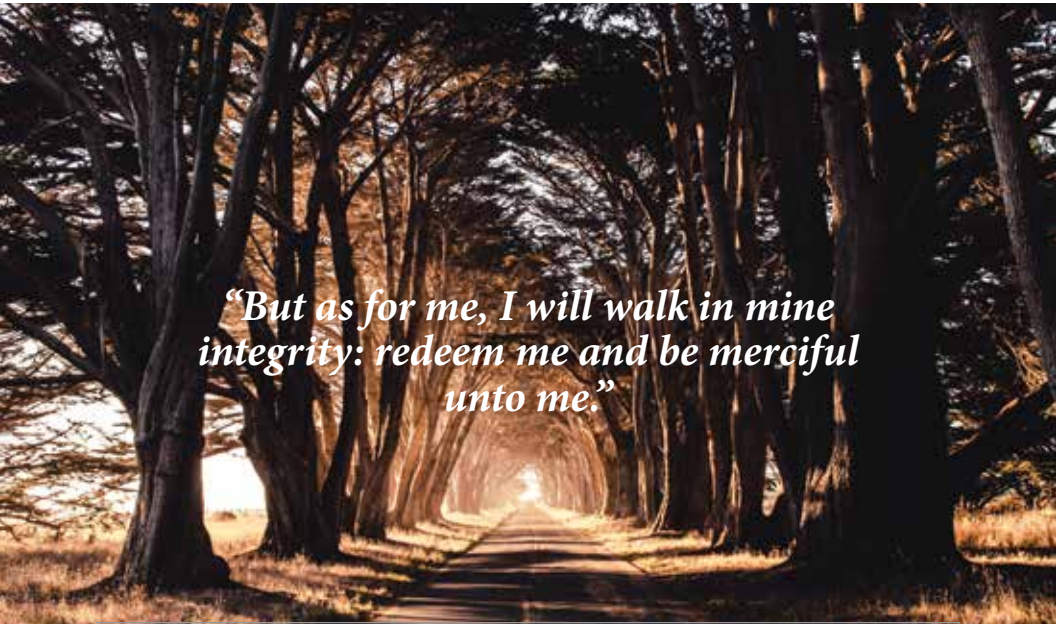
The integrity of others, when mixed with God’s mercy, can also help us avert costly personal mistakes. We witness this in the life of Abimelech. In Genesis 20 he explains how he took

Sarah into his house: *“In the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this.”* (Gen 20:5). Note how Abimelech’s integrity included one of the key ingredients: innocence. And his integrity saved him and the lineage of Abraham and Sarah from certain disaster.

Thummim

Did you know that the High Priest’s clothing contains a lesson in integrity? Embedded in the square breastplate worn over his chest were four rows of three gemstones inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. It also contained two additional stones: *“the Urim and the Thummim.”* (Exod 28:30).

It is fascinating that the word *“Thummim”* is the plural of the Hebrew word *tome* which is translated as *“integrity”* throughout the Old Testament.¹ Thus, Thummim could be translated as *“integrities”* or



“But as for me, I will walk in mine integrity: redeem me and be merciful unto me.”

Do we wear integrity over our hearts each day? And is it consistently part of our inner heart, mind, and character?

“perfections.” God does not provide us with all the details of the form or use of the stones. But through them, God did guide the High Priest to determine whether someone had integrity (Thummim), and was therefore innocent, or they had a lack of integrity (Urim) and were therefore guilty.

The practical message of the Thummim is clear. God expected the High Priest, as His spiritual leader and representative, to act with the highest of Thummim or integrity. He also expected the Israelites to develop and practically apply integrity in all aspects of their lives. The Thummim and unblemished sacrifices reminded them of this principle when they met with the High Priest.

Furthermore, in wearing the breastplate with Urim and Thummim, Aaron was to “bear the judgment of the children of Israel **upon his heart** before the Lord continually.” (Exod 28:30). The High Priest wore the Thummim over the heart, all the time. Surely this was a constant reminder that Israel was to daily clothe their own hearts and minds with integrity. It was to be part of their inner characters and would help them judge right from wrong.

Do we wear integrity over our hearts each day? And is it consistently part of our inner heart, mind, and character? God describes Abimelech’s integrity as being “*of thy heart*” (Gen 20:5) and, similarly, David’s as being “*the integrity of his heart*” (Psa 78:70-72), or “*a perfect heart.*” (Psa 101:2).

Finally, the Thummim reminds us of our own High Priest who made integrity a matter of his heart. The Lord Jesus Christ mirrored the perfect integrity of his Father and “*pledged his heart to approach Me [God].*” (Jer 30:21 NKJV). His knowledge, conviction, behavior, consistency, innocence and character all spoke of integrity, and he followed that conviction to the cross. By his integrity, and God’s mercy, he has provided a means to save the lives of many “*as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*” (1 Pet 1:18-19). May God give us strength and endurance to fortify our hearts with the same integrity of Job, David, Christ, and many others as we await his soon appearance.

*Nathan Badger,
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¹ The KJV translates the Hebrew word *tome* (Strong’s 8537) and its feminine form *toomaw* (Strong’s 8538), as “*integrity*” sixteen times throughout the Old Testament. The KJV also translates these words as “*upright*” and “*perfect*” as seen in Psa 101:2 and Prov 10:9.

² Brainy Quote. “Mark Twain Quotes.” Accessed January 26, 2022. https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/mark_twain_133066

³ There are two additional Hebrew words very closely related to integrity, though the KJV does not translate them as integrity. *Tawmeem* (Strong’s 8549) means “sound, wholesome, undivided, complete, without blemish, or having integrity.” *Tawm* (Strong’s 8535) means “complete, morally innocent, undefiled, having integrity.”

FAVORITE SPIRITUAL SONGS

FROM SUNDAY SCHOOL STUDENTS

By Jessica Gelineau



In the eighth Psalm, which David intended to be “accompanied by a stringed instrument,” we find the often-quoted first two verses. I like how the New Living Translation renders them.

O LORD, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth! Your glory is higher than the heavens. You have taught children and infants to tell of your strength, silencing your enemies and all who oppose you. (Psa 8:1-2).

In the following pages, you’ll find submissions from a group of Sunday School students from the West Coast of North America, sharing their favorite spiritual songs. Many of the children also drew a picture to show how they feel when they hear or sing their favorite praise songs. As you read through these short reflections, let the words of these young ones remind you

of God’s strength, and silence whatever voices of fear, despair or distraction that may be vying for your attention today. Please share these songs with the children in your life! In doing so, maybe you or they will find a new favorite as well.

Pippa G., Preschool

Mom: Pippa, what’s your favorite song?

Pippa: “Jesus is Alive” (by Orange Kids Music.) It makes me feel sad because Jesus died.

Mom: Does it make you feel anything else?

Pippa: Happy because He came alive again!

Mom: Do you think other kids would like this song too?

Pippa: Mmhhh. Can we listen to “Jesus is Alive” right now?



**“How Music Makes Me Feel”
Skyler W., Kindergarten**



**“El Shaddai”
Evan C., Kindergarten**

“I enjoy “Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God” [Green Hymn Book #356] because it’s really pretty and it’s a great song. When I hear it, it makes me feel peaceful and helps me look forward to The Kingdom. Something that it teaches me is to always put God first.”

Brianna M., 6th grade



**“How Music Makes Me Feel”
Grace H., Kindergarten**



**“How Music Makes Me Feel”
Toby A., Kindergarten**



“Shine as Lights” [makes me feel calm]
Riley W., 2nd grade



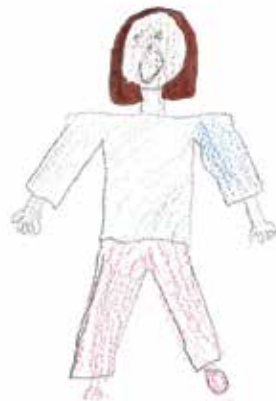
“I Will Enter His Gates” [Praise the Lord #192]
is my favorite song because it makes me feel
happy and it makes me feel peaceful.”
Sarah H., 2nd grade

“Savior, We Meet In Thy Dear Name” [Green Hymn Book #240]
just gives me confidence and joy. The tune of the music just melts
you to your chair. It reminds me of the day before Jesus died.

Jacob M., 5th grade



My favorite song is “Good News
of the Kingdom of God” [Orange
Worship Book #111] and I like it
because it is a nice song. It makes
me want to sing and dance.
Lydia S., 2nd grade



My favorite Bible song is “Psalm 20”
from the Orange Book [#11]. I like
it because it makes me feel calm and
peaceful. It is a beautiful song because
the music is very peaceful.
Emery C., 3rd grade



My favorite Bible song is “Psalm 20” [Orange Book #11]. It is on page 33, and authored by Aletheia and Timon Burney. My favorite part is the chorus. I like how it starts off really happy, gets quieter for a bit, then is happy again, then quiet. It makes me really joyful when it says, “Then You will win the victory, and we will shout for joy!” It makes me think about the Kingdom, because God will win the victory, and will set up the Kingdom and Jesus as King.

Bethany H., 4th grade

“Seek Ye First.” [Green Hymn Book #365] This song is written by Karen Lafferty. This is my favorite song because I always think “Why does God do this to me!” but then the song says, “Seek and ye shall find.” So I pray and I feel better.

Joseph G., 4th grade

I think “We’ve Got Good News of the Kingdom of God” [Orange Worship Book #111] is a great spiritual song for children because it really tells us that we have something to look forward to in the future. It tells us that the new future is going to be peaceful and calm. I feel that this song is very uplifting and exciting! I hope this helped you!

Naomi S., 4th grade



“Savior, We Meet In Thy Dear Name” [Green Hymn Book #240] just gives me confidence and joy. The tune of the music just melts you to your chair. It reminds me of the day before Jesus died.

Jacob M., 5th grade



“El Shaddai’ [Praise the Lord #24] is a great song because it talks about Abraham and when I really think about it I feel happy. Another great song is “Go Down Moses” [Praise the Lord #292], it tells you about how Moses saves his people.”

Sophia S., 4th grade



“Tell Me Why Do You Weep” [Praise the Lord #108] I picked it because I like feeling about all the dead people and feeling how sad it must feel to not be with their families. I like how it gets faster and faster until it gets really hard to say. The happy part is when the song gets faster and it’s all about the kingdom when Jesus comes and all the dead people are resurrected.

Noah A., 2nd grade



“We’ve Got Good News of the Kingdom of God” [Orange Worship Book #111] is my favorite hymn in the book. I love this hymn because it makes me feel like the Kingdom is coming soon and it makes me love Jesus more and think about how much I love God. And it’s just my favorite song.”

Adalia V, 4th grade

*Jessica Gelineau,
(Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA)*

Calling all interested contributors!

Over the past year, the *Tidings* has featured several articles in the Music and Praise section written by multiple contributors reflecting on a theme.

In the November 2021 issue, young people shared their *Reflections on Spiritual Music and Mental Health*. Back in June 2021, we were encouraged by *Reflections on Treasured Hymns* written by elders in our ecclesias. In an upcoming 2022 *Tidings* issue, we will feature reflections on Psalms. We’re wanting to hear about the Psalms that have most personally strengthened you or been meaningful in your life, and why. Perhaps a certain Psalm brought you through a time of trial, or maybe there is a Psalm that you routinely pray to praise our Heavenly Father. *Tidings*’ readers of all ages are encouraged to contribute!

Please email your contribution (1-2 paragraphs maximum, please!) to jessica.r.gelineau@gmail.com by May 6th.



EXPOSITION

MARTHA

HER GIFT OF RESPONSIBILITY

By Larynette Hinds

WONDERFUL WOMEN OF THE BIBLE

In our continuing series of character studies about valiant and virtuous women in the Scriptures, Sis. Larynette Hinds takes a fresh look at Martha, the sister of Mary and Lazarus. ~ Editor

MARTHA gets a bad rap. Many commentaries on Martha paint her as the woman whose heart was centered on displaying her culinary prowess to her guests. She is compared to her sister Mary, who chose to sit and listen to the words of Jesus. In the human spirit of comparison, we pit these two sisters against each other and then pick sides.

Every believer should be like Martha; I will tell you why.

At the beginning of Luke 10, Jesus appoints 72 more disciples and sends them out in twos, instructing them to go into every city and every place, *“and into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace is there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again. And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the laborer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house.”* (Luke 10:5-7).

Jesus instructs his disciples to expect to be provided for by the recipients of the gospel message. When Jesus and his entourage enter a certain village (Bethany) in Luke 10:38, Martha receives him into her house. Being the mistress of the house, Martha prepares food to feed thirteen-plus guests. Any woman who runs a household, or anyone who oversees food arrangements for ecclesia gatherings, knows this is no small feat. Martha’s

generosity and willingness to serve others are evident from the moment we meet her. She understands her role and responsibilities, and she takes them seriously. How many of us are eager to invite brothers and sisters who visit our ecclesias into our homes for a meal? How many of us dare take on the challenge to feed a group of men who show up unannounced?

We condemn Martha for focusing too much on serving an elaborate meal instead of listening to the words of Christ. We label her as the poster child for believers who get entangled in their long to-do lists but care less about devotion to Jesus. We are referring to Jesus! He was an important guest. Why would we expect Martha to serve anything short of an elaborate meal? Will we dare serve peanut butter and jelly sandwiches if Christ showed up at our doorsteps? It is human to want to impress and please others, especially those who are important to us. Martha, like us, was human, and that is okay.

It is remiss to read the story of Martha without placing it against the backdrop of the Gospel of Luke. The Gospel of Luke is riddled with stories highlighting the importance of service, generosity, and hospitality. Jesus himself feeds 5,000 men in Luke 9:12-17: a miracle that exemplifies God’s providence. Jesus also takes the responsibility of meeting the crowd’s need for natural

food. Again, in Luke 10:25-37, we read the story of The Good Samaritan, where Jesus explains what it means to love our neighbor—using our resources to provide for those in need, just as the Good Samaritan provides for the man who is left for dead by thieves. We also see this principle in Jesus' instruction to the rich ruler in Luke 18:22 to sell all he has and distribute to the poor. Luke 14:16-24 shows God's radical hospitality in granting us an open invitation to the marriage supper of the lamb. God is willing to welcome us if only we heed the call and come.

Martha uses her resources to serve Christ, his disciples, and those under her care. In our feeble attempt to minimize Martha's service, we judge her intentions and try to make void her love for doing God's work. The very thing we see as a negative in Martha is the very reason, we should admire her and strive to be like her.

True, Martha makes it her duty to focus on what she thinks is important, given the circumstances. Perhaps, when she invites Jesus into her house, she assumes her sister Mary will help cater to their guests. Or, since she made it her responsibility to take care of everyone, she did not have the chance to engage the way she would have loved to. We do not know the exact reason we do not see Martha at the feet of Jesus, but one thing we know for sure is she voiced her frustration.

Martha walks up to Jesus, right in the middle of his teaching, and tells him, *"Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me."* (Luke 10:40). Imagine a sister interrupting a brother's exhortation at a fraternal gathering to ask for help with the meal preparations! Martha dares to speak, and Jesus' response is all the reassurance, correction, and care Martha needs from the Lord. *"But the Lord answered her, Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."* (Luke 10:41-42). We see a beautiful relationship between Martha and Jesus—Martha is comfortable expressing her feelings to Jesus, and Jesus takes the time to listen and respond to Martha's frustration. How many sisters have left the truth because others are too busy teaching while ignoring their concerns and frustrations? How many of our arranging board members bother to take the concerns from sisters seriously? Do we bother to respond to concerns and frustrations from our children, brothers and sisters with love and kindness as Jesus did?

Some brothers and sisters have become the default people in our communities and ecclesias to fill the gap, pick up the slack, and do what needs to be done. They know where the shoe pinches when we fail to take

How many sisters have left the truth because others are too busy teaching while ignoring their concerns and frustrations?
How many of our arranging board members bother to take the concerns from sisters seriously?

the responsibility to do God's work. Have we ever considered calling out the laziness and inconsiderate actions of others who leave the responsibility to care for everyone to the repeated few? Or are we too busy trying to portray ourselves as "Marys," but we are not fully committed to showing our devotion and love to God and our savior Jesus? Sure, God can use stones to raise children for Abraham (Matt 3:9), but have we pondered what will happen if we have no Marthas in our ecclesias and communities? Someone must do the work. May we all be like Martha and be that someone.

Notice, Jesus does not tell Martha her generosity and hospitality do not matter. Perhaps, all Martha needed to know was that Jesus cared about her too. Yes, Martha needed instruction, but she would not have received that correction and the gentle response from Jesus if she kept her frustration to herself. Even more tragic, she would have never understood the depth of love and care Christ had for her if she had chosen to be quiet.

The story of Martha is that of a woman of faith who continues to learn from the Lord Jesus. She continues to use her voice to express what she knows and understands, and Jesus continues to teach Martha and even reveals himself to her clearly in John 11:25: "*I am the resurrection and the life.*" In the verses that follow, we see Martha's beautiful confession of faith and her belief in Christ: "*She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.*" (John 11:27).

Martha has the gift of hospitality, and she uses every bit of that talent. Martha is the servant who was given five talents and brought five talents more (Matt 25:14-30). When Jesus and the disciples come back to Bethany after the resurrection of Lazarus in John 12, we still find Martha serving, using her gift and resources—her blessings from God.

We, like Martha, have many talents from God. We, like Martha, want to serve our Lord Jesus and our fellow believers, and sometimes we too have many reasons to be distracted and are very much in need of care and love. May we, like Martha, speak up, voice our frustrations, and seek a resolution so we can continue to be about God's business. May we, like Martha, understand our responsibility to deliver on God's mission and purpose. May we, like Martha, be a friend to those who have been rejected for the sake of the Gospel. May we, like Martha, receive those, who like Jesus, did not have a place to lay their heads. May we, like Martha, show our faith by our works. May we, by God's grace, be counted among the righteous when Christ Jesus returns.

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(South Ozone Park Ecclesia, NY)*



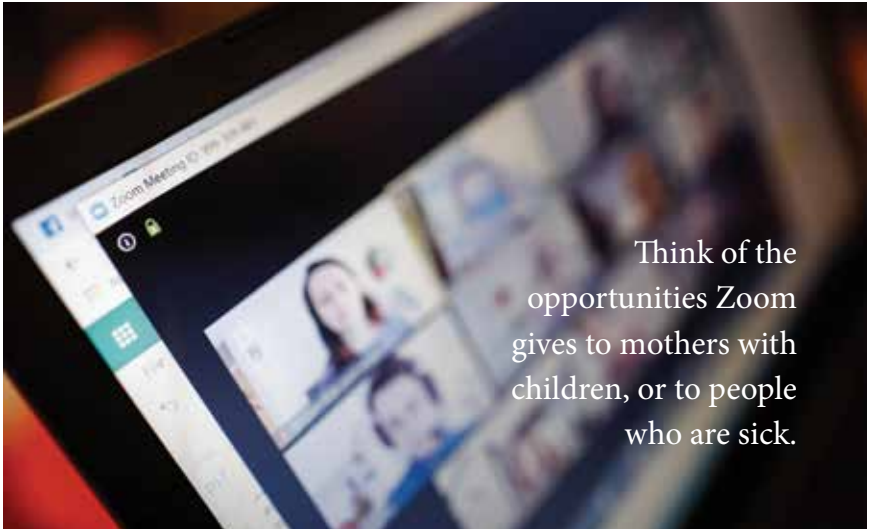
GOD GAVE US ZOOM

By Russell Patterson

MY wife and I are both past ninety years old. This means that we are limited in where we can go and what we can do. Before we had Zoom, we had to struggle to find an auditory Breaking of Bread service or develop or create our own. We were unable to attend a Bible class, as we had no transportation or ability to sit through an hour-long class. We could listen to a tape of the Bible readings, but we had no opportunity to share comments or ideas. In other words, we had very

limited help in our ministration and had no real fellowship. Zoom has changed all of that.

Zoom enables us to attend the Breaking of Bread service with others, and even share ideas and enjoy fellowship. We can connect with a Bible class almost every day of the week if we choose. We're able to share ideas, ask questions and participate. I also have a Bible study with a friend with the help of Zoom.



Think of the opportunities Zoom gives to mothers with children, or to people who are sick.

Zoom has also enabled between twenty to thirty brothers and sisters to do the readings “together” every weekday. Most of our participants are widows or widowers, and the remainder are married folk, with a few that are single. For those who are alone, they have little choice but to read by themselves. Reading with the Zoom group enables us to ask questions and share life experiences with people from all over the country. While the online readings started as a local Southern California response to the pandemic, we now have added participants from British Columbia, Toronto, Ohio, Virginia, Colorado, New Mexico, New Jersey, Indiana, Oregon and Alaska. It is a delightful experience to share with people that we only know because we have Zoom.

Zoom has provided a significant advantage because it has enabled us to have more meaningful Sunday services, weeknight classes, group Bible readings, preaching, and most

of all sharing of love and fellowship. If we didn't have Zoom, we would be in isolation due to our age, though we live less than twenty miles from the closest ecclesia.

We are thankful that God allowed the Zoom technology to exist by the time of the pandemic. It has opened many positive opportunities in the Truth. Think of the opportunities Zoom gives to mothers with children or to people who are sick. Imagine what the Apostle Paul could have accomplished if had access to a technology like Zoom to be able to reach the ecclesias in Asia, or how prophets could have sent messages to the Israelites. It makes me wonder if something like Zoom will be used in the Kingdom?

I am very thankful that God has provided us with this technology to stay connected with our brothers and sisters.

*Russell Patterson,
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WE BECOME WHAT WE WORSHIP

By Richard Morgan



IN his book, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry*, Presbyterian scholar Gregory K. Beale (1949 -) argues the case that we take on the characteristics of what we worship. So, for instance, those who worshiped idols became just as blind, deaf and immobile, spiritually speaking, as their false gods.

It makes perfect sense if you think about it. If you adore something, it's going to affect your psyche. For instance, if I am enamored with money (perhaps the most apparent modern-day idol), it will affect how I live my life, my approach to

my career, my stress level when things are tight, and so on. There's an excellent example of the phenomenon in the parable of the talents. The man who only had one talent had a particular view of his master that he was "*a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed.*" (Matt. 25:24).¹ In other words, he saw his master as strict and expecting too much. So, he threw his hands in the air, thought there was no point in doing anything to try to please his master, and buried his talent.

If that's your view of the God you worship, that he's like a strict taskmaster, it will affect how you perceive the world and live your life. You'll tend to be rigid too, and not want to risk doing anything because it feels like God is at the ready with a lightning bolt the moment you trip up.

This brings us to the fundamental point that we need to understand who the God of the Bible is. Sometimes Christians will ask, "Does it matter what we believe?" Well, when it comes to our perception of God, it matters a lot if we become what we worship.

Think about the children of Israel in Egypt. Joshua records for us that they worshiped the gods of Egypt (Josh 24:14). When Moses told the people Yahweh was coming to rescue them from the burdens of the Egyptians, they didn't want to listen. If you look at Moses' speech in Exodus 6:6-8, it's a wholly positive message about rescuing them from slavery and bringing them to the Promised Land. What's not to like about that? And yet the scripture

records, *"but they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery."* (Exod 6:9). The Hebrew expression translated *"broken spirit"* has the idea of impatience. The word for "harsh" means strict or stubborn. What's interesting about that is not only does it seem that they had

Sometimes Christians will ask, "does it matter what we believe?" Well, when it comes to our perception of God, it matters a lot if we become what we worship.

become embittered because of their slavery, letting it eat away at them, but they had become just like Pharaoh. He too, of course, was a stubborn man—and rather like the master in the parable of the talents. Pharaoh himself was regarded as a god by the Egyptians. The people took on his personality. When we come to the wilderness wanderings, we find they were a stiff-necked people (e.g., Exod 32:9), using the same word for "harsh."

Also, in Exodus 32, we have the incident of the golden calf, undoubtedly an attempt to form their perception of Yahweh in the image of what they were used to in Egypt. It is at this point that Moses ascends the mountain and asks God what he is like—*"Please show me your glory."* (Exod 33:18). Yahweh reveals to Moses He is not a strict taskmaster but *"a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness."* (Exod 34:6). It's an understanding about God that is fundamental to how we live our lives. If we adore God because of His compassion, patience and justice, then those qualities will be expressed in how we live our lives.

We can also see the importance of this topic when we look at why God created us in His image and likeness (Gen. 1:26). As a child takes after their parents, resembling them in their looks and mannerisms, so God wants us to take after Him but on a much deeper level. He designed us so that we might reflect who He is. Therefore, we need to understand what God's image is and what He is like. The command against making graven images teaches us to avoid forming a false image of the

one we worship. But it's not just about making physical images; it's also about what image of God we create in our mind, according to our understanding. Throughout church history, the topic of identifying the true God is central to what it means to be a Christian. It's importance for the Christian can be seen from what we looked at last month and how the Magisterial Reformers persecuted those who disagreed with them on the topic of the Godhead. Broadly speaking, Christianity can be subdivided into groups depending on their concept of the God of the Bible. Mainstream Christianity is Trinitarian and looks at other groupings with suspicion, sometimes calling them cults. Pentecostals, for instance, differ from mainstream Christianity in viewing God through the lens of Modalism, rejecting the idea that God

Does any of that matter, though? Don't we all worship the same God, just understand Him differently? Why do we have to argue about the minutiae of the topic of God? Why can't we just get on with worshipping Him and leave off all the angry debating?

It's a good question, and that's why I want to delve into this topic in this article and the ones that follow. Does our concept of God matter? Well, from what we've discussed so far, there is undoubtedly cause for us to be wary of forming a wrong idea, or image, of God in our minds. But does that stretch as far as worrying about whether God is one or three in one?

One way to look at this topic is to think about the **fruit** of the doctrine of God. We've already introduced that idea—the fruit of one's concept of God is how we conduct ourselves based on that

Why do we have to argue about the minutiae of the topic of God? Why can't we just get on with worshipping him and leave off all the angry debating?

is three persons in one Godhead and instead saying that there is only one God, and only one person, but that he exists in three modes, or manifests Himself at different times in the form of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then there's the category of Christians who entirely deny the deity of Christ, and Christadelphians would fall into that group. But that group, too, can be divided into those who believe he was a man specially created by God (Biblical Unitarians) and churches like the Jehovah's Witnesses who believe he pre-existed as a lesser god or angel.

concept. But think of it too from the point of view of other teachings that stem from the central doctrine of God. Perhaps the most crucial doctrine connected to the Trinitarian concept of God is the meaning of the death and resurrection of Christ. I want to explore this topic in more detail in a future article, so here we'll just go through a summary. Leaving aside for now the philosophical problems associated with **God** the Son dying on the cross, the idea of God dying for our sins is key to the Trinitarian understanding of the

Atonement. A Trinitarian is moved by the idea that God would become one of us, suffer for us and die to remove our sins. I can understand how that might affect a Trinitarian in a very positive way, that God would do all of that for us. However, when we delve a little deeper, we often see something else firmly connected to the idea that God the Son died for us. The argument goes that the sinfulness of humanity is so great that it would take a deity to solve the problem. No man, a Trinitarian will tell you, could ever offer a sufficiently valuable sacrifice to atone for the sins of all humanity.

From one point of view, that Trinitarian argument makes perfect logical sense. However, it also presupposes something eerily like the pagan concept of deity and their worship. In classic paganism, the relationship between the gods and their worshipers was transactional. I like to use the analogy of a vending machine. In goes 25¢, and out comes a candy bar. For the pagan, their worship of the gods was the same kind of thing—in goes the sacrifice, and out comes a blessing. Think, for example, of the classic image of a group of pagans throwing a virgin into the mouth of the volcano to make sure the volcano god didn't erupt in anger. In goes the 25¢ virgin, and out comes the blessing of a non-eruptive volcano.

The classic trinitarian atonement model is no different when it comes down to the basic concept of what it means to sacrifice. Only instead of a pure virgin, we now have the perfectly sinless god-man, suitably holy and righteous, to take upon himself the punishment we all would otherwise have deserved.

In goes the 25¢ God the Son, and out comes the blessing of appeasing the wrath of a God who cannot abide sin; sin fully atoned for.

Before we go on, I should add that the above is more of a caricature of Trinitarian belief than an immersive study of their doctrine of Atonement. Trinitarian scholarship on the topic is more sophisticated, and I might be charged with oversimplifying. However, I want to illustrate that for the man-on-the-street Trinitarian, the idea of God dying for them is just like the ancient pagan concept of sacrifice. Sin must be atoned for, and it required a massive sacrifice to do it.

Is that the God of the Bible? Do we see Yahweh demanding a sacrifice before He will welcome people into His covenant? In one sense, we might respond in the affirmative because, after all, didn't He set up the sacrificial system as outlined in Leviticus? And what about the whole process for approaching Yahweh set out in the tabernacle?

Leaving aside a study of these things, think about it more simply. How does God treat His people? Take, for example, David's sin. When Nathan exposed David's sin, what did David do? Did He go away and sacrifice a thousand rams and a hundred bulls? No—the record simply states that God took away his sin. There was no atonement made, no transaction whereby David might make up for his sin by offering something on the altar that pointed forward to the death of God the Son. Some might argue that the atonement was the death of the child conceived in the adultery. After telling David his sin

was forgiven God said “*Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child who is born to you shall die.*” (v. 14). However, Trinitarian commentators agree that this was a **consequence** rather than an atonement. For example:

David’s confession came with immediacy, without denial, and without excuse; the LORD’S forgiveness was equally direct and unrestrained. It also was without cost: forgiveness was granted the king without requiring him first to make animal sacrifices or give great gifts to the LORD. In an unadorned fashion Nathan responded to David by declaring that “*the LORD has taken away your sin.*”²

The point is God doesn’t need something from us—at least as far as an expiatory sacrifice—for Him to change His mind about us. He isn’t there, like a taskmaster, at the ready with a lightning bolt unless we accept Jesus into our hearts. He isn’t a bloodthirsty deity who demands payment for sin. He isn’t someone who needs sacrifice before He calms down and shows us mercy. He already is merciful, gracious, patient, loving, faithful, forgiving, and just. What He wants from us is confession and repentance, all based on our appreciation of the death of His son, but that’s a long way from the satisfaction model of the atonement preached by Trinitarians. The whole point of what He revealed to Moses on the mountain—is that character is the very essence of who He is. God is love. In effect, God told Moses, “I’m not like those pagan gods the people worshiped in Egypt. I’m not looking

for a transactional relationship. I’m a loving Father who loves His children.”

Suppose we worship a God who demands sacrifice before we can have a relationship with Him and can only be satisfied with the death of His son to atone for our sins. How might that be reflected in our earthly relationships and how we treat people? If we become what we worship, it requires serious thought.

On the other hand, many nominal Trinitarian Christians are loving, patient, and kind and don’t seem to have been affected by the Trinitarian concept of atonement. Also, some who reject the Trinity, Christadelphians included, are legalistic and seem to have formed a transactional relationship with others. That tells me that often one’s officially sanctioned concept of God (e.g., what is written in a creed) isn’t necessarily what one believes. I’ve had personal experience of talking to so-called Trinitarians, for example, who, upon further questioning, don’t believe in the Trinity or its Atonement model after all. I’ve also talked to Christadelphians who seem to think worship of God is a transactional thing, whereby we must give our pound of flesh to stay in His good books.

What is your understanding of God? Who is He? What is His **essence**? Next month we’ll explore this topic a little further and see how that question regarding God’s essence is right at the center of how the Trinity doctrine came about. Our goal is to help us appreciate a little more about why our rejection of the Trinity is essential for us to understand. (*To be continued*)

Richard Morgan,
(Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA)

PHILIPPINE BIBLE EDUCATION CENTERS

By John Elton

FOUNDED in 2013, the Bible Education Center (BEC) assists in coordinating and supporting preaching and pastoral work amongst the local ecclesias particularly in the southern and central Philippines. The management committee of the BEC is predominantly senior Filipino brethren. Its work has expanded rapidly in recent years, supported by its staff and a large team of enthusiastic volunteers.

Some of its current activities have been:



A BEC in the Philippines

- There are two shopfronts used for preaching and Bible classes, located in large commercial centers in southern Philippines.

- Coordination of weekly online Sunday School classes for over 600 children, predominantly from non-Christadelphian families.
- Weekly religious instruction classes, conducted in three major high schools in Mindanao, as part of the student's study curriculum.



A BEC in the Philippines

- Coordination of community preaching seminars in conjunction with local ecclesias.
- Annual Bible Camps and inter-ecclesial weekends. A five-day Summer Bible Camp, scheduled for April 2022, has over 200 young people currently registered to participate.

The COVID pandemic required the BEC team to rapidly explore other options to support the local ecclesias in coping with lockdowns, particularly those isolated in remote locations. Additionally, there were plans made to maintain and further expand its preaching and pastoral work. A Zoom platform was secured, and video production and coordination facilities were established in the BECs.

The current activities include:


- Coordinating a weekly combined memorial meeting, with responsibility for its conduct rotating amongst seven local ecclesias.
- Weekly online Sunday School classes, beamed to seventeen remote sites across the Philippines.
- A five-day online Sunday School workshop involving over 300

children across 27 remote sites was also coordinated last year as part of the WCF online global Bible School with their support.

- Bi-weekly CYC Bible classes and interactive activities for the youth. Three weekly online Bible study and “first principles” classes at the request of those living in remote communities.
- A website providing access to local exhortations, Bible talks, Sunday School materials, etc., as well as preaching materials in local dialects.
- Targeted welfare support for needy Sunday School children in our community, particularly from the non-Christadelphian community.

The work has been blessed with numerous baptisms, particularly from our Sunday School and youth work over recent years. We are grateful to our donors and particularly for our Father’s ongoing blessing for our humble labors in His service.

*John Elton,
(Punchbowl Ecclesia, Australia)*



THE PHILIPPINES

A FIELDWORKER'S IMPRESSIONS

By John Elton

Samal Port , Island Garden City of Samal, Philippines

MY first visit to the Philippines was 49 years ago. I had been actively involved as a member of a large and well-resourced Australian ecclesia from childhood. However, I was challenged to experience overseas mission work by a brother who had recently returned from the Philippines. Despite the challenges of having a young family, I reluctantly agreed to a four-week visit. I confess to having felt somewhat patronizing towards those who had newly accepted the gospel in a third-world country. I was confident in my Christadelphian heritage and my ability to educate new converts in the

third world on the finer principles of the Bible's message. That initial four-week visit ended up having a major impact on my subsequent personal life and my pilgrimage over subsequent years.

In contrast to the largely godless and materialistic society that is Australia today, I found a Filipino community predominately espousing Christian ethics and principles, although frequently heavily influenced by their Catholic traditions. I found a small Christadelphian community who were mostly humble farmers, poor by first-world standards, who were zealous

for their newfound faith, and were committed to uphold and preach it. I found brothers and sisters who had a thirst for the gospel. They would rise early and regularly walk 3-4.5 miles to fellowship together at the Lord's table or join in Bible studies in their homes. Others regularly sacrificed their weekends to travel many miles via rudimentary public transport to preach the gospel and encourage those living in relative isolation. I marveled at members who used every opportunity to preach the gospel, to hand out flyers and engage in Bible discussions with fellow travelers in buses, Jeepneys, or in the street.

We have many material blessings in our first-world countries. But in the Philippines, I found Sunday School children who sometimes had only one dress and well-worn shoes. Children who enjoyed playing games together used only sticks and stones from the street. Children would gladly sit for several hours to hear Sunday School lessons.

Though lacking the material blessings we may enjoy, these brethren and sisters showed me what discipleship truly means. I have recounted to them many times over my subsequent 49 years of visiting that those early members taught me, in their love, zeal and enthusiasm for the gospel, what discipleship truly entails. They taught me more than I could ever have taught them.

I returned home after four weeks, profoundly influenced by their example of dedication. I was moved by their desire for the Master's return and their focus on the prospect of eternal life in the Kingdom as the only solution to the

poverty and hardships in their lives. I returned the following year bringing my wife and two young daughters, desiring to impart to them the spiritual lessons I had learned.

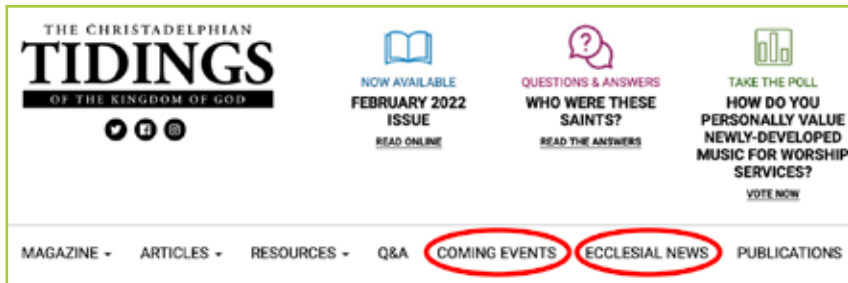
My secular marketing background has taught me to evaluate "return on investment" as a key principle in allocating marketing resources and optimizing the outcome. What will provide the best return for funds employed? Having been actively involved in several major preaching campaigns in my home state in Australia, it is also sadly evident that preaching in the third world is attracting a much greater harvest to the gospel than what we are able to achieve in our materialistic first-world societies.

I have been motivated to actively support the work in the Philippines since that first visit. By God's providence, I was blessed to reside there for a few years. I have been privileged to witness the consistent growth in the Truth from that initial handful of members during my first visit in 1973, to now over 700 brethren and sisters scattered across six of the major islands.

As in Australia however, the slow encroachments of affluence within the Philippine community also challenges today's members to maintain the original zeal and dedication shown by their pioneers. As the Master teaches us, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God." (Matt 6:33).

*John Elton,
(Punchbowl Ecclesia, Australia)*

In this fast-paced world of ever present news, *The Tidings* has decided to no longer publish **Ecclesial News** or **Coming Events** in the magazine. We feel that these items are much better served in an online environment where they can be posted and shared much more expediently. You can find the most recent information online at www.tidings.org



Your comments on this change are welcome by email to editor@tidings.org

Sarasota, FL

A number of brothers and sisters have visited the Sarasota, FL Ecclesia in the past few months. They include Sis. Gaby Kilbourne of the Echo Lake, NJ Ecclesia, Bro. Jeff and Sis. Ethel Wallace, Cranston, RI, Bro. Tony and Sis. Amy Bell, Monroe, WA and Bro. Wayne and Sis. Brenda Osborn of the North Battleford, SK ecclesia.

We thank Bro. Osborne and Bro. Bell for their words of exhortation.

We are happy to have Bro. Terry and Sis. Jean Cannon with us from Castle Bromwich, UK.

James Wilkinson

Western Bible School

We're excited to be getting in touch with you with an update on plans for WCBS 2022. As always, our plans are subject to the will of God.

We are planning to move forward with a week-long, in-person WCBS 2022!

The dates we are planning for the week are our usual: Sunday, July 24 through Saturday, July 30th. We have those dates officially booked with Menucha. Registration will open March 1!

Registering soon will be helpful in allowing us to know whether or not we can rent the entire campus.

Part of the joy of WCBS is being together in beautiful surroundings. The committee has discussed the viability of providing an online option for WCBS 2022 and we have decided to focus on providing our usual in-person experience; we won't be providing an option to attend WCBS virtually this year. However, we will record the talks given by our two speakers, John Launchbury and Luke Barratt, and will provide those recordings on the WCBS website.

We're so excited to be diving back into planning for this year, and are really looking forward to getting together in person again, after two long years away.

Nate Launchbury

Thoughts on the Way Does God "Draw" us?

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:44).¹

DOES man have freewill to choose or reject eternal life? Or does God, by some arbitrary method, select ahead of time those whom He will "draw" to Himself, while at the same time leaving everyone else in their own unbelief? Or, to put it another way, is every individual "predestined" either to life or death. Is it all out of our hands?

Take the verse above, for example. By itself, without context, it seems to say that salvation, and the steps leading to salvation, are entirely in God's hands, and entirely out of our control. But is this so? Must a person wait passively while God, by some unknown and unknowable method, "draws" him to Christ? Or does God draw men and women by means which require them to make choices of their own?

Jesus uses the same Greek word, translated "draw," in another passage in John: "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." (John 12:32).

This verse seems to say that God, through His Son on the cross, "draws" all men to Himself. But since all men do not come to Christ, there must be a self-selection process along the way. That is, God must "draw" a man before he can be saved, but the man himself must choose to be drawn also, if God's offer is to be validated.

This idea of drawing is in keeping with the overall context of John 6: "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (v. 37). This would be meaningless if the "coming" were not an individual choice. "My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life." (v. 40). So again, the individual's free response (e.g., "looks to," "believe in") is necessary.

"It is written in the prophets: 'They will all be taught by God'" (Isa 54:13). "Every one who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me." (John 6:45).

The calling process involves two essential things: (1) God teaching, and (2) man learning. Once again, there must be a freewill response to God's offer:

The person is "taught" by God (v. 45);

The person "listens" to the instruction (v. 46);

The person "learns" (v. 45), i.e., he "sees" (v. 46);

The person "comes" to Christ (v. 45), i.e., "believes upon" him (vv. 40,47); and finally

The person receives everlasting life, being raised up on the "last day" (vv. 47,54).

We see, then, that God's "calling" is open to all mankind, and "inclusive" for all, if the invitation is acted upon.

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you. (Isa 55:1-3).

Here there is a proclamation, broadcast to all who will listen—just as Jesus said in Matthew 11:28,29: *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, and you will find rest for your souls.”*

In these words of God and His Son, there are no restrictions placed upon men, except what they may place upon themselves. When Jesus commissioned the disciples to preach the good news about his resurrection, there was the same universality in the offer of salvation: *“Go into **all the world** and preach the gospel to **all creation**. **Whoever** believes and is baptized will be saved.”* (Mark 16:15, 16).

Paul and the other disciples interpreted this to mean that the good news was offered to all, without reservation and without exception: *“**Everyone** who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”* (Joel 2:32). *“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”* (Rom 10:13, 14).

So, the responsibility rests upon all those who hear the message, to respond to it, and to accept it when they are convinced. And finally, to share that message with others along the way.

Who will do the preaching now? Jesus cannot do that directly. The apostles have all died. It must be up to us to pass along the same message: *“The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.”* (Rev 22:17).

Those who hear the message, and act upon it, are also obligated to pass the message along. **“I have heard the wonderful news! You should come to hear it too!”**

God uses regular men and women—like you and me—to pass along His message. We are, and should be, partners and coworkers with Christ to carry this precious treasure to others. Is it frightening? In some ways, yes. Is it amazing? Most certainly. *“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.”* (1 John 3:1)

The Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians:

I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.” (1Cor 9:19-23).

George Booker,
(Austin Leander Ecclesia, TX)

Note: In a later article, we plan to consider the idea of “predestination.”

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