

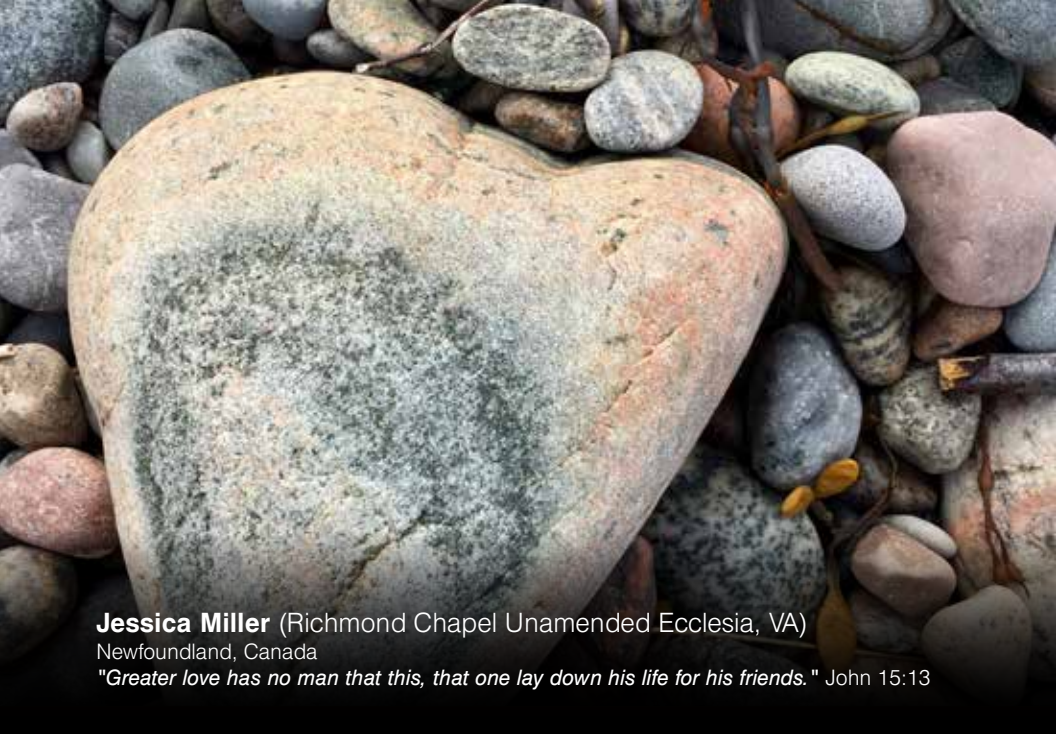
TIDINGS



Volume 85, Number 5, May 2022

WHAT CAN I DO?

I wonder if we could pray more together.
Could we demonstrate our reliance on God
to our children and friends by having greater
fellowship in prayer?



Jessica Miller (Richmond Chapel Unamended Ecclesia, VA)
Newfoundland, Canada

"Greater love has no man that this, that one lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13

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OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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TIDINGS

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EDITORIAL



WHAT CAN I DO?

By Dave Jennings

THERE are so many problems in this life that we feel powerless to influence. Not only the grandiose things like wars, hunger, pandemics and natural disasters. But the smaller things in life too, where we are directly involved. These may be relationship difficulties, employment concerns, financial hardships or health matters. So often, we are confronted with the question of “What can I do?”

Over the past couple of years, we have faced several “big” issues. Here in North America, we saw turbulence in the political process, social injustice, a pandemic that just about shut down our lives. When faced with such threats around us, it is easy for us to feel that there is just nothing we can personally do. Wouldn't it be great if there was one resource, one person who had the wisdom and power to correct all these wrongs? If that person existed, there would be an exceptionally lengthy line of petitioners at his front door. Everyone would want to come to this person to ask for intervention in their difficulties. Of course, there is no such mortal on this earth that can come close to fulfilling this need. But our omnipotent Father in heaven does, and He has, through Christ, opened the way for us to bring our petitions right before Him.

While the United Nations is weighing alternatives and nations are contemplating their steps, we have been elevated through Christ to do more than any other people. For we don't rely on our own wits and skills, but we are encouraged to bring our petitions right to our Heavenly Father. We know that His arm is not weak like ours. The authority given to our Lord Jesus Christ

is beyond our full grasp. For, he has made him to have “*dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.*” (Psa 8:6-8).

When faced with any dilemma, whether small or large, our first work is to pray to our God. It is not disengaging or taking a passive role in the face of our problems. Rather, it is exactly what great men and women of faith have always done. Praying for God's intervention is, in fact, the most important thing that we can do for all the problems we face. Peter wrote that “*the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers.*” (1 Pet 3:12).

None of us would compare our ability to influence others to the Apostle Paul. Yet, it was clear that Paul was fully dedicated to regular, fervent prayer for others. Paul prayed for young Timothy, far away in Ephesus, from his prison cell in Rome. He declared, “*that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day.*” (2 Tim 1:3). Paul was confident God would hear his prayers and act on Timothy's behalf. That must have brought great comfort to him. Paul appeals to those in Rome to “*strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints.*” (Rom 15:30-31). We see a continuing theme with Paul, which was a reliance on God to deliver him and prosper his work.

Epaphras of Colossi was memorialized as one who was *“always labouring fervently for you in prayers.”* (Col 4:12). Anna was recognized in Luke’s Gospel for serving *“God with fastings and prayers night and day.”* (Luke 2:37). Moses prayed for the people of Israel during their many failings in the Wilderness. Daniel’s prayer for Judah and Israel is recorded for us in Daniel 9. Our Lord himself was constantly focused on prayers for others. Praying for others, not only ourselves, is part of what defines a child of God.

It is further clear that the Apostle Paul had a “prayer list” that allowed him to call to mind the many people for which he was praying. The phrase *“making mention of you in my prayers”* occurs at least four times (Rom 1:9; Eph 1:16; 1 Thess 1:12; 2 Tim 1:3). In my imagination, I see Paul with a tattered and long scribbled list of brothers and sisters that he wanted to remember in prayer, along with other challenges that he was facing. These may have taken precedence over his own personal concerns, though we do know that he prayed three times for relief from the *“thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan.”* (2 Cor 12:7). The answer was provided to Paul, and he accepted it. *“Lest I should be exalted above measure”* the answer had been no.

Applying These Lessons to Our Day and Age

Someone once wrote, “I am praying for you already. Is there anything else I can do?” This really is the right approach to life. The most important first step is to approach all problems with prayer and petition to our God.

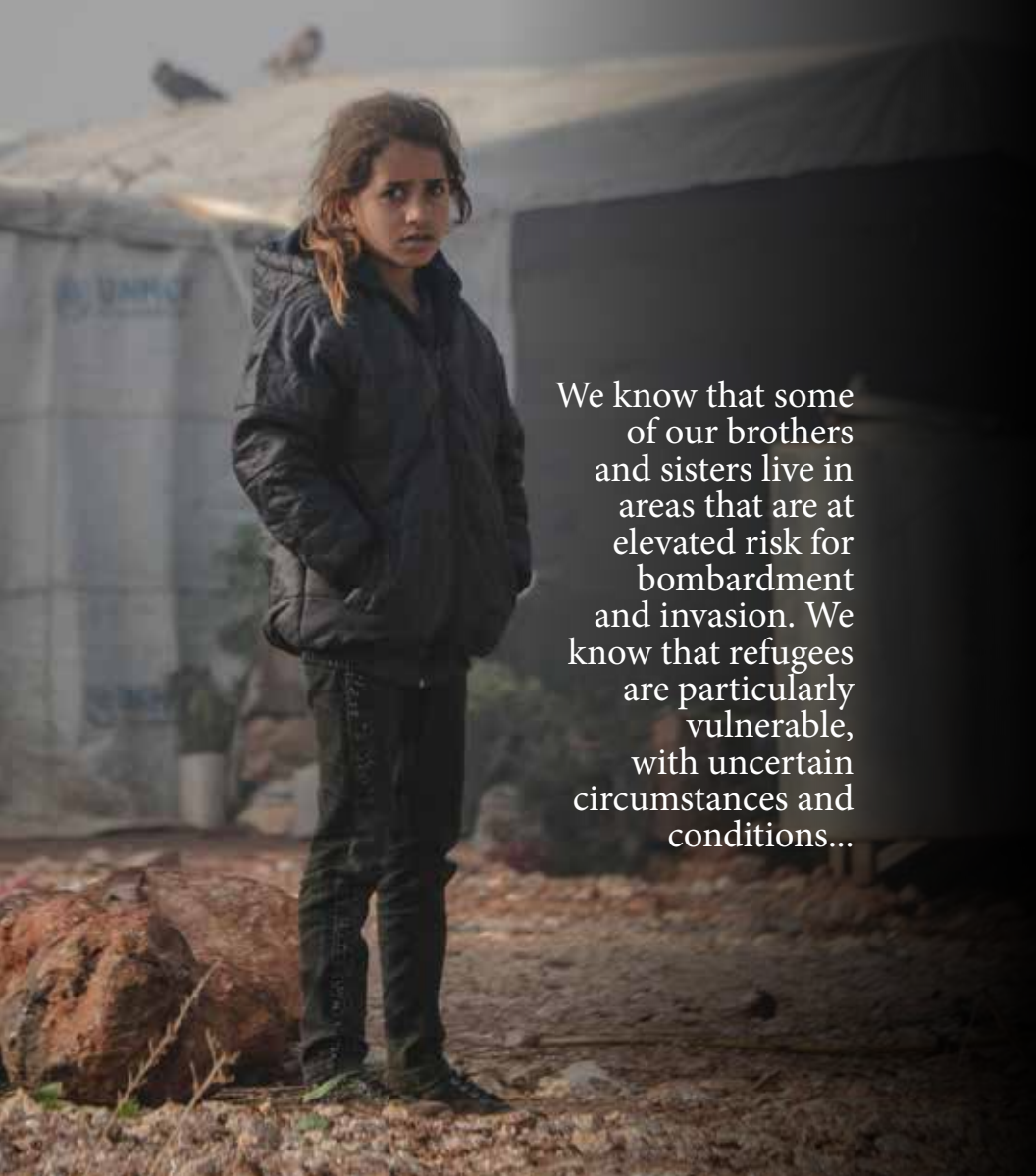
Let’s think about a big problem facing us today—the War in Ukraine. Kyiv

is more than 6,300 miles from my home near Los Angeles. I may never go to Ukraine in my mortal lifetime. I certainly have no influence on what the nations or rulers are doing. But, of course, my heart goes out to all of Ukraine, especially our brothers and sisters. So, I ask the question, “What can I do?”

Let’s start by listing what we do know. We know that some of our brothers and sisters live in areas that are at elevated risk for bombardment and invasion. We know that refugees are particularly vulnerable, with uncertain circumstances and conditions. We know that the primary method for brothers and sisters in Ukraine, as well as Russia, to fellowship is through the internet. We know that Internet access, especially outside of these countries is potentially at risk. We know that our Russian brothers and sisters are highly likely to experience considerable difficulty due to the economic sanctions being imposed, making their lives even more difficult. Finally, we know that the rulers of all lands are under the control of the angels, and our objective is for all brethren to live peaceable and godly lives, absent from constant threat of authorities.

So, “What can I do?”

1. Pray for those in Ukraine who are under threat of attack, and for their families that may be threatened. Ask our Heavenly Father to be their fortress and remove them from harm’s way.
2. Pray for those who have successfully left Ukraine but are in various states of uncertainty in their present circumstances, as well as what their future may be. Ask God to protect



We know that some of our brothers and sisters live in areas that are at elevated risk for bombardment and invasion. We know that refugees are particularly vulnerable, with uncertain circumstances and conditions...

them during this time of great vulnerability.

3. Pray that we may continue to have a window of opportunity to communicate, worship and preach in Ukraine and Russia. This may include praying that Mr. Putin does not order severe Internet restrictions.
4. Pray for our brothers and sisters in Russia, who are also victims of this war. Pray that they may be blessed with adequate resources to feed and house their families during these times of strict economic sanctions that are isolating Russia from other world economies.

5. Pray for Mr. Putin and the Russian government to cease from their continued invasion. Pray for the leaders of Ukraine, as they attempt to govern a people that are under great duress. Pray for the nations that engage in opposition to the war, that they will not cause further harm.

That's five items to include on our own prayer list. I am sure that you can include more.

I am convinced that the members of our community are all engaged in active prayer. I wonder, however, if we might improve by speaking about prayer needs more openly? I wonder if we could pray more together. Could we demonstrate our reliance on God to our children and friends by having greater fellowship in prayer?

Years ago, several of us were presenting a Bible Reading seminar in the local community. We had been blessed with great attendance and participation. One of the seminar attendees asked me to visit his church and talk with his pastor about presenting the seminar to his congregation of more than five hundred members. While this didn't ultimately work out, I was specifically invited to attend their prayer meeting, which they held every Tuesday night. That evening, there were at least three hundred of their five hundred members in this meeting. I was impressed to see how they broke into smaller groups and prayed together for specific needs. The individual I had come with had a daughter facing cancer treatments and the group, holding hands together, prayed for her healing. Later, I finally met with the pastor. He cordially greeted me and asked about

the seminar. After describing it to him, he asked me, "Can I pray for you and the success of your work?" Of course, I agreed, and he led a prayer with my seminar friend and me for about three minutes. I must say that it forced me to really examine my own practice. Had I prayed **with** my brethren before we started the seminar? Would I have prayed for this pastor to be successful in his work?

There are many ways for us to witness the Truth. Certainly, preaching the true gospel to our friends is one of the most important methods. But I suppose that when we look back at the infant church in Jerusalem, their reputation was not only for breaking bread, and the Apostles' doctrine, but for prayer. They were a community that prayed often. They prayed individually. They prayed in meetings together. They prayed in the Temple. They saw prayer as a way to serve others, like Epaphras later did in Colossi.

So, what can you do? Start with specific, earnest prayer to our Heavenly Father. While the rest of the world is scratching their heads and running their best analysis, we are petitioning the God who *"measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out the heaven with a span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance."* (Isa 40:12). That sounds to me like a pretty good place to start!

Dave Jennings

TIDINGS ANNOUNCEMENT

Sis. Lori Cusenza retired at the end of 2021 after almost 30 years of service as Assistant Editor of the “News and Notices” section of the *Tidings* Magazine. Sis. Lori did not grow up in a Christadelphian family but rather received the gospel message via some close friends and was baptized in 1982. She came from a large family of seven brothers and sisters. Being second oldest, she told us that she was always comfortable being a caretaker of her younger siblings. Thus, taking on the job of dealing with publishing the “News” from our North American community made her feel part of the Christadelphian family. In the early years of the job, social media didn’t exist, and email was just in its infancy.

Correspondence to the magazine often came in hand-written, or if we were fortunate, typewritten. There was no “spellcheck” or “auto-grammar” suggestions. Without Sis. Lori’s help, the burden of transcribing submitted “News and Notices” would have been overwhelming! The job also required good judgment, and in Sis. Lori’s own words, “The biggest challenge with the job was knowing when I should not put some info into the magazine. I remember seeing some things that really didn’t need to be spread to the

entire community and had to seek guidance from the Editor. Otherwise, it was sometimes difficult to parse out what the author was meaning and finding a way to communicate correctly, while correcting for grammar errors that made sentences difficult to understand.”

I asked Sis. Lori if there was anything she disliked or would have done different now that she could look back on her many years of service. Her reply was,

“I can’t think of anything I disliked about working on the magazine. It was an honor and a privilege to be able to do it, and I appreciated the trust that was put in me to accomplish what needed to be done each month.”

Indeed, it was an honor and a privilege to have Sis. Lori on

the magazine staff, and we wish her health and happiness in the years to come. Recently she has taken on a new challenge as a grandmother. Her daughter and son-in-law, Sis. Christie and Bro. Stan Gergle had a baby girl named Emery-Brynn Ariella Gergle, on March 12, 2022. Sis. Lori would like this to be considered her last “News and Notice” to the *Tidings* Community!

John Bilello,
(Ann Arbor Ecclesia, MI)



"OH GOD, THOU ART MY GOD"

BASIC TRUTHS OF GOD APPLIED IN OUR LIVES

ANNUALLY we read the book of Psalms from January to March in our daily readings. Each year I am amazed afresh by the Psalmist's ability to take basic truths about God, and translate them into powerful statements to govern his personal thoughts and feelings as he struggles with day-to-day issues.

For example, in Psalm 118 he describes being surrounded by his enemies, as a swarm of bees on the attack.

We would normally panic. But the Psalmist proclaims this basic truth: "*The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?*" (Psa 118:6). Sadly, and too often, we do fear. We become anxious, and lie awake in the night hours, too stressed to sleep. Contrast this with David as he flees from Absalom: "*I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me.*" (Psa 3:5). Then, think of the total confusion and anxiety this experience would have bred in us.

And what about Psalm 31? Here David shares the weight of his isolation:

I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind; I am like a broken vessel. For I have heard the slander of many: fear was on every side: while they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life. (Psa 31:12-13).

Yet, in the following verse, he confidently responds with this basic truth: "*But, I trusted in thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my God*" (v. 14). Notice how David personalizes this relationship: "*my God.*" Fifty-five times the Psalms lift our relationship to this level of intimacy with this same expression "*my God.*" And in many other passages this intimacy is reinforced. Psalm 18:2 overflows with it: "*The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.*"

David reminds us how important it is to ponder the daily implications of living our basic beliefs. What practical steps can we take to apply these? To help us do this in Hyderabad, India, our ecclesia formulated its present statement of faith, or "Confession of Faith," so that each statement includes a clear implication for us to work on. For example, Clauses 6 and 7 read:

Clause 6: We believe that God, in His kindness, conceived a plan of restoration which, without setting aside His just and necessary law of sin and death, could save faithful human beings from destruction, and fill the earth, with sinless

immortal people. We therefore believe we should praise God for that kindness, that despite our sin He cares enough to call us to be His, and we believe that we should be like that, showing a kindness that seeks to restore relationships despite everyone's unworthiness.

Clause 7: We believe that He initiated this plan by making promises to Adam, Abraham and David, and afterwards elaborated it in greater detail through the prophets. We therefore believe that we should be sincere to the promises we make.

Omniscient

There is a definite consequence to every belief and basic truth, which should impact our life in every way. This should cause us to reflect on the supernatural attributes that constitute our basic definition of God: that He is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. It is essential for us to translate these academic descriptions of God into personal applications.

Firstly, God is omniscient, or all-knowing. Therefore, Job's assertion, "*He knows the way that I take*" (Job 23:10 ESV), is true for Job and us. Job did not know the path that God was taking (v. 8) or even the path God had marked out for him (v. 9), but Job still acknowledged "*God knows my way*" (v. 10). Furthermore, we can be sure God knows what He is doing. Job radiates this assurance in verses 13-14 when he declares: "*He performeth the thing that is appointed for me.*"

In contrast, we cannot work out or comprehend the ways of God. Even Job

could not. And even the wisdom of the wise writer of Ecclesiastes could not:

Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun.... though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it. (Ecc 8:17).

Though we cannot fathom God's ways, it is reassuring to know He can fathom us: "O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me... and art acquainted with all my ways." (Psa 139:1-3). How grateful we are that this knowledge is with Him, for He is the one with the power to lead us along the path to His Kingdom. Even if we knew the path which lies ahead in His providence, we could not, with human strength, walk the Kingdom road. But, as Paul reminds us, He knows and can perform. (Rom 4:21). "For it is God that works in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure." (Phil. 2:13).

With certainty, God knows the way that we take. Every mile, and every millimeter. If we tread the path He maps out for us, we shall come forth as gold (Job 23:10). God is omniscient; therefore, God knows.

Omnipotent

Secondly, God is omnipotent, or all-powerful. Not just as an abstract principle, but in the practical realities of the daily lives of His people. The simple matter of fertility in two old women illustrates this for us in Genesis 18:12-14 and Luke 1:36-37. As does the conception in a virgin maid in Luke 1:34-35. God's rhetorical question to Abraham declares this plainly: "Is any thing too hard for the LORD?" (Gen 18:14).

When Jeremiah purchased a field that was over-run by the enemy, surely the world laughed, and the seller gleefully counted the coins. But Jeremiah's purchase, impractical as it appeared, was a testimony to God's power to keep His word. Thus, he prays: "Ah Lord God! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee." (Jer 32:17).

God is all-powerful to remove the obstacles that might block the way to the Kingdom. What temporal riches impede our progress along this Kingdom Road? Are they material things, prestige, or respectability in the eyes of a godless world? There are too many obstacles for mankind to gain salvation, but Jesus assured his disciples and us when he said, "with men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." (Matt 19:26).

All things are possible! Even forgiveness of those sins for which we feel we could never forgive ourselves. "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." (1 John 3:20). It is God alone who can comprehend the human heart, whether it is "desperately sick" (Jer 17:9-10 ESV) or sincerely seeking Him (Acts 15:7-8). God "knoweth all things" and can do all things.

Omnipresent

Thirdly, God is omnipresent, or present in all places at all times. How eloquently David writes of this in Psalm 139:7-13. Wherever the path of His providing takes us we can be sure that "even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me." (v. 10). This is true even if He leads us into the wilderness. And in that place, we can there cry

Wherever the path of His providing takes us we can be sure that *"even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me."* (v. 10). This is true even if He leads us into the wilderness.

with Hagar, *"Thou God seest me."* (Gen 16:13).

How desperately we need God's omnipresence and the ways of His providing. Only in Him can *"we live, and move, and have our being."* (Acts 17:28). He does not need us, *"as though he needed any thing"* (v. 25), for *"Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills... for the world is mine and all the fullness thereof."* (Psa 50:10-12). But how desperately we need Him every day of our life!

All is His and all is at His command. Have we translated His omniscience to *"He knows the way that I take"*? Does His omnipotence truly teach us each day *"there is nothing too hard for thee"*? Does His omnipresence assure us that *"thou God seest me"*? God the provider, He who maps out the ways of providence of each day and night for His beloved is ever present with all knowledge and all power at His command. With this guarantee we can with loving resignation say, *"He knows the way that I take,"* and *"I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."* (Psa 17:15).

To achieve the same sense of security as David, as we wake each morning to face another day, we need the sure anchor of faith that God truly surrounds us, and is working all-powerfully in us, knowing us, and present with us.

God Is... Light, Good, Love

If we want to appreciate God's attributes in the same way as David, Job, or Jeremiah, the first step of our journey is to recognize that *"God is."* Paul reminds us of this when he declares, *"He that comes to God must believe that He is."* (Heb 11:6). A God who "is not" can provide us with nothing. Yahweh alone is the eternal one, who was, and is, and is to come. Whether past, present or future, He is the *"I am."* The God who exists when no others do. In contrast, Baal could not answer his worshippers because Baal did not exist. *"They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not; neither is there any breath in their mouths."* (Psa 135:16-17).

Our God alone is the God who "is," and who can both see and hear. The Psalmist writes *"He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?"* (Psa 94:9). And so, we share the same relief of David as he sings: *"The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry."* (Psa 34:15).

The wonderful thing about the attribute of existence is that it tells us that there is more to follow. *"God is"* is the prefix for a whole range of other characteristics, and basic truths.

John reveals one example when he tells us *"God is light."* (1 John 1:5). To understand the depth of this basic

truth, we must remind ourselves of the genetics principle of Genesis 1:11 and of its outworking in the spiritual realm as a sort of spiritual genetics. *"Each bearing seed after its kind"* was the vital principle God put into all that He made. By this, we know a lemon tree won't produce mangoes, or a thorn bush apples, or a human mother a baby lizard. How much security that gives us! When our loved ones deliver their offspring, we only have to ask: "a boy or a girl?"; not, is it a calf, or a piglet, or a baby goanna (lizard). The law of genetics was put there by a loving Father in Genesis 1:11, and it has been there ever since.

Now, what is applicable to all creation, is also true of God. If God *"is light"* then that which is of God, is also *"of light."* Therefore, the fruit of all He does is light even though the paths of His doings may be flecked with shadow from a human perspective. That which is of this world is darkness, for *"all that is in the world, the lust of flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."* (1 John 2:16).

From Genesis 1:3-4 we learn that the light which was of God was *"good."* So interrelated are *"God"* and *"good"* in scripture that when Moses prayed *"show me thy glory,"* the LORD replied, *"I will make all my goodness pass before thee."* (Exod 33:18-19). God's glory is His goodness. By nature, He is omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all knowing), and omnipresent (everywhere present). But the glory is, that with all that power, all that knowledge, and His all-pervading presence, He is still *"merciful, gracious, longsuffering, abundant in goodness*

[Heb. chesed = kindness] and truth." (Exo 34:6). Man by nature cannot in this life display the supernatural power of God. We all fall short of His glory (Rom 3:23) because we fail to be as merciful, as gracious, as patient, as kind, as truthful, as forgiving or as just as God.

All that is of God therefore *"is light"* and it *"is good."* It is a principle that we, the children of faith, must believe and apply in our lives. His Word is of Him and so *"Thy word is a light unto my path and a lamp unto my feet."* (Psa 119:105). Do we consider the paths of our lives with this perspective? God the provider brings light through all the ways of providence, however dark those paths may seem.

Finally, it is John who also reminds us of another basic truth, that *"God is love"* (1 John 4:8,16), and that which is of God *"is love."* (v. 7). The ways of providence will always be paths of love. The path of providence that took Jesus along the *"via Dolorosa"* (the sorrowful way) to Golgotha was the way of love. Thorny and painful, to the extreme, though it was.

If we recognize that:

- 1) *"God is light and in Him is no darkness at all"* (1 John 5:7), and
- 2) that *"Thou [LORD] art good, and doest good"* (Psa 119:68), and
- 3) that *"God is love"* and *"love is of God"* (1 John 4:7-8), this is an essential foundation for an appreciation of God and His wonderful working in your life and mine.

*Tim Galbraith,
Hyderabad Ecclesia, India*



NEVER RETURN TO OUR OLD "GODS"

By Julius Bumadilla

MY dearly beloved brothers, sisters, and friends in one precious hope and faith. This morning you made the right decision to be here and in unified purpose to serve our Heavenly Father. The right choice leads to Life. We are gathered before this table of our Lord Jesus Christ to renew our vows once again, our faith and our hope as we are to remember that great love of God shown to us by the sacrificial death of His Son and our Lord Jesus Christ. We share the blessing of eternal hope, as

evidenced by his resurrection. Allow me to share with you some thoughts from the Holy Scriptures as we together prepare ourselves in receiving the memorials.

I will share with you some vital points by way of exhortation from today's first reading in Exodus 32, which our loving brother read for us. This chapter recorded one of the most grievous sins committed by our forefathers in the wilderness, as they journeyed towards

the promised land, “*a land flowing with milk and honey.*” (Exod 3:17). The promised land was a picture of abundance and prosperity!

There are two relevant questions I can place to jumpstart my exhortation. First, what would cause believers to fall flat on their faces? Second, what would cause someone to compromise everything they stood for and lose their reputation?

The context of this chapter tells us that forty days earlier the people of Israel witnessed and felt the unimaginable power and sovereignty of Yahweh, their living God, as He delivered the Ten Commandments from the Mt. Sinai (Exod 20:18-19), in addition to the many wonders and miracles they saw even from the land of Egypt. Convinced and confident, the people confessed “*All the words which the LORD hath said we will do.*” (Exod. 24:3). But, when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, “*Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.*” (Exod 32:1).

To understand what happened here, it is helpful to get inside the story and try to imagine being in their situation. Maybe then we'll begin to understand why we're so prone to go astray. God's move was evident to the nation of Israel. God had taken them from being a nation under slavery to a free nation on the way to a land that God had promised them. God had told them that they would be His treasured possession, and that He would live among them. This was amazing! He had provided for

them miraculously in the desert. They had seen God move with their eyes and had heard His voice with their ears. They'd just heard God make a covenant with them. God made it very clear He would not tolerate divided loyalty. He wanted all their devotion. He would not share it with anyone.

However, we read in verse 1 that Moses was delayed in coming down from the mountain. This actually was a big deal. From their perspective, Moses had been gone much longer than they'd expected. They were people with families. They were standing in the middle of the desert with no homes or jobs. God had given them manna and quail, but that was only good if it lasted. At any moment, as far as they knew, God's provision could end, and they would be stuck in the middle of the desert with nothing. They felt exposed, vulnerable, and scared. Moses was their only connection with God, and who knew if he was even still alive or if he would ever come back? These were valid concerns. So, their solution was, “*Make us gods who will go before us.*” Brothers and sisters and friends, this circumstance and reaction is not just of the ancient Israelites. This is a picture for us too.

The Apostle Paul wrote:

Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.” (1 Cor 10:6-7).

When confronted with issues in this present life, we may fall the same way they did. Paul said we face the same danger they did. We could make idols.


No one here I believe has an idol in their house. We're not about to create a golden calf or anything like that. What does Paul mean that we face the same danger Israel did back then?

As I exhort today, you may have circumstances in your life which make you feel exposed, vulnerable, and scared. This is an ordinary human experience. You are going to go through difficult trials in your life you are looking for something to hold on to for assurance and comfort. And we know for certain that a weightier part of discipleship is about taking up the cross. Jesus taught: *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."* (Matt 16:24). There are times during such trials, God may sometimes seem distant. How do we propose to carry

these burdens, being true disciples of Christ?

God has given us eternal life, but we don't have the complete fulfillment of these promises yet. We believe they're true, but we walk by faith, not by sight. Sometimes when we're in the middle of troubles, God will seem distant. We'll be left looking for assurance and comfort, and we will sometimes wonder where God is because He won't be as obvious as we'd like. In those times, we'll grab on to something for assurance and comfort, and if it's not God, for many it will be something else. Under stress, we return to "gods" we used to trust. This is actually the sin that we're tempted to repeat every single day.

There was a time when God was temporarily absent before the sight of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

A woman with long dark hair and glasses is sitting outdoors, looking off to the side with a thoughtful expression. She is wearing a light-colored top and blue jeans. The background is a soft-focus view of trees and foliage.

There are times during such trials, God may sometimes seem distant. How do we suppose to carry these burdens, being true disciples of Christ?

Eve doubted God's goodness and his word. They were afraid, and so they clung to something familiar in the place of God. For Adam and Eve, it was the tree. For Israel, it was the golden calf. For us, it will be something else if we do not learn well the lesson! We're going to be struggling with this temptation for the rest of our lives. It's the same as the first temptation faced by Adam and Eve. The apostle John wrote: *"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."* (1 John 2:16). When we're scared or under stress, we tend to return to these old idolatries and worship them instead of God. Let us not forget that whenever we begin worshipping the things of the world, we stop worshipping God.

So, we read in Exodus 32:5 that they worshiped the golden calf, even as they held a feast for the LORD. We can cling to our old idols as well as God. We look to them for comfort and strength. Now we can understand why some can easily go astray. They faced some pressure, and they looked to something other than God as a way to deal with that pressure or fear. Where do you turn for comfort and strength when you feel scared? What do you tend to trust in alongside of God? The modern world has its own way to answer. Many of us, especially our children, are enslaved with gadgets today. Many of us bury ourselves in work. Many of us look to relationships to feel we're okay. Many of us look to our bank account or something that preserves our status or reputation. Some of us turn to drugs, alcohol, or

**What may be
your idols,
knowingly or
unknowingly?**

pornography. Where is God in all of these?

What may be your idols, knowingly or unknowingly? Think what thing you usually grab first when you wake up. Think how you spend your first hour in every day. Think about what you love to daydream about. Think about where you spend your money. Think about the places you turn when you're under great stress. Think about what you can't imagine losing because you don't know how you'd go on. Think about what sparks uncontrollable emotions in your life—anger, fear, or passion.

The Apostle Paul tells us, *"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry."* (Col. 3:5).

We're all in danger of idolatry without even

knowing it. Under stress, we return to "gods" we used to trust in. This is the universal human condition.

God tells Moses to go down from the mountain (v. 7). He threatens to wipe out the entire nation and to start again with Moses. In verse 19, Moses takes the tablets containing the Law and smashes them. The Law represents the terms of God's covenant with the people. Moses is communicating that everything is in danger. This act could unravel everything. It's endangering their very relationship with God. Why is idolatry a big deal in our discipleship? When we serve other gods, we are setting our whole hearts on something other than God. Something has taken God's place in our lives. This will endanger

our entire spiritual lives. It's a matter of serious concern for all of us. Where will we place our worries in life? In whom shall we put our trust and hope? A choice must be made. Moses challenged the people, "*Who is on the LORD'S side?*" (v. 26). Our only choice and only hope is a mediator. God tells Moses that he wants to wipe the people out. "*Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you,*" he says (Exod 32:10). When you consider how holy God is, and how often we rebel against Him, it's amazing that His patience has endured so long. Why didn't God wipe Israel out? Because Moses mediated for them. He pled with God, based on his reputation and covenant to preserve the people, and God answered his prayer (Exod 32:11-14).

Brothers and sisters and friends, God is so patient. What has kept Him from wiping us all out? It certainly isn't our innate goodness. We have a pretty poor track record. What has kept God from wiping us all out is a commitment to His reputation and the covenant that He has made with us.

We need a mediator. We have that mediator, an even better one than the Israelites had. We have a mediator in our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:5). Jesus is a better mediator than Moses. Moses only prayed. Jesus not only prayed, but he died for us that we might live. He didn't just ask God to forgive our sins, he laid the basis for our reconciliation to God at the cost of his own life. This being the case, nothing ought to prevent any sinner from pleading

for himself through Jesus Christ. In a sense, Exodus 32:14 is written over the head of every believer: "*And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.*" What does our mediator do? He intercedes for his people. Hebrews 7:25 says, "*he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.*" Right now, he is praying for us. Having died for our sins, he's making specific requests to God on our behalf. This means that he won't leave the work of saving you only half done. He will complete it. He will save me and all of you, every part of our lives, for all of eternity.

This morning, brothers and sisters, as we receive the memorials before us, we remember our mediator who has set an example for us to follow. A life dedicated to serve and worship his God and Father alone, no matter what temptations, trials, shame came his way, or even in the face of his death on the cross. Under stress, we must never return to "gods" we used to trust. Our only hope is our mediator. We began today by talking about people who've ruined their lives because they've turned to someone or something other than God in times of stress. We're not that different, and it's a big deal. It will destroy our lives. That's what sin intends to do to us. It intends to destroy us. But all glory be to our God and Father, Who allowed His begotten Son to die for us to live!

*Julius Bumadilla,
Bugallon Ecclesia, Philippines*

I WILL REMEMBER THE DEEDS OF THE LORD

PSALM 77
AS A PATTERN OF
THOUGHT

By Richard Morgan

DURING the COVID-19 pandemic, society has been experiencing another pandemic of people struggling with mental health. We Christadelphians are not immune, and I've had to deal with a case of extreme anxiety myself.

To deal with the inner demons that can plague us, often we turn to the Psalms. They're a source of comfort for all kinds of situations we find ourselves in. What we go through was experienced by men like David and Asaph, and we have the privilege of insight into their psychology by reading their thoughts in the Psalms and singing them in the words of our hymns.

But the Psalms need to be for us more than things we read or think about when we are looking for comfort. Just like with the rest of Scripture, the Psalms are designed to change our way of thinking, to alter our perspective, and see things from an eternal point of view.

Asaph, who penned Psalm 77, struggled with getting his mind straight. In the opening verse he makes a very clear doctrinal statement: *"I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, and he will hear me."* On an intellectual level we can all understand what Asaph says. We know that prayer is powerful, that we have access to the throne of grace, and that our prayers and hymns rise to the God of heaven. We also know that he hears our prayers and answers them.

The problem for Asaph, and for you and me from time to time, is that while we can appreciate these things intellectually, yet sometimes we just don't "feel" it. Do you ever pray to God, or sing a song of praise, but feel

like nobody is listening, that you're not being heard? That's how Asaph felt. In verse 2 he writes, *"In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted."* Asaph has prayed without ceasing, but it's not working.

Have you experienced what Asaph is going through? You turn to God in time of need, and nothing happens. You pray urgently, but it feels like the door is slammed shut. That feeling drove Asaph to despair. He prayed and prayed and prayed but his trouble kept coming back to haunt him, and he couldn't find rest.

We've all gone through times of trouble, and perhaps you're going through one right now. Maybe you're experiencing a deep sense of loss, or something has caused you so much stress that your heart has been crushed with sorrow. Maybe it's thinking about something ahead of you, a deep worry you have that won't go away, or you feel trapped by your sin and guilt. You want God to alleviate the pain, to take the sorrow away, to fix the problem. And you know He can—He's the Creator of the Universe!

But there's only silence and your troubles persist.

At the end of the next verse, verse 3, the psalm inserts a *Selah*, and it's worth thinking about what Asaph said—*"When I remember God, I moan; when I meditate, my spirit faints."* He's doing all the right things, and he knows it. He's remembering God. He's appealing to God. He's depending on God. But all that does is make him moan? Why?

Whatever trouble Asaph was going through was bad enough, but it was **compounded** by the fact that he felt like God wasn't listening. The Master of the Universe, Who is within instant reach through prayer, was not rushing to his aid. It would almost feel better if God didn't exist. Thinking about God choosing not to answer only makes it worse.

Verse 4 says, *"You hold my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak."* Asaph can't sleep. Lying awake at night, tossing, and turning, his trouble dominating his mind. Prayer has become a burden to him. He can't get the words out to express how he feels. He wonders, does God even care?

Then his thoughts turn to the past—*"I consider the days of old, the years long ago. I said, 'Let me remember my song in the night; let me meditate in my heart.'"* (vs 5-6a). I think Asaph here is thinking back to times when God **did** answer his prayers. Everything seemed so clear back then, in his youth. He prayed and God answered. But now he's beginning to doubt.

What if those previously answered prayers were a figment of his imagination? What if it was all one big coincidence and God never was listening? What if he had so wanted to

believe in God and answered prayer that he convinced himself that it was so?

He's on the edge of the abyss—*"Then my spirit made a diligent search: 'Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable? Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?'"* (vs 6b-9).

It feels like he's come to an end as he stares down into the darkness of the abyss. There's a Selah at the end of this section too. It's at this point that the psalmist pauses, reflects, and tries to get his head straight. He doesn't like what he sees. Jumping into the abyss, losing his faith like that doesn't seem to be a better option.

When you've been going through your troubles, has anyone ever said to you, "Just pray about it," or "Meditate on some Bible verses," or "Think about how God has helped you in the past"? But none of it works, none of it helps—in fact it can just make things feel worse than they already were. God starts to feel unreal to you. What you thought was a powerful thing—your faith in God—feels like it's being shredded to pieces.

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However, somewhere amid his chain of thought something clicks in his mind. It is hard to know whether the turning point is in verse 10 or 11. Verse 10 is awkwardly translated—“*Then I said, ‘I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High.’*” What are “the years” of God’s right hand? To illustrate how much difficulty translators have had with this verse my margin reads completely differently—“*Or, This is my grief: that the right hand of the Most High has changed.*” Perhaps the idea of God changing has got to him. He thought God was immutable—unchanging—but is He really? It seemed like He used to answer prayer but all that’s changed. It would be a very unnerving thing to worry about the God of heaven changing like that.

Whether that’s a valid translation or not, the next verse, through to the end of the psalm, tells us that something changed in Asaph’s thinking. In verses 11-15 he chooses to remember what God has done in the past:

I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old.

I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds. Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God?

You are the God who works wonders; you have made known your might among the peoples.

You with your arm redeemed your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph. Selah

The first half of the psalm was entirely dismal, but Asaph’s spirit changes

completely in the second half. He reflects on God’s greatness, His wonderful ways, the fact that He saves his people. What was it that clicked in Asaph’s mind? What changed between verses 10 and 11?

It’s not about praying more, or more earnestly. It’s not about reading the Bible more and meditating on it. He tried that, and it wasn’t working. Instead, it just helped him drive himself closer and closer to despair. There is a change in his thinking, however, but what is it?

It’s on the edge of the abyss, staring into the darkness, almost losing his faith, that the psalmist finds the answer.

The key is in the words at the start of verse 11—“*I will remember the deeds of the LORD.*” Before this, in the first half of the psalm, it might have felt like he remembered God—he even says he remembered him in verse 3—but in reality, he wasn’t remembering God at all. At least not in the same spirit as verse 11.

Have you ever felt like you’re trapped in your own head? That was Asaph’s problem in the first half of the psalm. He was driven by his emotions and how he felt. In times of trouble, we can be constantly bombarded by our feelings of insecurity and doubt, projecting how we feel onto others and imagining they’re feeling the same way about us as we feel about ourselves. These are false messages, but they can plague us, eat away at us, dominate our minds, and control our thinking.

But in verse 11 Asaph takes hold of himself and gets a grip on his emotions. Look at these two verses, one from the

first half, the other from the second. They sound very similar, “*When I remember God*” (vs 3), “*I will remember the deeds of the LORD*.” (vs 11).

What’s the difference between these two remembrances of God? Look again at the immediate context of verse 3. Is it really about God? Or is it all about himself?

He is so caught up in his own thoughts, emotions, and feelings, if the first half of the psalm can be termed a prayer, it’s a prayer that is wholly centered on himself. It’s one long “woe is me.” There are plenty of psalms recorded for us of others who when they are going through trouble make their complaint to God, He answers. This one is different. This Psalm is an exercise in one of the fundamental lessons of our lives—to get out of our heads and into God’s.

What Asaph does in verse 11 is shift his thinking to be **God** rather than **me**-centered. It’s not going to magically fix his situation. He still must deal with the trouble he’s experiencing. But that shift of focus provides a change of perspective and he can look at his trouble through a brand-new lens.

When we allow the false messages in our brains to dominate our thinking, we can end up like Asaph in the first half of the Psalm. We follow a seemingly logical route down the path of questioning God and questioning our faith until we end up at the edge of the abyss. The key is to remember it’s

not meant to be about me; it’s meant to be about God.

When the psalmist remembered God initially, it was in the context of the unnerving thought that God had failed him. That God hadn’t rushed to his aid.

That God didn’t care. That he wasn’t the center of God’s universe. It was only when he remembered that things should be the other way around, that God should be at the center of **his** universe that he could step away from the abyss.

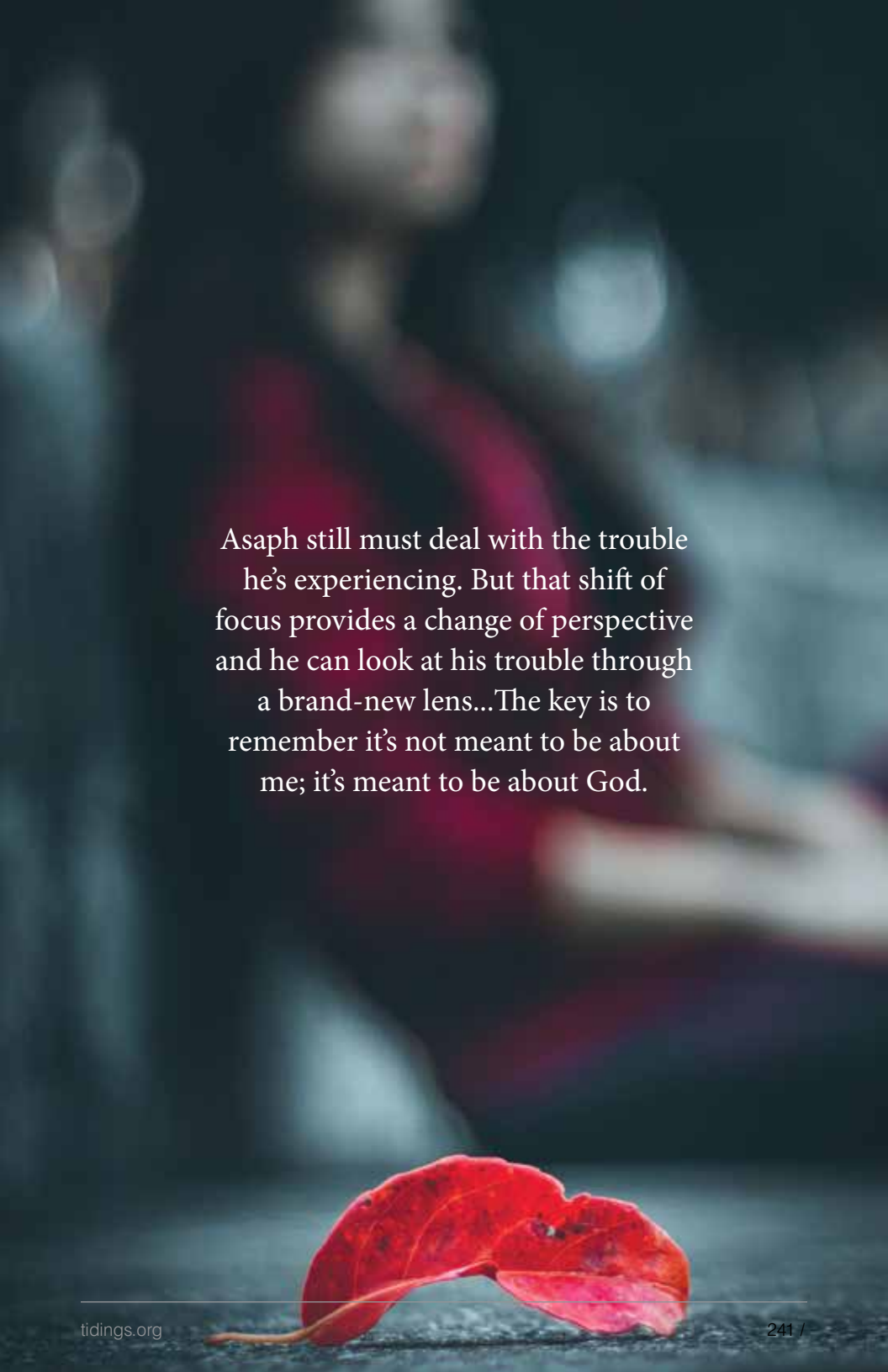
It’s not about me, it’s about God. It’s about seeing the big picture from an eternal point of view. When our focus is on God and not our woes, we

begin to see things more clearly. I have personal experience of the power in this change of perspective. I felt like Asaph recently, captured and held hostage by my feelings, having more faith in the false message of my brain and my insecurities than in God. I’ve felt like, at times I’ve been staring into the dark abyss. But something clicked in my mind too. In my prayers and meditations, I had forgotten all about God. I’ve realized if I can stop looking down and instead lift my head to see God, I don’t feel as anxious anymore.

Why does God allow us to experience these things? Why does God allow us to travel to the edge of the abyss? Why does He allow us to feel like He’s utterly silent?

When we were younger, we often felt

In thinking I was remembering God, in my prayers and meditations, I had forgotten all about Him. But in a grand Selah of my life, I’ve realized if I can stop looking down and instead lift my head to see God, I don’t feel as anxious anymore.

The background is a dark, out-of-focus photograph of a person wearing a red long-sleeved shirt. The person's face and hands are blurred. In the foreground, a single, vibrant red leaf lies on a dark, textured surface. The leaf is curled slightly, showing its veins and a small hole. The overall mood is contemplative and artistic.

Asaph still must deal with the trouble
he's experiencing. But that shift of
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spiritually vibrant. God answered our prayers. He strengthened us. Life as a son or daughter of God was good. But God wants us to mature. He wants us to grow up. While we might want God to rush to our aid the moment we find ourselves in trouble, God doesn't want to spoon feed us like He did when we were younger. If He's constantly there, rushing to solve our problems for us like an umbrella parent, we would never learn.

But He wants us to learn. He wants us to confront ourselves. He wants us to appreciate the vanity of life without Him as we circle the abyss. He wants us to value the bigger picture which we can't see if we're constantly worried about ourselves.

The Psalm ends with Asaph thinking about the specific time when the children of Israel found themselves in trouble. They were stuck between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea and there was no way out. They were staring directly into the abyss. But as Asaph records in verses 16-20:

*When the waters saw you, O God,
when the waters saw you, they were
afraid; indeed, the deep trembled.*

*The clouds poured out water; the
skies gave forth thunder; your
arrows flashed on every side.*

*The crash of your thunder was
in the whirlwind; your lightnings
lighted up the world; the earth
trembled and shook.*

*Your way was through the sea, your
path through the great waters; yet
your footprints were unseen.*

*You led your people like a flock by
the hand of Moses and Aaron.*

Sometimes life can feel like the clouds won't stop pouring out water, and there's lightning and thunder and an earthquake. But the irony of this psalm is that sometimes the answer to our prayers in times of trouble is that there is no answer. God lets us travel to the edge of the abyss. He allows us to stare into the depths of the sea with the enemy on the other side. It's in those moments that something clicks in our minds, and we figure it out.

But look at verse 19. In being silent, in not rushing to our aid, in allowing us to go through the torment of sleepless nights, anxious thoughts, feelings of despair, through it all God's footprints, although unseen, were right there next to us. God was holding our hand the whole time. We just needed to look up and see.

*Richard Morgan,
(Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA)*

GO AND DO THOU LIKEWISE

By Russ Brierly



*Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord,
and he will repay him for his deed. (Prov 19:17 ESV).*

LOOKING at the subject of charity and the giving of our funds or other resources, such as our time as a volunteer, is considerably different now from what it was some years ago. We are flooded today with requests for funds, some from inside our community and

some from outside. Some are even addressed to the ecclesia looking for a communal response.

Today, we are blessed with far more disposable income to respond to these requests than ever before. We are also

faced with an ever-increasing number of homeless people, where even necessities are hardly met. To distribute our funds or allocate our time wisely becomes a challenge both to individual brothers and sisters in their personal finances and to those who are involved in administering the funds collected. This article attempts to provide some guidance on these issues.

Old Testament Record

We begin our survey of this subject by first looking at how God wanted those who were about to settle in the land to view the poor, the sojourner, the fatherless and the widow. There are some general statutes in Exodus 22-23, but it is in Leviticus where we find specific mention of helping the poor and the sojourner by providing food for them from their fields and vineyards. In Leviticus 19:9-10, we read:

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God. (ESV).

A passage in Deuteronomy (24:19-22) seems to add not only to the scope of the activities but adds also the fatherless and the widow to those who were to be the recipients of the activity and tells them why they should be doing this. They were commanded to do this because they were to be reminded they were once slaves in Egypt themselves and this alone should prompt them to show compassion to the sojourner and those without the capacity to provide for their own immediate needs.

“You Shall be Holy”

In addition to caring and providing for the needs of those marginalized by society, God had an even deeper and more encompassing principle he wanted to instill in the minds of his people. In Leviticus 19:2 he declares “*You shall be holy for I the Lord your God am holy.*”



Holiness is one of the three defining characteristics of God. It is seen in his righteousness and justice, and that righteousness and justice is reflected in his statutes, laws and commandments. The second of the three defining characteristics of God is his love. This is manifested in his mercy, grace and lovingkindness.

As human beings who were created in the image of God, created in his mental and moral image, we were given the ability to not only recognize his holiness in the principles we are asked to follow but to see and imitate his love. By seeing and appreciating the grace and mercy he shows for us, broken humans that we are, we can begin to feel and understand that love.

As image bearers we are asked to look at the poor, the sojourner, the fatherless and the widow, so many of whom are homeless and without shelter, and consider how we might demonstrate God's love to them. How might we show them God's grace and mercy through an act of kindness that helps meet their immediate needs?

Waywardness During the Time of the Prophets

As we get into the time of the prophets, we find the people trampling on His statutes and ignoring the hungry and homeless and ill-clothed. After exposing the blatant and inexcusable hypocrisy of the whiney pack of self-centered, pious-pretending, quarreling sinners, the Prophet Isaiah speaks the charge of the LORD. You might wish to read the whole of Isaiah 58 in the New Living Translation (NLT). It helps make the sad situation come alive and

one can see how displeased God is with the whole lot of them. I have chosen only those passages that deal with the subject at hand. These passages strongly display what the LORD expected of them and gave them no excuse for their neglectful, bad behavior. They also display in the strongest, yet gentlest of terms, God's love and mercy for the repentant.

No, this is the kind of fasting I want:...Share your food with the hungry, and give shelter to the homeless. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help. Then your salvation will come like the dawn, and your wounds will quickly heal. Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind. Then when you call, the Lord will answer. "Yes, I am here," he will quickly reply... Feed the hungry, and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon. (Isa 58:6-10 NLT.)

Who is My Neighbor?

When we move into the New Testament, we find Jesus putting the commandment "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*" into its proper perspective in each of the three synoptic gospels. In Mark (12:28ff) it is a scribe, impressed with the answers Jesus was giving the Sadducees, who asked him the question, "*Which commandment is the most important of all?*" Jesus answered:

The most important is, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second is this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.

When the scribe confirmed that Jesus had spoken correctly and reiterated this back to him adding that this was much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices, Jesus commended him and said to him, *"You are not far from the kingdom of God."*

In Matthew 22:36, it was one of the Pharisees, a lawyer, that questioned him to test him. *"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"* The answer was the same as in Mark. However, here he added, *"On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."* Perhaps the NLT renders this passage a little clearer, *"The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."*

Let us now briefly examine the most descriptive of the three, the parable of the Good Samaritan found beginning in Luke 10:25. We find here, again, a scribe and probably a Pharisee *"putting him to the test"* as he asks the question *"Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"* Jesus, in his usual fashion of wanting the individual to think through the question himself, asked *"What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"* He answered correctly with the same answer reflecting love of God and love of neighbor. Jesus then said to him *"You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."* If

this were all, this would be the end of it, and it would differ little from the other two encounters in the Synoptic Gospels. But it wasn't.

The scribe, or expert in religious law wanted to justify his own actions and so he asked Jesus, *"And who is my neighbor?"* We all know the story that has become known as the Parable of the Good Samaritan. It offers varying opportunities of interpretation as to whether we see ourselves as the "good" Samaritan or the traveler who had been robbed, beaten up and left half dead but it leaves nothing open for interpretation when it comes to defining *"Who is our neighbor?"* The Samaritan was considered an enemy of the Jew, their temple considered to be a pagan temple and their nature considered to be a "half-breed." Yet it was one of these despised Samaritans who came along and felt compassion for the beaten man by the side of the road. It was he who soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. It was he who put the man on his own donkey and took him to the inn and took care of him and it was he who the next day handed the innkeeper two silver coins and assured him that if the charges were more than what he paid this day he would cover them on his next trip.

Jesus then asked a question of the scribe *"Which one would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?"* (NLT) There is probably not a one of us who wouldn't answer the question the same way the scribe did, *"The one who showed him mercy."* If we answered that question well, how then do we respond to what Jesus then said, *"Now go and do the same?"*



Jesus cared deeply about the poor and the downtrodden, demonstrating his compassion in tangible ways; giving sight to the blind, touching the leper, healing the sick and giving hope to those who only felt despair. His love and compassion did not just deal with the physical realm but extended well into the spiritual as he preached the good news of God's love and salvation as expressed in the present age and as it will be in the Kingdom to come.

Why was it so important to Jesus to link the two concepts: loving God with all one's heart, soul, strength and mind and loving one's neighbor as oneself? The first phrase comes from the Shema (Deut 6:4), probably the most important prayer in all of Judaism, whereas "*love thy neighbor as thyself*" seems to be plucked from the middle of a chapter, full of statutes in the Book of Leviticus filled with still more statutes. As such, it hardly seems significant enough to be designated as the second commandment and important enough that Jesus said of the two, "*There is no other commandment greater than these.*"

However, what Jesus is telling us when he presents these two commands as the first and the second is that when we love God fully and completely as we are called to do in the text of the Shema, with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind, we can begin to get a glimpse of the astounding and amazing and bottomless love that God has for us. When we see and begin to grasp just a bit of that love, it can't help but motivate us to want to show that love and compassion to "*our neighbor*," whoever that may be, wherever that may be, and whatever the challenge may be in doing so.

"Love Your Enemies"

We see Jesus himself reflecting and teaching on that very love in the passage about loving one's enemies. Found in Luke 6:27, he starts off with teachings that seem almost impossible to follow, "*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.*" He continues talking about the concept of "*loving your neighbor as*

yourself,” changing the wording a bit and presenting it as what has come to the known as the Golden Rule: “As you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.” Or as stated in Matthew 7:12 in the NLT “*Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.*” Verse 36 of the Luke passage sums it up well, “*Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*”

Both Paul and James convey their conviction on the importance of the commandment “*love your neighbor as yourself*” in their writings. Paul points out in Galatians 5:14 that “*the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’*” To put that into action he counsels, “*So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.*” (Gal 6:10 ESV). While Paul counsels to do good to everyone and especially to recognize the needs of fellow believers, one would be hard pressed with the riches we have been blessed with today to think that our giving should be confined only to the believers. What Paul ranks as highly important and of great advantage to the believer is “*faith working through love,*” a love that is not confining or exclusive, a love that looks for needs and acts with compassion when those needs are found.

James treats the command with such

respect that he refers to it as the royal law and states this about it “*If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well.*” (Jas 2:8 ESV). He also issues a warning that to

think that their faith, their belief in one God was all that was necessary to be right with God was foolish, and James asked them as if they didn’t really know, “*Can’t you see that faith without good deeds is useless?*”

Though these passages represent only a portion of the New Testament teachings concerning giving and sharing, we would like to close this section

with a passage from Hebrews,

Therefore, let us offer through Jesus a continual sacrifice of praise to God, proclaiming our allegiance to his name. And don’t forget to do good and to share with those in need. These are the sacrifices that please God. (Heb 13:15-16 NLT).

The statement is clear. Sharing our resources, whether they be funds or time with those in need, is as pleasing to God as the sacrifices we offer in song or word.

“Go and Do Thou Likewise”

When Jesus answered the questions posed by the scribes or lawyers in each of the three instances in the Synoptic Gospels, he answered by stating the two most important commandments, love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind and love your neighbor as

While Paul counsels to do good to everyone and especially to recognize the needs of fellow believers, one would be hard pressed with the riches we have been blessed with today to think that our giving should be confined only to the believers.

yourself. In Luke the questioner was looking for a boundary, but Jesus instead gave him a principle.

In looking at ourselves as servants, made in God's image and in realizing that "*we love, because he first loved us*" (1 John 4:19 ESV), we begin to understand the relationship between the two commandments. When we love God with all that we have, with our full being, He is more than willing to help us reflect that love and compassion back to those in need. It's a matter of principles, not rules and regulations. Loving God is reflecting the love He shows to us in His mercy and grace, His love and compassion, back to our neighbor.

I would like to close this article by presenting a beautiful piece written by Bro. Jason Grant as he describes their ecclesia's experience in packing and distributing sleeping bags to the homeless in Barrie, Ontario. This story, and many other inspiring stories, are available on the website of The Garden Outreach at thegardenoutreach.org/stories/orangeville-ecclesia/. Please check it out. There are many beautiful stories there of your brothers and sisters and their associated young people demonstrating the principle of "*love your neighbor as yourself.*"

The most inspiring part of all of this [packing and distributing the sleeping bags], outside of the opportunity to **practically** help people in need, was how our kids responded. They saw firsthand the dire situation of the "hidden homeless" men, women and young people, who so often fly

under our radar. They also saw the tremendous amount of work that goes into assisting people in need, every single day, and the critical role of volunteers who help clothe, shelter, feed and counsel the poor and needy.

Judah (age 10) was particularly moved and inspired by the experience. Immediately after getting home that evening, he wrote up a speech and went to neighbors on our block and asked for donations for the Center. Through other fortuitous circumstances, which we humbly thank God for, and no small amount of hard work, Judah collected more than 50 articles of new clothing (thanks Mark's Work Warehouse!!), perishable food items, and personal hygiene products.

It's amazing to see how a simple act of giving can turn into something much bigger. It can inspire our young people, and very young people, to show acts of love and be comfortable doing so. If ecclesias can be encouraged to include their young people in these initiatives, perhaps in some small way, it will help keep them engaged and focused on a life of faith and charity, following in the footsteps of our Lord who gave to people in need, continually and without second thought, irrespective of their beliefs or social standing.

Russ Brierly
(Moorestown Ecclesia, NJ)



SIX WOMEN WHO SAVED MOSES' LIFE

By Melinda Flatley

WONDERFUL WOMEN OF THE BIBLE

In our continuing series of courageous women in the Bible, Sis. Melinda Flatley looks at six women who played significant roles in the life of Moses. ~ Editor

MOSSES was a fortunate man. He was called the “friend of God,” (Jas 2:23) and the LORD spoke to him face to face. But without God placing six uncommon women in his life, he might not have survived to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, or through the wilderness. The Law of “Moses” might be the Law of “someone else.” However, without these ladies, God’s plan would most likely still have been worked through some other means, because all things are possible with God. All this history, and much more, was written in The Pentateuch by Moses. His personal

history starts in Egypt in the Book of Exodus. Here’s a look at the role of those six courageous women who God chose because of their faithfulness to be instrumental in saving Moses’s life.

Shiphrah and Puah

These women were the Hebrew midwives to the Israelites in Egypt. Their names mean “beautiful” and “radiant,” and these qualities were reflected in their characters.¹ In Exodus 1:15-16, Pharaoh ordered them to kill all the newborn boys, because he feared an uprising from the enslaved Hebrew

people. What midwife could do this task? Their job was to save the lives of babies, not murder them! And so, the midwives *“feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the boys [including Moses] live.”* (v.17).² They bravely defied Pharaoh by cleverly suggesting the Hebrew women were no better than animals, giving birth in the field. Since that was also Pharaoh’s opinion of his slave people, he spared the midwives from punishment. No doubt God’s hand was instrumental as well, and He rewarded them. *“And it came about because the midwives feared God, that He established households for them.”* (Exod 1:21).

But Pharaoh issued a new decree: *“Every son who is born you are to cast into the Nile, and every daughter you are to keep alive.”* (Exod 2:23). They were to be thrown to the crocodiles as if to the Egyptian God, Sobek, who symbolized Pharaoh’s power. This fate the midwives could not prevent.

Jochebed

Was Moses saved from death by Shiphrah and Puah only to drown

in the Nile or be eaten by crocodiles? No! He was rescued again by his mother, Jochebed, who hid him for three months. She was of the house of Levi and married to Amram, who was also her nephew (Exod 6:20). Jochebed’s name means “YHWH is

Jochebed’s name means “YHWH is glory;” as such, she is the first person in the Bible to have the abbreviated name of God in her name. She proved herself worthy of carrying this exalted moniker.

glory;” as such, she is the first person in the Bible to have the abbreviated name of God in her name. She proved herself worthy of carrying this exalted moniker.

When Moses was born, she sensed there was something special about him. Perhaps Jochebed remembered the prophecy that the people of Israel would remain in Egypt for four hundred years (Gen 15:13). In this instance, she would have resembled Mary and other young women in New Testament times, who were praying they might be the mother of the Messiah. But at three months, when his cries were too noticeable, she had to make a new plan. Jochebed did just as Pharaoh decreed: put him in the Nile. Only she made him a floating basket, a miniature ark, just like Noah’s (Gen 6:14; Exod 3:2, Strong’s 8392). She was determined to give him every chance. Hebrews 11: 23 says: *“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king’s edict.”*

Pharaoh’s Daughter

Pharaoh’s daughter was savior number four, when she discovered the ark containing the baby Moses, near where she was bathing. She is a hero for two reasons. First, for saving the infant and, second, for defying her father’s orders. She must have been very persuasive to get the royal household to accept her adopted son, being he was one of the Hebrews. This is how Moses could receive the world-class Egyptian education (Acts 7:21-22).

Up until now, Moses did not have a name. Because she saved him, Pharaoh’s daughter had the honor. *“She named him Moses [Egyptian for “child*

of the water,” Hebrew for “who had been brought out”] *because I drew him out of the water.*” (Exod 2:10). Later, we find out she has a name too, not just “Daughter of Pharaoh.” We read in the genealogies of I Chronicles 4:15-17 that her name is now Bithia, “Daughter of God.” She married into the family of Caleb (one of the faithful spies) and had, among other children, a daughter named Miriam! It’s not certain this is the Pharaoh’s daughter who became Moses’ adopted mother, but naming her own daughter to honor his sister is a clue. Did she convert to become a Hebrew? Was this how Moses was saved from becoming a full-fledged Egyptian—perhaps even from his inheriting the throne of Egypt? No, again! More perils for Moses were in the offing.

Miriam

The answer is because Jochebed sent Moses’ older sister, Miriam (probably about 14 years old) to watch what

happened to Moses in his ark in the Nile waters. To avoid detection, she must have had to carefully travel from the land of Goshen to the place where Pharaoh’s daughter was known to bathe. It appears this strategy was a deliberate one, planned out by Jochebed (perhaps standing nearby too) and Miriam to give Moses the best chance of survival. When she saw he was being rescued, she bravely approached the Egyptians and suggested finding a Hebrew nurse for Moses. It was a bold move to bring Moses’ own mother to do the job. Jochebed was even paid wages for this. And she must have received protection from the royal edict. Saved again by Miriam, who ensured Moses received a Hebrew upbringing in the love and safety of his own home and people! Maybe this happening even facilitated the conversion of Bithia?

We read later in Exodus about Miriam becoming a prophetess and co-leading the people in the wilderness along with



Moses and Aaron. (Exod 15:20-21; Mic 6:4). She had seen it all from the beginning.

Zipporah

The final female who had a savior role in Moses' life was his wife, Zipporah. She was a Midianite who he had first met when he chased away men who were on her father Reuel/Jethro's land. Rabbinic tradition has it that to marry, Moses promised her father his firstborn would not become Hebrew. And thus, he neglected to circumcise his son, a failure to acknowledge the covenant to Abraham.

In Exodus 4:24-26, we read of a strange incident at a lodging place as they traveled to Egypt at God's command, after the burning bush incident. The LORD was angry with Moses, *"and sought to put him to death."* Zipporah figured out it was because of the lack of follow-through on their son's circumcision. Although it was distasteful to her, she took a flint knife and performed the circumcision. *"And He [God] let him alone."* Her intervention worked and Moses was again saved to continue to Egypt and bring his people out of bondage. He was now fully educated in both the ways of Egypt and the ways of the wilderness and thus the perfect instrument of God to save the Hebrew nation.

Conclusion

We should all reflect on the turning points in our lives where God placed

someone to intervene and save us from the ill fates of bad circumstances or choices. Even perilous times are a part of our spiritual education. God used six righteous and valiant women to save Moses in extremely dangerous situations, from which he might not have survived. It is to his credit that he honored them in his autobiography. These women who are in Moses' life all displayed the principles expressed in Proverbs 32:8-9:

Open your mouth for the dumb,

For the rights of the unfortunate.

Open your mouth, judge righteously,

*And defend the rights of the afflicted
and needy.*

They can rightly be called "ezer women." The idea comes from Genesis 2:18, where Eve is called an *ezer kenegdo*, often translated "help meet" (KJV). The word *ezer* comes from two roots, "to rescue, save" and "to be strong."³ And *kenegdo* means "corresponding to him, a mirror image."⁴ So, the sense is a much stronger concept than a mere companion; it's more of a strong, courageous ally and rescuer. Doesn't that just describe these six women in Moses' life? And isn't that just a suitable role for all women of faith?

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¹ See *Exodus—Shemot*, by Richard Morgan, *Tidings Magazine*, 9/2020 for more on the importance of names in the Book of Exodus.

² All references are from the New American Standard Bible.

³ Strong's 5828.

⁴ Strong's 5048.



SERPENT THEORY

By William Rundle

ONE of the most confusing passages in the Bible is in Genesis 3, where a serpent convinced Eve to eat fruit from the forbidden tree, which resulted in mankind's inherited sinful nature. Even for Bible believers, this is difficult to understand. Most people think it's just a fairy tale, but a deeper look into it can prove its authenticity.

The chapter starts out by saying, *"Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"* (Gen 3:1). So right away we are told that the serpent was the craftiest or most cunning animals, and that he could talk and have conversations with humans. How can we believe this? It is important to know that the Scriptures tell us that this was

a true story and not just a parable. In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul writes: *"But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ."* So even in the New Testament, Paul verifies the authenticity of Genesis 3. It is also important to know that this was not a case of God tempting Adam and Eve by making the serpent speak. First of all, God wouldn't have punished the serpent if this happened. In James 1:13 it says, *"When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone."* Now I've never been walking down the street and heard any animal speak, let alone a serpent. The question we must ask is whether this is talking about every serpent in general? Or is it

talking about one specific serpent?

Right after Scripture calls the serpent the craftiest animal that the LORD God had made, it says: *“He said to the woman.”* It doesn't say, *“And one of the crafty serpents said to the woman.”* It just says *“he.”* So, we can now see that this is clearly speaking about one specific serpent, who was craftier than any other animal, not every serpent in general. So how would this one serpent gain all this knowledge and ability to speak? The serpent could have very well have eaten from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Scriptural evidence for this comes in verse 6, right after the serpent told Eve that she would not die if she ate from the tree. The serpent says, *“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.”* How do you think Eve knew that the fruit was good for food? It can't be because it looked good, because right after it says, *“and pleasing to the eye.”* So how do you think she knew that it was good for food then? Possibly because the serpent was right in front of her eating from the tree. How did she know that it was desirable for gaining wisdom? Because the serpent, who was unexplainably craftier and more knowledgeable than any other animal and who had the ability to intelligently speak to humans, was right there in front of her eating from the tree, and she realized that that's where his knowledge came from.

Notice how it doesn't say, *“and after talking to the serpent, Adam and Eve walked up to the forbidden tree and ate its fruit.”* It just says that *“she took some and ate it.”* The Scriptures allude to this conversation taking place right at the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

But snakes we know today don't eat fruit, so how could this make sense? If we look back to Creation however, we read: *“Then God said, ‘I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.’ And it was so.”* (Gen 1:29-30). So back then, in the Garden of Eden, humans and animals ate plants. The snake could have eaten from the leaves of the tree. Remember it is the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, not the Fruit of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

The lesson this teaches us is to stay away from worldly thinking. Adam and Eve's first mistake was to go near the tree. They shouldn't have been anywhere near it. If they completely avoided it, they wouldn't have been influenced to go against God's will. The more we surround ourselves with the world, the more likely we are to sin. This was a completely true story that shouldn't be taken as a fairy tale.

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¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the New International Version.

RAIN BEFORE THE FLOOD

By Paul Wade

IN Genesis 2:4-5, we read that it had not rained on the earth:

These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground.

It is interesting to note that the final phrase of this verse implies that when there would be rain there would be a “man to till the ground.” At that point, there would be rain.

Rain is introduced in verse 6, and the introduction of man is in verse 7. However, some still think that it did not rain until the time of the Flood in the days of Noah. That date would be some 1,656 years into the future. If

Scripture actually stated this, it would be difficult to imagine. Once Adam was condemned “to till the ground from whence he was taken” (Gen 3:23), that would have been impossible. A person cannot grow crops to feed his family without rain or manufactured irrigation. The words “to till” in verse 5 are from the Hebrew word *abad* which means to work over, to till, or to dress. It is also interesting to note that once Adam was formed, that it is stated, “The Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.” (v. 15). The words “to dress” are from the same Hebrew word *abad* that was translated “to till.”

However, in the next verse we read a description of how God provided rain. “But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.” (Gen 2:6). One who thinks that God did not allow it to rain until the time of the Flood, would immediately

point out, “I do not see the word rain in this verse.” However, this is exactly how rain comes into existence. A mist or vapor (Hebrew word *ed*) arises, or goes up and forms the clouds, and the only way it can water the earth is to fall back down onto it.

When a subject comes up in Scripture, many times, not all the details are given at that time. Two examples of this:

1) When the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, as recorded in Exodus 14:16-30, there is no mention of thunder, lightning or rain. But in several of the psalms, these elements of storm are certainly included as reasons why the Egyptian chariot wheels became stuck in the mud and were rendered useless. In Psalm 77:14-20, we read,

Thou art the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people. Thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah. The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid: the depths also were troubled. The clouds poured out water: the skies sent out a sound: thine arrows also went abroad. The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook. Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known. Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

2) In 1 Kings 21:8-13, we are given the account of Jezebel, using

the name and seal of Ahab, had Naboth put to death. In this record, there is no mention of anyone else being put to death regarding the matter of Naboth's vineyard. However, in 2 Kings 9:26 we find, “*Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth, and the blood of his sons, saith the LORD; and I will requite thee in this plat, saith the LORD. Now therefore take and cast him into the plat of ground, according to the word of the LORD.*”

The fact that Naboth's sons were also put to death in order that Ahab might secure his vineyard is not revealed until after this writing.

This is the same case with Genesis 2:6. It is a good description of how rain comes into existence, though this account lacks any details. The details are supplied in Job 36:27, where rain is not only mentioned, but we are told exactly how rain happens.

Behold, God is great, and we know him not, neither can the number of his years be searched out. For he maketh small the drops of water: they pour down rain according to the vapour thereof: Which the clouds do drop and distil upon man abundantly.

It is amazing that the word vapor is from the Hebrew word, *ed*, exactly the same word that is translated mist in Genesis 2:6. Therefore, we are not left to speculate. The LORD God watered the earth by causing it to rain.

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GOD'S ESSENCE

By Richard Morgan

LAST month we posed the question, what is God's "essence?" If we were to define God at the very core of His being, how would we do it?

The ante-Nicene theologians wrestled with this question until it was settled at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. Two leading Christians, Arius and Athanasius, were at the center of a debate regarding the identity of God and His Son. Arius argued that the Son was subordinate to the Father, a view that had been predominant in Christianity before the council. However, as Christian thought developed over the centuries, theologians crept ever close to the idea that the Son was not only God but equal with the Father. It was that which Athanasius supported and which became enshrined in the Nicene Creed.

One word sums up the crux of the controversy, *homoousian*. It means "of the same substance" and became key to the decision at the council and found its way into the Nicene Creed. Here is the relevant excerpt from it with the idea of homoousion expressed in the term "consubstantial:"

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial
with the Father; through Him all
things were made.

While the Nicene Creed has been heralded as one of the defining moments in the enshrining of the Trinity in Christianity, the debate raged on for centuries, and Arianism (the alternate view at the council to

what became the Trinity) continued its popularity despite the outcome of the council. However, for many people today, the doctrine of the Trinity defines what it means to be a Christian.

How did the idea of the consubstantiality of the Godhead come about? The word *homoousian* isn't Biblical, although the word *ousia* (substance) occurs twice in Luke 15. But you won't find anywhere, from Genesis to Revelation, any word that describes the substance of God, let alone *homoousian*. So, why was it this word that was at the center of the debate?

For centuries, church theologians had been wrestling with the relationship between God and Jesus. As I mentioned above, the predominant view before the Nicene Council was "subordinationism," the idea that Jesus is less than God the Father in some way. Arius, for example, believed that Jesus pre-existed as a divine being but was created by God. Other views ranged from him being a mere man adopted by God, a man specially created by God, to another divine being who pre-existed but was not Very God.

For instance, the man who coined the term *Trinitas* (Trinity), Tertullian, who lived between AD 155-220, believed that only God the Father existed at a point in time in history. Later, the Son and Holy Spirit emerged from His substance or essence:

"The Father is the whole substance, whereas the Son is something derived from it... Thus, the Father is distinct from the Son, being greater than the Son, in as much as he who begets is one, and he who is begotten is another." (Against *Praxeas* 9).

The main argument for moving away from subordinationism to the consubstantiality of the Father and Son was that God is immutable, i.e., He does not change. The idea makes perfect logical sense if you believe in the deity of Jesus. If he is God and God cannot change, he must have always existed and been God in the fullest sense. Otherwise, there must have been something that changed that would nullify the immutability of God.

For Biblical Unitarians like the Christadelphians, these things are meaningless. Because we reject the idea of the deity and pre-existence of Jesus, we don't wrestle with such a question. However, it is worth thinking about what led to the concept of the consubstantiality of God and Jesus because it helps us see how often theology can completely miss the point.

Let's ask our opening question again. What is God's essence? Part of the answer to that question from a Trinitarian would be something to do with the consubstantiality of the Father and Son. But, as I pointed out above, the Bible doesn't even talk about God's substance. Where did such a notion arise? The only inkling we have of God being made of anything is that He is spirit (John 4:24). But what is spirit? Is it a substance? The Bible teaches us that God created all things—everything in the Universe. Science backs the Bible up by telling us that there was a beginning, and before that beginning, no space, time or matter existed. So, even if the idea of God having a "substance" meant anything, whatever that substance is would be outside the realm of our ability to observe or understand it.

The ante-Nicene theologians wrestled with metaphysical concepts more in line with classical philosophy like Platonism than the Bible. The Scriptural record does not discuss the substance of God or that Jesus was of the same substance. It is very telling that the Nicene Creed required non-scriptural language to define its terms.

What the Bible **does** teach us is things like, "*God is love.*" (1 John 4:16). **That** is the point. The relationship between God and Jesus is not about substance, essence or nature. It's about spiritual qualities. John the Baptist told the people, "*God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.*" (Matt 3:9). The New Testament writers are at pains to tell us that biological or physical descent is of no value to God. He is interested in our faith, our character, not our lineage. The same is true for the relationship between God and His son. The question is not about biology, chemistry or physics; it's about what kind of person Jesus is, the Son of God.

To further emphasize the point, think about the phrase "*the only-begotten Son of God.*" It's a famous description of Jesus from passages like John 3:16 in the KJV: "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.*"

The ante-Nicene theologian Origen took hold of this title of Christ to develop his theory of eternal

The Scriptural record does not discuss the substance of God or that Jesus was of the same substance. It is very telling that the Nicene Creed required non-scriptural language to define its terms.

generation. The argument also has to do with the immutability of God. If God doesn't change and Jesus is God, he must **always** have been begotten of the Father. This is how Origen put it:

“We recognize that God was always the Father of his only-begotten Son, who was indeed born of him and draws his being from him, but is yet without any beginning.” (On First Principles 1.2.2).

“This is an eternal and everlasting begetting, as brightness is begotten from light; for he does not become Son in an external manner, through the adoption of the Spirit, but is Son by nature.” (On First Principles 1.2.4).

The idea made its way into the Nicene Creed with the words, “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father.” The argument is made stronger by the rule that “like begets like.” For example, you will never find a horse giving birth to

an elephant. A horse will always beget a horse. Likewise, if Jesus is the Son of God, and like begets like, then whatever is begotten of God must likewise be God.

Origen spent most of his life in Alexandria, and Athanasius, the 20th bishop of Alexandria, was an Origenist in his theology. Trinitarian dogma, therefore, has a lot of background in the writings of Origen. However, while Trinitarians laud the theory of eternal generation in backing up their idea that Jesus is the eternally begotten Son of God, it is perhaps less well known that Origen extrapolated his idea in applying it to believers as well:

“The Savior is eternally begotten by the Father, so also, if you possess the ‘Spirit of adoption’ (Rom 8:15) God eternally begets you in him according to each of your works, each of your thoughts. And being begotten you thereby become an eternally begotten son of God in Christ Jesus.” (Homilies on Jeremiah 9:5).

Also, just like most of the ante-Nicene theologians, Origen believed that Jesus was subordinate to the Father and the Holy Spirit was a creation of God. Like Tertullian, who came before him, he was not a Trinitarian and would be classified as a heretic by today's standards.

Let's analyze the phrase "*the only begotten Son of God*" because something somewhat surprising will reveal itself. If you look at any modern version like the ESV, you will find that the word "*begotten*" has been removed from the phrase. The reason for this is a historical misunderstanding of the Greek word *monogenes* translated "*only begotten*" in the KJV and as understood by the ante-Nicene theologians when they read the Greek text.

The word is made up of *mono*, meaning "only" and *genes*. Early lexicographers assumed this comes from the root *gennao*—"to beget." However, more up-to-date scholarship has determined instead that it comes from the Greek verb *ginomai*—"to be" hence translations like "only," "only one," or "unique."

There's good evidence that this is the correct way to look at *monogenes* in the Bible. The exact phrase "*only begotten son*" (*monogenes*) is used of Isaac's relationship with Abraham in Hebrews 11:17. Again, in modern translations, see how it's translated something like "*only son*" instead. Hebrews here refers to the event recorded in Genesis 22 when Abraham offered up his "*only son*" (vs 2, 16). However, Isaac wasn't Abraham's only son. After Abraham died, Ishmael was still alive, "*Isaac and Ishmael, his sons buried him.*" (Gen 25:9).

Either there's a contradiction going on here, or there's something else we need to understand. Like its Greek equivalent in Hebrews 11, the phrase "*only son*" in Genesis 22 is translated from one word in Hebrew—*yahid* and could have been translated something like "unique," "darling," or "precious." In other words, the word "one" isn't to do with something numerical, but the quality or type of son Isaac was to Abraham. And, just like Jesus, he was, of course, the seed of promise, unlike Ishmael.

If we take this principle to the New Testament, we can see the importance of Jesus being God's *monogenes*. God has more than one son. Adam is called his son (Luke 3:38), as is Solomon and others. But there's something unique and special about Jesus, and it has nothing to do with substance or essence. The example of Isaac and Ishmael helps teach this point too. Out of Abraham's two sons, who was the more physically related to him? Isaac's birth was a miracle. Abraham's body was as good as dead, and Sarah was not only infertile but had gone through menopause—her womb was dead (Rom 4:19). Whether or not Abraham and Sarah had physical relations when Isaac was conceived doesn't change the fact that the flesh was a non-factor in his birth. On the other hand, Ishmael was the fleshly and physical son of Abraham, and a DNA test would have found out that they were of the same substance.

Paul brings out the lesson when he writes, "*it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.*" (Rom 9:8).

In other words, being a child of God is not about biology, chemistry and physics.

This is where the ante-Nicene theologians missed the point. They misunderstood what *monogenes* means, but, more importantly, they didn't consider the principle that God is not interested in one's physical descent. Jesus being the son of God, has nothing to do with him needing to be of the same substance as God.

There's one more interesting point about what it means to be a child of God. Above I pointed out that *monogenes* does not come from the root "to beget"—*gennao*. However, that word is used in two of the contexts most famous for the phrase "*only begotten Son*"—John 1 and John 3. We cited John 3 above, but look at the context. Earlier, in Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus, he said, "*unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God*" (vs 3). The word for "born" here is *gennao*, but Jesus applies it to believers. Not only that, but the phrase is better translated "born from above," and Jesus goes on to explain what he means—"*That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*" (vs 6). Jesus is talking, of course, about one's spiritual rebirth in Christ.

In John 1, where *monogenes* is used of Jesus in verse 14, just before it, we read this: "*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*" (vs 12-13). Again, the word "born" here is *gennao*, and Jesus explains what he means, that someone being born of

God doesn't have anything to do with physical descent.

Think about what this means from the point of view of the argument that like begets like. Jesus isn't even described as begotten (in the sense of the word *gennao*) of God—it's believers who are! Not only that, but look at John 3:6 again—"*That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*" Isn't that precisely the law "like begets like"? If, as the Trinitarian argument goes, something that God begets must necessarily be of the same substance and eternal nature as God, it follows that in John 3 that must apply to believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. They are consubstantial with the everlasting God, for "*God is spirit,*" and believers are "*born of the Spirit.*"

God is raising children for His ultimate purpose. Our elder brother in God's family is our Lord Jesus Christ. As the prime example of what it means to be a child of God, we need to understand what it means for Jesus to be God's Son. It's not about biological (if that term can even be used concerning God) descent or eternal generation; it's about the spiritual qualities associated with being in God's image and likeness. The doctrine of the Trinity deflects attention away from what it means to be a child of God.

Richard Morgan,
(Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA)

BARBADOS

By Ben Drepaul

BARBADOS, one of the paradise vacation spots for people from all over the globe, has recently announced its intention to cease being a constitutional monarchy, therefore removing the Queen as its head of state. Three strong women now head the government: President Sandra Mason, Prime-Minister Mia Mottley and Deputy Prime-Minister Santia Bradshaw, the granddaughter of our own Sister Ida Yearwood, who died in 2019 at the age of ninety-three. I remember as a kid, she was quite stern. In fact, many of the brethren dared not question her authority. She was one of the oldest members, joining some forty years after the truth first arrived here in 1892. Back in the 1980s, on one occasion, we wanted to sing, “How Great Thou Art” at the CYC, however, she firmly maintained that if it were not in the hymn book, we could not sing it! On our recent visit to Barbados, upon arrival at the Grantley Adams International Airport, we had to traverse what seemed like the length of the facility, as we made our way to our car rental. Thankfully, Bro. Jonathan Ramlochan was there to guide us to our villa on the West Coast. Even with GPS, the many round-about are quite a challenge to those who are accustomed to stop lights and intersections, not to mention driving on the “wrong” side of the road and sitting in the “right” side of the car. Instead of the turn signal, the wipers came on a few times. However, most Bajan drivers are quite patient, and will allow the silly tourists some leeway since they will only be here for a week or two. So, we were quite grateful to Bro. Jonathan who took time off

from Digicel to accompany us on a few occasions across the Island.

It was quite a delight to see our brethren, some after over 20 years. Despite the pandemic still not being completely over on the island, there were about twenty members present at the Bank Hall Ecclesial Hall. These included the Baileys, with Bro. Rudolph at the piano. I remember him from many years ago and how he got interested in the Truth, after being a musician for years. Also in attendance were the Caines, whom we also met on several occasions at the Caribbean camps over the years. We met with the Haynes, who live a short walk from the meeting place, as do the Ramlochans; Sis. Bev, who lives nearby and ensures that the building is open and ready for meetings each week, Sis. Judy, who also attended several Caribbean camps with the CYCers; Sis. Kim, who remembered me from childhood days, along with Sis. Tania and Bro. Anthony and Bro. Oral and their families. We also had Bro. Clive Drepaal from New York and Sis. Joanne Wilton from Birmingham on their annual visit to the island. We did notice, however, that there were no Sunday School kids and, upon inquiry, found out that, sadly, some of them were scolded by a sister for running through the building a while back, and since then have stopped coming. Of course, the current pandemic has not helped the situation. It reminded me of an unscriptural policy someone at my own meeting was trying to enforce years ago, that children should not be at the Breaking of Bread. Thankfully, the arranging brothers were able to squash such a ruling, and we are

delighted to have our young ones at our meetings. After all, they are the future of our ecclesias, should our Lord delay his coming. We were also able to chat briefly with Bro. David Bancroft, who has a meeting in his own home with a few members.

One of our highlights was our journey across to Lakes Village, St. Andrew, to the home of Sis. Murl Marshall baptized in 1961. She is one of the oldest residents there. Upon arrival, we saw Sammy (her cousin) sitting on his front porch reading from the Psalms, and were blown away when he immediately not only recognized us from 35 years ago but called out my name. We were able to spend a few hours recollecting some great memories and taking a short tour of the yard, even though the fruits are now being harvested illegally by young men who traverse the island via pick-up trucks, collecting especially the coconuts and selling them for \$3 each in the cities.

Another highlight was reconnecting with another family, the Gibsons. Back in the eighties we had gone to the island for a three month missionary stay and had rented a villa from them in Paynes Bay, St. James. The children attended the meeting and CYC with us, but sadly we lost our connection after leaving the island. Now, it so happened, that the street we rented on was the

same street they live on. Again, I was completely amazed when Bradley, who now resides in England, but happened to be on the island, recognized and called me by name. Matrina, his sister, is a horticulturist and has numerous plants all over her place. This time, we hope to maintain our connection, in the hopes that they eventually come to a knowledge of the truth. I attempted to reconnect with Santia, another childhood friend, however, no doubt her duties within the present government and system of things did not allow for that.

Hopefully, with a new laptop, webcam and mic, they will soon be able to broadcast via Zoom, so that we can tune in from time to time and lend support to this Caribbean Island. If you have a love for the island flavor (fresh fish such as Mahi, Rainbow, Billfish, Congalie and flying fish) and do not mind eighty plus degree weather year-round, as well as beautiful beaches, then this is the island that could use a few capable brothers and sisters to further the gospel message. Historically, Bajans have been very keen Bible students; even their prime-minister quotes from the Bible, so be prepared to defend the Scriptures, as we all should be!

*Ben Drepaol,
(Brooklyn Ecclesia, NY)*



ST. LUCIA

By Martin and Lois Webster

AFTER a two-year gap because of COVID-19, we visited St. Lucia from January 23 to February 20. The requirements for this visit were governed by rules, rules, and more rules from the Canadian and St. Lucia governments! Full COVID-19 tests were required to enter St. Lucia and on landing, after a good journey, there was inspection of everything we had submitted in the designated documents. We were thankful that everything was in good order.

We were in touch with all the members of the ecclesia within a couple of days, including our new Sis. Rosie Fregis. The first visit we made was to 89-year-old Bro. George Rock. He is doing very well, although he is not able to leave home. The day of our visit was the twentieth anniversary of Bro. George's baptism. This baptism was the result of much work by brothers and sisters from Canada and the Caribbean in the 1990s. Bro. Russ Dawes had had

a lot to do with Bro. George's baptism and arranged for Bro. George to come to Canada to get a prosthesis for his right leg. On this occasion, we did the readings, and Sis. Rosie Fregis came over after school.

On most days we did the Psalms reading with our 95-year-old landlady, Doris Bailey, and her principal caregiver, Debbie Couchman, and part-time caregiver, Celia. We also offered a series of classes on the Promises of God. In the series of about twelve classes, we started in Genesis and went through to Revelation. On a previous visit, Bro. Mike LeDuke had given them a copy of Minute Meditations by Bro. Robert Lloyd. On the days we did not have a class, Debbie would read to Doris one of the meditations. They really enjoyed them.

Bro. Gabriel Fontenelle is very grateful for the support he has received to rebuild the family home where unfortunately his 92-year-old mother

caused a fire last year. We went to see the house (which is close to the international airport, at the other end of the island from the CBMC apartment) and were impressed with the work that had been done. The front half has been completed and is being lived in and the back half has walls. The roof must still be built.

One of the “benefits” of COVID-19 has been the use of Zoom for ecclesial functions. This has greatly helped the ecclesia in St. Lucia because it enables them to join the Kitchener-Waterloo Canada memorial service. They come to the CBMC apartment and using a laptop computer participate in the service, with the local brethren taking part in readings and prayers.

We telephoned contacts and had discussions with as many as possible, mostly in the apartment but also in the lovely Serenity Gardens which is less



Sisters Lois Webster and Rosie Fergis with Bro. George Rock

than one hundred meters (328 feet) from the apartment.

Our final week in a hotel overlapped with the visit of Bro. Mike LeDuke. Although the week was a “vacation,” we did several things together, including visiting a couple of radio stations to explore the possibility of broadcasting the gospel message to listeners or advertising the “thisisyourbible.com” program. Bro. Mike will continue to explore this possibility.

*Martin and Lois Webster,
(Kitchener Waterloo Ecclesia, ON)*



(Left to Right) Bro. Benji St. Ange, Bro. Mike LeDuke, Sis. Laurretta Valcin, Bro. Gabriel Fontenelle, Julian Jackson, Sis. Dawn Hutchinson, Sis. Julie Gonzague, and Sis. Lois Webster



The Vineyard Voice



SHARING OUR VOICE IN THE VINEYARD

Our Lord's parting message at the Last Supper was to abide with him, the true vine. It was the magnificent culmination of the vineyard theme he began with two of his parables. We are workers in a very special vineyard, there to bear fruit until our Master returns.

This is not solitary labor—it is shared service. The days may be long, and the heat of the day blistering hot. But we serve with many others in this vineyard. Indeed, the Owner of the vineyard expressly called many to serve alongside one another. The Owner does not really need us to pick the fruit. In another food analogy, Jesus tells us his Father could make bread from stones if He wanted. One of the vineyard lessons seems to be that the many serve together for "their" benefit, not for God's. They serve together to encourage each other. To help one another. Above all, to love one another, a clarion starting point in John's Gospel for our Lord's "True Vine" exhortation at the Last Supper.

How can we better encourage fellow workers in the Master's vineyard? As the isolation of the pandemic begins to fade and as the world watches new horrific images of war, such encouragement has never been needed more. The Williamsburg Christadelphian Foundation (WCF) has launched *The Vineyard Voice* as one way to share more encouragement until the Master returns.

The Vineyard Voice

The Vineyard Voice is an information exchange designed to share the joys and struggles we all encounter. Such an exchange helps to remind us we're not alone in the vineyard, and opens the door to drawing strength from one another and from our Master. It readily shares the joys and trials other workers encounter—so creating fresh opportunities to lift up prayer together. Through such prayers, we live the powerful lesson from the Apostle Paul: "*If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.*" (1 Cor 12:26 ESV).

This effort starts with a focus on North America. Lord Willing, we will broaden the service to the globe over time.

The Vineyard Voice shares two important types of information:

- **Urgent prayer needs.** This is a rapid response announcement of a health emergency, a death or an emerging crisis situation, so that community prayer and support can be quickly marshaled. The announcement is sent via email to all who subscribe. The goal is to raise awareness to urgent needs, to allow the community to help as it best can and, above all, to pray together for those in need.
- **Monthly report.** This is a monthly update from voices across the vineyard (starting with North America). To provide a geographic frame of reference, we organize the updates by ecclesia. This monthly report is delivered by email to all who subscribe. The goal is to share moments of celebration (such as baptisms and marriages), to be more aware of trials that have arisen (such as deaths, serious illness or tragedy) and to see opportunities to serve together (such as special ecclesial efforts).

Lend Your Voice

WCF is committed to helping disciples of Christ grow faith across the whole arc of life. The Apostle Paul compares this journey to running a grand race, a race won by a persevering faith. In this journey, Paul tells us, God supplies the grace, but we must supply the faith. This means our faith in God—expressed through our understanding of Him, our trust in him and our service to Him—must be a central focus as we

each run our race. No matter where we are in the race, we always look to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. But we can also look around the vineyard and find encouragement from our fellow servants.

We hope you will lend "your" voice to *The Vineyard Voice*. Many other servants in the vineyard care and want to know about your prayer needs. You can also help them by lifting up prayer when they are in need. Together, we can celebrate the joys of serving together and bear up better under trials.

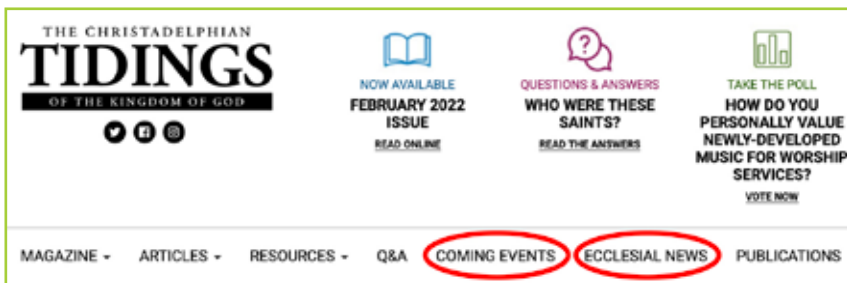
You can get involved in three ways:

- **Subscribe** to *The Vineyard Voice* email list. You'll receive the urgent updates and a monthly report. You can sign up at wcfoundation.org/vineyard-voice
- **Share** your urgent prayer needs. Prayer is always the best starting point for any trial we face. Please share urgent needs with our hotline at urgent@wcfoundation.org. Anyone can send in prayer needs, but we ask that it be approved by members of the affected family.
- **Encourage** your ecclesia to be part of *The Vineyard Voice*. We hope this information exchange can be a source of encouragement for ecclesias all across North America—and beyond. We encourage your ecclesia to give and receive this encouragement. Our faith is stronger together than standing alone.

For further information, please contact *The Vineyard Voice* coordinator Sis. Carol Jones, cjones@wcfoundation.org

Mark Drabenstott,
(Kansas City CGAF Ecclesia, MO)

The Tidings has decided to no longer publish **Ecclesial News** or **Coming Events** in the magazine **after next month**. 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

Baltimore, MD

KATIE KREIDER, daughter of Bro. Jeff and Sis. Jen Kreider, was baptized on Saturday May 8th, 2021 at the home of the Link family in the company of many witnesses. Katie's Aunt Joanne sang hymn 335 with the beautiful words written by Bro. C. Ladson, "We Praise thee Heavenly Father." Katie was baptized by her father, Bro. Jeff.

We rejoice with Bro. Bill and Sis. Carol and the Link family over two joyous weddings! Sunday October 10th, 2021, Sis. Larynette Ndah Link (Baltimore, MD ecclesia) and Bro. Philip Hinds (South Ozone Park, NY ecclesia) were joined in marriage. On Friday December 31st, 2021 Sis. Hadassah Link (Baltimore, MD ecclesia) and Bro. Daniel Ryan (South Australia) were married. We ask God's richest blessing for these two couples as they begin their walk as *"heirs together of the grace of life."*

On a sad note, our ecclesia has lost three senior members. Bro. Bud Stalter

died July 20th, 2020 at the age of 82. Bro. Bud was baptized later in life being overjoyed to have found, at last, the pearl of great price. This joy showed in his expressions of love and enthusiasm for God and his brothers and sisters. He sleeps now until the day of his Lord's appearing.

Bro. Robert Schneider died November 10th, 2021, at the age of 86. He was a long-time member, having moved to Baltimore from Meriden, CT in 1956 to marry his beloved wife Sis. Inez. They raised their family here, and all Bro. Bob and Sis. Inez's four daughters are in the meeting here still, along with grandchildren. Uncle Bob was dedicated and faithful in his service to his Master. He was steadfast until the end, now awaiting the resurrection.

Sis Dorothy Link fell asleep in Christ on November 15th, 2021, at the age of 94. She moved to Baltimore from Springfield, MA as a child with her parents Bro. Ernest and Sis. Janet Hardy. Sis. Dorothy has instructed many in the way of righteousness and was always

deeply concerned about the well-being of both her natural and spiritual family. She expressed her care in many practical and loving ways. Her Godly wisdom and guidance will be so missed. She leaves, until the resurrection day, her son Bro. William and his wife Sis. Carol, and eight grandchildren and six great grandchildren.

Our dear Bro. Bob Stinchcomb has transferred from the Baltimore to the Ann Arbor, MI ecclesia. He grew up in the Baltimore Sunday School and was baptized as a young person. Bro. Bob was a constant in our lives for so many years, and we miss him. We commend him to the care of the brothers and sisters in Ann Arbor. We are glad to have Bro. Dan Ryan with us, by way of transfer from Australia, but sorry to lose Bro. Jacob Pogson, who has now returned to Australia after being with us for over two years. The Kreider family has transferred to the Washington, D.C. Ecclesia. Bro. Sam and Sis. Audrey Van Reuter transferred to the Verdugo Hills ecclesia. We are grateful to both families for their encouragement while they were here and commend them in love to the care of their new ecclesias.

Andy Billelo

Orlando, FL

We rejoice in the baptism of our new brother, **SHILOH MARKWITH**, on January 8th, 2022. Bro. Shiloh is the son of Bro. Aaron and Sis. Rhonda Markwith.

We welcome as new members Bro. Stephen and Sis. Betty Lou Lewis, who have transferred from the Largo Ecclesia.

We are very sad to report the loss of our Bro. Nick Parrino who fell asleep in Christ this past year. We yearn to see our brother again at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our annual study weekend was held January 28-30, and we are very grateful to Bro. Tony Isaacs from Atlanta, GA for his classes on the subject, "God's Prophetic Utterances—Attestation to His Reality."

We continue to stream our Memorial services via Zoom to brothers and sisters unable to meet with us in person.

Dan Garan

Sarasota, FL

The Sarasota ecclesia enjoyed the fellowship of Bro. Pat and Sis. Deborah Bryan of the Portage, IN Ecclesia. We are grateful to Bro. Bryan for his words of encouragement.

We are also grateful to Bro. Terry Cannon, from Castle Bromwich, England for his recent exhortation.

James Wilkinson

Vancouver, BC

During the past year since we last reported, like so many, much of our ecclesial activity has remained limited by local COVID-19 mandates.

We commended our Sis. Beverly Ferguson who resides in a retirement home, to the New Westminster Ecclesia, with whom she has enjoyed Zoom meeting fellowship for several years. Transferring to us from the Rolling Hills, AB Ecclesia by way of Victoria, is Sis. Sarah Kohlman. May our Lord bless our sisters as they continue in their new spiritual homes.

Our Sis. Ruth Parman fell asleep in October after suffering for several years from an irresolvable medical condition. We rejoiced in Sis. Ruth's unshaken faith in the day of resurrection and in our LORD's boundless grace. May her rest be short.

The blessing of marriage in our common faith came to Bro. Peter Pennington and Sis. Esther Isobe (New Westminster Ecclesia) in August, and to Bro. Steven Fedorski and Sis. Sarah Kohlman, united in September. Our prayers are for our LORD's blessing on their walks together. Little ones arrived to two families: Bro. Wesley and Sis. Silvia Butler welcomed Shaphan their third, while Bro. Gavin and Sis. Reyah

Orsetti welcomed Aniyah, their first. May our LORD bless these young ones as they grow in his loving care.

Finding suitable affordable housing in our metro area continues to challenge all, so we are thankful that six families completed successful moves during the year. Stimulating exhortations and classes by visiting brothers are a blessing many are enjoying in this "Zoom" era and we thank the many who generously served, including Bro. Jason Hensley (Simi Hills, CA) providing 2021 fraternal classes, "Giving Grace." Our 2022 fraternal classes, October 8-9, will be presented by Bro. Dafydd Jenkins (Cardiff, UK).

Phil Snobelen

BIBLE SCHOOLS

Mid-Atlantic Bible School

July 2-9, 2022

Shippensburg University, PA

Speakers: Dennis Bevans (Austin, TX), Jason Hensley (Simi Hills, CA), and Joseph Palmer (San Diego, CA).

Register: midatlanticbibleschool.com

Midwest Bible School

July 16-24, 2022

Trine University, IN

Speakers: David Noble (Paris Ave, OH), Jason Robinson (Thousand Oaks, CA).

Register: midwestbibleschool.com

Idyllwild Bible School

July 24-30, 2022

Idyllwild Pines Camp, CA

Speakers: Mick Roberts (UK), Jason Hensley (Simi Hills, CA), and Allen Laben (San Diego, CA).

Register: californiabibleschool.org

Abrahamic Faith Gathering

July 25-31, 2022

Slippery Rock University, PA

Speakers: Steve Ross (Cleveland, OH), Glen Anderson (Ann Arbor, MI), and John Pople (San Francisco Pen., CA).

Register: abrahamicfaithgathering.org

Lakefield Bible School

August 22-27, 2022

Due to issue with the venue, this year's school will be ONLINE

Speakers: Jim Sullivan (Stoughton, MA), Tyrone Smartt (South Ozone Park, NY).

Register: lakefieldbibleschool.org

Thoughts on the Way Predestination

ROMANS 8:28-30 provides an outline of God's purpose in working for the good of those whom He has "called." His purpose consists of five steps:

1. Foreknowledge;
2. predestination;
3. calling;
4. justification; and
5. glorification.

The first four steps are already realities for believers now. They guarantee the fifth and final step (Rom 8:17, 18, 21). All this may be said without implying that there is no chance of falling away, for there always is. But we must learn to dwell as much as possible on the positive aspects. Only such an attitude will sustain us through the trials and doubts that inevitably buffet us. Only such a positive attitude can do justice to the love of God shown in His great work for our salvation. Against the backdrop of His supreme mercy, fear and despair are nothing but offenses to Him who has repeatedly commanded us, "*Fear not.*"

*"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son" (v. 29): "Foreknew" ("foreordained": KJV) is the Greek *proginosko* to know in advance. The Apostle Peter uses the same work in a helpful context:*

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

*He was chosen [*proginosko*] before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. (1 Pet 1:18-20).*

The Greek word *proorizo* signifies "to set bounds," or ordain, "beforehand." *Pro* means "before, ahead of time." *Horizo* (like horizon in English) marks the boundary, or line of sight, beyond which the sun disappears in the evening, that is, the line of demarcation between earth and sky. "*Proorizo*" appears here and in verse 30, and in Ephesians 1:5, 11, where the righteous are "*sealed*," that is, "separated" and marked out for special care. (The same word also occurs in Acts 4:28 and 1 Corinthians 2:7.)

We probably all have a pretty good idea what "predestination" is not. It is not "eternal security;" it is not "once saved, always saved." But the question here is, what does it mean?

Let us now return to the context in 1 Peter 1:18-20, mentioned above. The purpose of the Passover lamb's blood was to put a limit, in advance, upon the work of the Destroying Angel. Those who had faith sprinkled the blood of the lamb on their doorposts. In doing so they were marking out a boundary beyond which the angel of death could not go. Those Jews who stayed in the houses sprinkled with blood were marked out ahead of time (Exod 12)—"predestined," we might say—to be saved out of Egypt. All around Egypt, there were other houses which were not marked out to be spared. Instead, they were marked out

("predestined") to perish, including the firstborn of Pharaoh (see Rom 9:17).

We see that the verse before us at this moment, Romans 8:29, also has a "firstborn" connection: *"that [Christ] might be the firstborn among many brothers."* There are other Passover connections as well, in the immediate context:

- Romans 8:32, compared with Genesis 22:13: the ram as a special offering, and,
- Romans 8:36, compared with Psalm 44:22: believers are as sheep to be slaughtered.

Did the LORD, by His own arbitrary choice, "predestine" certain Jewish families in Egypt to be saved, while "predestining" others to be condemned? Of course not. He did not necessarily select, one by one, every person, Jew or Gentile, who would fall under the Divine provision. What the LORD did was provide the command regarding the Passover lambs. The Jews were required to choose, by their own free will, whether they would put the blood on their houses, and then they had to choose whether they would remain in those houses during the night. They had to act in faith upon the principles and promises which God had given them. If they did, then they were "predestined" (marked out beforehand) to be spared or saved, even while others around them, who chose differently, were "predestined" to perish.

Of course, those who chose to be saved out of Egypt had to continue to remember God and His promises, and continue to keep the Passover, as a reminder of what God had done for them, and (we may assume) as an act of faith in the greater "Passover lamb" to come, who would

truly take away the sins of the world.

But it was still God's "predestination" in the first place; to paraphrase:

"I have marked out a place where you will be safe from the death that will be visited upon the world. That place is one of absolute security. But you need to go there, do what I say, and above all remain there. Otherwise, you will not be 'marked out' for My Glory!"

So, we may be sure that, whatever is expressed by this word "predestination," it should not rule out or neutralize the free will of individuals to choose and obey.

"Those predestinated in Paul's survey in Romans 8 are said to love God and are called according to His purpose; and it is upon this principle their glorification is assured. It is most important we should keep this in mind, or we can never understand the principle of predestination. It is this fact that is omitted in the doctrine which contends that men are born to eternal life or eternal damnation." G.S. Sherry, "Whom He Did Foreknow," *The Christadelphian*, Vol.72, pp. 209,210

How did God predestinate us? By establishing the way, the truth, and the life—the line and demarcation that we must follow. In God's purpose, man is predestinated upon the basis of God's will and man's character. Thus, it is clear that any "predestination" depends, first, on the atonement provided by Christ, and secondly on our faithful following of the way of life.

George Booker,
(Austin Leander Ecclesia, TX)



The Story of Meal-a-Day's School in Haiti

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