

2 0 2 2 S P E C I A L I S S U E

TIDINGS

Volume 85, Number 7, July/August 2022

CONFRONTING CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

Jesus warned of times like the “days of Lot.”
This Special Issue focuses on the “sin of Sodom.”
What you first think of is only part of it!

15 authors provide powerful exhortations
to help confront challenges to godly living.

Building faith in the
Christadelphian community.

TIDINGS

Volume 85, Number 8 / July/August, 2022



SPECIAL ISSUE

Introduction — The Sin of Sodom, Bill Link	2
Pride — Knowledge Puffs Up, Chris Sales	6
— Facebook, Insta and Twitter. Oh My!, Jolie Tunnell	11
Fulness of Bread — Fulness, Faithlessness and Family	
— Dysfunction, Nancy Brinkerhoff	15
— Fulness of Bread, Dan Styles	19
Abundance of Idleness — Abundance of Idleness, Benjamin Link	24
— Apathy in the Life of a Believer, Noah Abel	29
Not Caring for the Poor — Serving our Neighbors, Anonymous Sisters	33
— The Stranger and Foreigner Among You, Linda Beckerson	38
— Strengthening Our Hand, Carol Link	42
Abominations — Alcoholism and Addictions, Robert Korbela	48
— False Intimacy, An Anonymous Brother	53
— Making Lifestyle Choices, James Sullivan	60
— The Other Ones, Joseph Robinson	66
Conclusion — "Let Us Hear the Conclusion," Alan Markwith	70

THE SIN OF SODOM

By Bill Link

What Was the Sin of Sodom?

ASK pretty much anyone, regardless of their familiarity with the Bible, and chances are they will identify the sin of Sodom as sexual immorality. They might not know about Abraham's nephew Lot, who lived in Sodom, and the angels' visit to his house. They might not know that the angels appeared to be ordinary men visiting from afar and that the men of Sodom plotted to abuse them vilely. Even without knowing these

details, most everyone associates Sodom with sexual immorality; the city's name is perpetually associated with sexual crime in the Romance languages, as well as in Persian and Arabic.

But there's a lot more to the sin of Sodom than sexual immorality, and it's worth knowing about.

Jesus warned that conditions in the last days would mirror the days of Lot, and the warnings he gives are not specific to sexual immorality—they are much

broad. Given that we live in the last days, Jesus' warnings are specifically for us.¹ Our Lord's warnings provide the impetus for this special issue. However, we're not going to dwell on the negatives, as though our goal were simply the avoidance of evil. Instead, this issue is intended to encourage us to know the evil and do the good!

Before considering Jesus' words about "the days of Lot," it is well worth looking at Ezekiel 16, where God Himself answers the question "What was the sin of Sodom?" in teaching about the apostasy of the southern kingdom of Judah.

Ezekiel 16

The prophecy of Ezekiel took place in the last days of the kingdom of Judah, in the sixth century BC. The renegade northern kingdom of Israel had been swept away by Assyria more than a century earlier, its doom hastened by a nearly complete rejection of the true God and by a tumultuous history of insurrections and intrigue.

By contrast, the southern kingdom of Judah had survived for four centuries, with an unbroken line of kings reaching back to the time of David. The kings in David's line were a mix of faithful and unfaithful men, with giants of faith like Hezekiah and Josiah, during whose times the nation flourished.

By the time of Ezekiel, the southern kingdom had also forsaken God spectacularly. Ezekiel depicted the capital city of Jerusalem as a young woman with two sisters: older sister Samaria to the north (former capital of Israel) and younger sister Sodom to the

south (Ezekiel 16:46). Jerusalem's sins were worse than her sisters', God said, and to put a point on what He had in mind, He said,

Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore, I took them away as I saw good. (Ezek 16:49-50).

Five items are listed: pride, excessive prosperity, careless ease, indifference to the plight of the poor and needy, and finally, "they committed abomination before me."² The one sin we associate with Sodom is not the whole story. It's not even first on Ezekiel's list. Sodom's "abomination" is listed last as the culmination of a catalog of sins. A good case can be made that it was oppression of the poor which brought about God's judgments. New Testament commentary on Sodom highlights its egregious sexual immorality (2 Pet 2:6-8 and Jude 1:7), but Ezekiel exposes the root causes which led to wanton, sinful behavior and thinking. It is sobering to think how well this catalog of sins in Ezekiel 16: 49-50 describes the world at present, especially the western world where many of us live. And while we might not be guilty of the abomination which ends the list, the spiritually numbing effects of "fulness of bread" and "abundance of idleness" may lead us to pride and to the indifference to the poor which God abhors.³

The list of Sodom's sins gives us plenty to think about, asking whether we are doing our best in God's service.

We need to ask ourselves whether our faith is passive. Is our faith purely an intellectual matter, detached from practical concerns? Or is it active and looking for opportunities in the LORD's service? This is not to disparage the exercise of our minds in God's service. After all, the first and great commandment is to *"love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength."* (Mark 12:30). We acquire the love of God through the exercise of *"soul and mind."* But the manifestation of such love is in our treatment of others. According to our Lord, the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:31). Paul says we are God's *"workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works."* (Eph 2:10).

For those of us living in comfortable prosperity, Ezekiel's catalog of Sodom's sin is an urgent call to introspection. Our Lord's words about the last times underscore the urgency of this call.⁴

"In the Days of Lot"

Along the way from Galilee, in Jesus' last journey south to Jerusalem, the Lord worked hard to prepare his disciples for when he would no longer be physically present with them. He repeatedly warned them they must live their lives in constant anticipation of his second coming.

Jesus compared his second coming to the *"days of Noah"* and the *"days of Lot"* (Luke 17:26-30). In both comparisons, he did not mention the corruption of

the time but only of the complacent going about of business-as-usual. In the days of Noah *"they ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage."* None of these is bad; all indeed are blessed by God for the faithful. In the days of Lot, *"they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded."* Again, nothing wrong, per se. The problem in both cases was that life carried on, heedless of God's ways, without any sense of Him as the provider, and the one to be served. Jesus doesn't mention that in Noah's day *"the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually"* (Gen 6:5) nor that the earth was *"corrupt before God"* and *"filled with violence."* (Gen 6:11). His point was that life went on with mankind, oblivious to God. His warning for us, in similar times of prosperity and complacency, is that we must be watchful and ready, giving our best in God's service.

Having arrived in Jerusalem, Jesus' warnings had their climax in the conclusion of his Olivet prophecy:

*But **take heed to yourselves**, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. **Watch therefore, and pray always** that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.* (Luke 21:34-36).

It is sincerely hoped we don't engage in carousing and drunkenness, not

only for fear of being so engaged at our Lord's return but also because these are so contrary to the high calling we have received. Paul says, *"that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."* (Gal 5:21). But what of the *"cares of this life?"* Jesus' disciples would have remembered the Parable of the Sower, in which the seed scattered among thorns was *"choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life"* and unable to produce fruit (Luke 8:14). If we are honest with ourselves, most of us will be able to acknowledge from first-hand experience the genuine threat of such cares and pleasures.

This Special Issue

Having the sense that our Lord's return could be at any time, we are wise to heed his warnings, specifically made for us. We know what God wants us to do, and it is time to encourage one another *"and so much the more as you see the day approaching"* (Heb 10:25).

In this issue, we have a series of articles encouraging us to see the threats we

face and to give our best in service. The *"sin of Sodom"* from Ezekiel 16 provides a framework for the topics we consider. Topics include the effects of social media and the Internet, the challenges of prosperity and covetousness, how we use our free time, how we are entertained, and the need for work in the ecclesia. Many of our ecclesias have brothers and sisters who have arrived as refugees. We discuss the importance of caring for such poor and needy. They provide us with an excellent opportunity to show the love of Christ and our love for Christ.

We hope that you will enjoy these articles and be stirred up by them. May God bless you. May He bless our community.

Bill Link,
(Baltimore Ecclesia, MD)

¹ The existence of modern Israel is an unmistakable sign of the times. The restoration of the Jews to their homeland is an unparalleled miracle, all the more remarkable by being accomplished while the Jews were still in unbelief, as foretold by the prophets (e.g. Eze 36:19-32).

² The careful reader will have noted that I've left out *"haughty"* in verse 50. The word is nearly identical to *"pride"* in verse 49. God repeats the first sin, perhaps the root cause of all the others, before mentioning the culmination of the sins.

³ In Genesis 18:21, God says He will *"go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me."* The word translated *"outcry"* is typically used to describe the pleas of the oppressed. For instance, in Exodus 3:7, *"The LORD said: 'I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows.'"*

⁴ These failings are focused on in the Lord's parable of The Rich Man and Lazarus, Luke 16:19-31. The number of Scriptures regarding our treatment of the poor is staggering. The list includes Deuteronomy 15:7-11; Proverbs 21:13; Isaiah 1:17, 58:6-9; Matthew 25:41-46; James 2:13-17, and many others.



KNOWLEDGE PUFFS UP

By Chris Sales

KNOWLEDGE is good. In fact, the right knowledge of God's Word is necessary for salvation. Solomon wrote, *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."* (Prov 9:10).¹ Conversely, a lack of knowledge is bad! *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you."* (Hos 4:6). In fact, it was ignorance (a lack of knowledge that Jesus was their Messiah) that caused the people to kill God's Son. (Acts 3:17).

Although knowledge is good, and the right knowledge is necessary for salvation, we are warned by Paul that knowledge can result in pride, which leads to sin! Paul wrote that *"knowledge puffs up, but love edifies."* (1 Cor 8:1). Pride was certainly at the core of Sodom's downfall (Isaiah 3:9) and the prophet Isaiah reminds us that Sodom, the home of righteous Lot, prided itself on its affluence and success. Isaiah upbraided his contemporaries for not giving full heed to the Word of God (Isaiah 1:10).

Incredibly, a correct understanding of God's word can lead us to sin! If we use knowledge in an unloving way and let pride enter into our motives, this can cause us to despise our brother or sister. Disregard for another can cause us to cause them to sin. How sad!

And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you

thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. (1 Cor 8:11-12). Ouch! Sounds like what Jesus said in Matthew 25:45. *"Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me."* He also warned against offending one of his "little ones" and causing them to stumble. Remember the millstone? (Mark 9:42).

So, what was happening in the First Century when Paul addressed this issue with the ecclesia at Corinth and said, *"Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up."* Well, Paul clearly says that the "knowledge" he was speaking about was that an idol was nothing. (1 Cor 8:4). This was a well-known fact from the Old Testament. Isaiah wrote, *"Indeed you [the idol gods of verse 23] are nothing, and your work is nothing; He who chooses you is an abomination."* (Isa 41:24). So, the Jewish faithful, and perhaps many Gentile believers, totally understood any meat blessed by or offered to an idol was unchanged. The idol could do nothing to the meat because the idol was nothing! But for some Gentile Christians who grew up believing an idol had power, their "conscience" [Greek: perception or awareness] was pricked, and they couldn't shake the feeling something actually happened to the meat. To them, the meat offered to the idol was somehow different from the meat that wasn't, so their solution was to not eat meat (1 Cor 8:7).

So, what was an ecclesia to do? Some members (with knowledge) knew that meat was just meat and could be eaten. Others (with a weak conscience) did not want to eat what they considered “defiled” meat.

Interestingly, the ecclesias in Acts 15 had decided that part of the “*necessary things*” to transition Gentiles into the mostly Jewish body of believers was to instruct them to not eat meat offered to idols, mostly because of Jewish sensitivities to dietary restrictions. By the time Paul wrote to the Corinthians and also the Romans (chapter 14), the issue was dividing Gentile ecclesias, and some (the strong, knowledgeable ones) were arguing that it was perfectly fine to eat meat offered to idols. Paul argued that they were right. That is, their knowledge was based correctly on Scripture. The idol was nothing and therefore could not affect the meat presented to it. But there was another attribute at play. It was love, and that was a game-changer.

The knowledgeable brother or sister, acting on a right understanding of God’s word about idols, could freely eat any meat. But if that action caused a “*weak*” member to go against their conscience to eat the same meat, it would be a sin. To act proudly and boldly on knowledge and rights is not acting in love. Paul calls it a sin (1 Cor 8:12). My “*right*” action is wrong because it is done without love! WOW! This is clearly what is meant in 1 Corinthians 8. The implications are profound.

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul gives a personal example of this principle.

It was within Paul’s rights to get married and be supported financially during his missionary journeys (he had solid Scriptural support and ecclesial precedent). But he purposely chose neither for conscience’s sake and to set a good example of acting in love. He made these decisions for himself and did not impose them on others.

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul reminds us that even if we know an idol is nothing (v.19), we do not have the liberty to do as we please. The oneness of the body of Christ is more important (v. 17). He summarizes with this timeless principle: “*All things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being.*” (v. 24).

How often do brothers and sisters become divided over an issue that in and of itself is neither right nor wrong but a matter of personal choice? It is the resulting interactions between members that can result in sin. Romans 14 sheds some light on this very issue, but there’s a new twist. **Both** sides were wrong in their attitudes towards one another! Pride had reared its ugly head in both camps! Both sides were acting proudly based on their knowledge and rights. Both probably considered themselves the strong ones. Neither were acting in love!

Paul said the meat-eaters despised their brothers and sisters. “What’s your problem? Do you really think that an idol has power? Go read Psalm 115. There’s nothing wrong with this meat! I want to eat it, and

the Bible clearly tells me it's okay to do so." But then the vegetarians were **judging** their fellow disciples. "How can you eat that meat? Don't you know it's contaminated? You just don't have enough self-control! Look at me; I touch not, taste not, handle not. I'm more righteous than you, and if you're not careful, you won't be in God's Kingdom!"

Paul's solution was on a much higher level and had nothing to do with knowledge or rights. He encouraged both sides to be "*fully persuaded in their own minds*" (Rom 14:5 KJV) but to respect the conclusions of others (v. 6). The key is how we treat others. We must act out love (v. 15), and this may mean not eating meat, even though we know it's well within our rights to do so (v. 20). Paul encouraged the Corinthians and us to have an extra level of discernment based on those around us (our children, other ecclesial members, young people) and what impact our right actions might have on their spiritual well-being.

What issues are there in the community today that should be left as matters of conscience and not be allowed to divide us? When can too much knowledge and not enough love lead to despising and judging? As we answer these questions, we should be careful not to say, "But I have the right Biblical understanding on this matter!" Remember, knowledge puffs up self and tears down others. Love builds up. When we examine ourselves, we know our fruits reveal our true

character. Are you tearing down or building up?

Here is one modern example—celebrating Christmas. We know the pagan origins of many of the rituals surrounding the celebrations of December 25th. Some think associating this with the birth of Christ is wrong, and we must distance ourselves as much as possible from these traditions. Others may find this holiday crucial for family time, especially with relatives outside our community. To refrain from being involved could create terrible upset for those they love dearly. Members may feel it is more important to maintain their family relationships and look for relevant opportunities to speak about Jesus Christ than stay home and refuse the pagan feast. To paraphrase Romans 14:5-6, let not them that celebrate despise them that celebrate not; let not the refrainer judge the indulger, for God has received them both.

There may be other things in our lives that fall into a similar category—certain careers, level of education, lifestyle choices, use of money and resources, diet, vacations, entertainment, use of social media, and maybe even some positions on doctrine and fellowship!

Whatever your "thing" is (It's different for each of us.), it might be helpful to consider a paraphrase of Paul's advice about "food" in Romans 14:15-22:

Yet, if your brother is grieved because of your "thing," you are

no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your "thing" the one for whom Christ died. Therefore, do not let your good be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not this "thing" and "that thing," but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. Therefore, let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of "your thing." All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who "brings offense because of his thing." It is good neither to do this "thing" nor that "thing," nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.

The right knowledge and even right action, without love, are meaningless and can be very harmful. Paul himself says in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am

nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

He doesn't say having knowledge and doing good deeds without love is less than ideal—he says it's useless and worthless.

In summary, we must know the truth (which takes time, study, and devotion), and we must act on that truth in the right ways (which takes practice, experience, and patience). It starts with a fear of the LORD and a love of His children. Our love of God, our love of the truth, and our love of our neighbor will develop in us the mind of the Spirit. This love, in turn, develops the fruit of the spirit, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Gal 5:22-23). This is the antithesis of pride!

Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever "thing" you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Cor 10:31).

*Chris Sales,
Collingwood Ecclesia, ON*

¹ All Scriptural citations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the New King James Version.



FACEBOOK, INSTA AND TWITTER. OH MY!

By Jolie Tunnell

OH, the lovely mixed blessings of cropping and sepia filters.

I hope a few words on the subject of social media will generate some conversation, especially with yourself, because it's one thing to take the machine at face value and another thing entirely once you've looked behind the big green curtain.

We certainly aren't in Kansas anymore, Toto.

I'm not going into the mechanics. In this Age of Information, there's really no excuse for ignorance. It's simple to suss out the humbugs for yourself.

Everything on your phone has been designed to addictively engage with you and take your money, including the phone itself. Period. So be it, if you decide some things are worth paying for. But at least admit you are voluntarily allowing the Wizard of Oz an opportunity to manipulate you.

Tech is one of the best tools invented by man to date.

It is also one of the most insidious. You don't need Google to educate yourself about human nature. You can use a Bible or a mirror. *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.*

Who can know it?" (Jer 17:9). We are needy things. We are wired to be social. We are constantly looking sideways at each other. We like shiny toys. And we are ever grappling with our place on the planet.

The tech companies understand this. They're really, really hoping you forget. Social media helped us keep in touch during a global pandemic. And while we were there, we scrolled. And scrolled. And scrolled some more. Every time we did, we triggered the machine's algorithms, and it fed us things we never knew we needed. It offered us power. Popularity. Told us things we wanted to hear. Presented the world at our fingertips.

Which felt good because the actual world was certainly unavailable for a while.

Once the world became available again, that good feeling should've faded by comparison.

Not sure? Try leaving your phone behind the next time you go out.

I'd like to remind you of some things that tech cannot do. That social media cannot replace. There is a difference between being socially present and being physically present. Our standard of living may be going up, but we need a refresher on what living looks like.

Only when you are physically present with another human being can you learn:

1. Trust. You can connect on social media and still not understand, give, or earn personal trust. The middleman is always there. We should already be on guard because we know how easy it is to deceive

someone with the machine between us. Handshakes, hugs, eye contact, body language, and other authentic, nonverbal cues are lost. Are your "friends" really your friends? Find out what happens when you hang out with them in person. *"A friend loveth at all times."* (Prov 17:17), not just online where it's convenient. They might be strangers after all. Building meaningful relationships requires a level of personal trust that cannot be exchanged online.

2. Patience. There is no instant gratification in person. You must wait for your companion's reactions, thought processes, and answers to formulate. You take the time to watch their facial expressions and nonverbal cues, make inferences, and then respond. There aren't shiny lights, buttons, or advertisements to look at while we wait. Boredom. How did we ever survive a solid ten minutes without something winking at us and telling us what winners we are? The machine makes real people look slow and dull by comparison, and this skewed view manipulates our fear of time scarcity. If we are headed into eternity, is there really a time problem? *"Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it until he receives the early and latter rain."* (Jas 5:7).
3. Teamwork. Being in a room full of people working toward the same goal as you is energizing, whether going into the gym or the office.

Online, you can't physically see who in the group is actively working alongside you on the project, and it gets discouraging quickly. Nehemiah built more than a wall. He built a community. He says, "*the people had a mind to work.*" (Neh 4:6)—a mindset they were willing to fight for. (Neh 4:21). The energy a physical group creates can't be underestimated. From basketball to family reunions, every team effort requires showing up in person and feeling that pulse. Don't forsake assembling, as Hebrews 10:25 cautions, but connect and build each other up.

4. Active Communication. Suppertime used to be the social hub. We found out what we needed to know around the campfire. The back and forth, give and take, question and answer of the real-time conversation teach a million small social norms in the background, too. It forces you

to exercise skills like empathy and reflective listening. Real-time communication forces you to learn the wisdom of choosing when to speak and what to say, forming and reforming opinions and replies on the fly. You learn both your place and your possibilities in society, bring your attention to the table, contribute to the mood, and share the victories and defeats of your people. You won't catch politicians or kings problem-solving online. A civil war was averted in Joshua 22 because they decided to debunk the long-distance rumors of verse 11 with some face-to-face communication.

5. Conflict resolution skills. How easy it is on social media to simply ghost when a conversation appears to be going south. How tempting it is to take cyber revenge when we feel slighted. It is hard to convey exactly what we mean



via a short text. Even emojis are misinterpreted. If only there were a way to numb (or indulge!) those pesky uncomfortable feelings... Using social media as a pacifier or a microphone is both immature and socially irresponsible. Discomfort is our opportunity to grow. *"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law."* (Gal 5:22-23). Learn the difference between responding and reacting. Tap into wisdom before jumping to conclusions. Feel all those messy feels and learn the skills to handle conflict in real-time and space maturely.

6. How to shelve your ego. Social media creates a tense, unnecessary, and unhealthy atmosphere of comparison and competition. Scrolling social media can lead to jealousy, envy, and the impulse to act on it. It can also make you feel depressed or full of FOMO (fear of missing out) anxiety. This is your ego's fight-or-flight response. We are all a hot mess. If there were such a thing as perfection, we'd not need Christ. 1 Samuel 16:7 adjusts our point of view nicely because *"people look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."* Your real friends know all about you and love you anyway. They make room for your growth. When you spend time with whole people—not just the parts they post—you can relax and put your ego back on the shelf.

7. Personal integrity and self-respect.

If you wouldn't think of adding a pic of your latest party to your resume, don't add it to your social media. Social media strips away your privacy and reveals your sloppy underside to browsing employers. On the other hand, carefully curated images that represent only the persona we want the world to see allow us to be anything or anyone at any time online. Sometimes, we are different people in different places simultaneously. And there are no stakes involved. If social media reacts negatively, we can simply delete it. If the person in front of us calls us on a false front, we have to explain our incongruities. Working with real-world consequences keeps you from compromising your self-respect. *"Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but whoever takes crooked paths will be found out."* (Prov 10:9).

Social media is something to remain vigilant about. So long as your tech remains the servant and not the master, it can be used for good things. It will hold exactly the amount of power you bequeath it. If the tide begins to turn... turn it off.

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me... What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? (Matt. 16:24, 26).

Jolie Tunnell,
San Diego Ecclesia, CA

FULNESS, FAITHLESSNESS AND FAMILY DYSFUNCTION

By Nancy Brinkerhoff

SOME families of the Bible are shockingly dysfunctional. The Old Testament from the first recorded family torn apart by murder gives us vivid and ugly pictures of families facing adultery, incest, rape, and estrangement. But perhaps the most tragic of all the Biblical family dramas is tucked in just before the end of the Old Testament, in the oft-ignored book of Hosea.

The Lord said to Hosea, “Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord.” (Hos 1:2).¹

The situation is difficult even to imagine. God asked a faithful young brother to give up the plans he had for his own life and accept the stunning pain and embarrassment of an unfaithful wife and illegitimate

children. But somehow, Hosea was a man who could take this on. He was willing to live God's plan and share God's pain if that was the way to reach God's people.

Because, of course, Hosea's family was to be an enacted parable. It was a living picture of God's love, despite Israel's unfaithfulness. Hosea 2 presents a poem that begins to describe Hosea's relationship troubles. But before too long, the reader realizes it is giving important insight into God's marriage to Israel. Along the way, the poem highlights some powerful lessons for our families today and how we, too, are affected by faithlessness and striving for the "fulness of bread."

For she said, "I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink." (Hos 2:5).

The bride in the poem had a very specific reason for her infidelity: the wealth she believed her lovers would give her. This emphasis on specific material things comes up again a few verses later, when God states, "She did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished on her silver and gold." (2:8). The punishment God threatens

is again related to the bride's desire for goods. "Therefore, I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its season, and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness." (2:9). Finally, at the end of the poem is a list of material things that describe the benefits of reconciliation. "The earth will respond to the grain, the new wine, and the olive oil." (2:22).

There must be a point to these repeated lists of physical goods in a story about marital and spiritual unfaithfulness. Somehow all the stuff—and who was providing it—was an important part of the story God told through Hosea.

This result is not surprising, considering the Bible's words used to describe the bride's sin. The Hebrew word for adultery, referenced several times in this story, is used for both marital unfaithfulness and idolatry (Strong's #5003). But the word used most often in the book of Hosea comes from a completely different Hebrew root (Strong's #2181).

The word for adultery used most often in the book of Hosea comes from a completely different Hebrew root.

The blessings we have already been given simply cause us to desire more. So, we turn to sources apart from God to provide for our needs and only end up more unhappy and unthankful. And the vicious cycle of grasping and striving continues.

This word carries the specific meaning of prostitution and implies the idea of being well-fed. The motive for the wife's sexual sin was the material things she perceived she would gain beyond what her husband could provide for her.

This idea is intriguing on a number of levels. God—the husband in the poem—cared for His bride's needs. He not only gave her enough to eat, but He also *“lavished on her silver and gold.”* (2:8).

But she could not see it! In her eyes, she could not trust her husband to provide for her, so she took matters into her own hands. And the result was infidelity, a shattered marriage, and a broken family.

It is a decidedly uncomfortable picture: given plenty, lacking faith and desiring more. But, if we are honest with ourselves, it is a picture many believers today can relate to. However much or little we have, it can be tremendously difficult to trust that God will meet our needs.

It is far too easy to begin thinking in this decadent society that the things we have been given just aren't enough. In theory, we can acknowledge God has lavished His gifts on us like He *“lavished on her silver and gold.”* But yet, we can still privately feel God is

not providing “enough.” Enough sleep, enough time, enough help, enough love and companionship when we're single, enough money to pay bills, enough corn and wine and wool and linen and olive oil...

This niggling feeling of dissatisfaction tempts us to act unfaithful towards God in various ways. No, we don't act out as dramatically as Gomer did. Thankfully most of us have little to no experience with literal prostitution. But we all have our own personal ways of getting our needs met when we feel deprived. And they can be almost as destructive to ourselves and our families as the bride's prostitution in Hosea.

It is a bit frightening how such a shocking, family-shattering story can stem from simply not recognizing God's provision in our lives. But it is no coincidence that this focus on materialism and idolatry comes up concerning both the harlotry of Hosea's wife and the sin of Sodom. Instead of inspiring gratefulness, too often, the fulness of bread has exactly the opposite effect. Hosea records about Israel: *“But when they had grazed, they became full, they were filled, and their heart was lifted up; therefore, they forgot me.”* (Hos 13:6, ESV). The blessings we have already

been given simply cause us to desire more. So, we turn to sources apart from God to provide for our needs and only end up more unhappy and unthankful. And the vicious cycle of grasping and striving continues.

There is a poignant passage in Deuteronomy that speaks to this problem: *“Because you did not serve the LORD your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity, therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the LORD sends against you.”* (Deut 28:47-48 NIV).

It is a stark choice, just as applicable in our age of plenty as it was to ancient Israel. Will we and our families serve God now with thankfulness and joy? Or will we follow Hosea’s Israel and lose it all in service to something else or in the work of our hands. (Hos 14:3).

Thankfulness does not come naturally to us humans. Surrounded by affluence and the fulness of bread, our natural tendency is to reflect on what we don’t have rather than find gratitude for what we do. The habits of thankfulness must be constantly retaught to our children and ourselves. Left to our own devices, we complain easily about our ecclesia, family, health, finances, and government. It takes diligent effort to train ourselves to become

people of gratitude.

Many of us have heard the old prayer, “For what we are about to receive, may the LORD make us truly thankful.”

There is a certain recognition that we need divine help to become people of thankfulness. We often cannot muster up gratitude on our own. So, we pray for God to change our hearts this way, as in many others.

And we create habits for ourselves and our families to teach and reinforce gratitude. Of course, it is easy to remind someone else to stop complaining

and be thankful for what they have. What is harder is modeling true gratitude, especially in the face of our problems and unmet needs. Yet this is the perspective we must learn.

Because, in these days of Sodom, when so many of us do have fulness of bread, we have the same choice as Israel did so long ago. We can either *“serve the LORD your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity,”* or *“in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the LORD sends against you.”*

Nancy Brinkerhoff,
(Denver Ecclesia, CO)

What is harder
is modeling true
gratitude, especially
in the face of our
problems and
unmet needs.
Yet this is the
perspective we
must learn.

¹ All Scriptural citations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the English Standard Version.



FULNESS OF BREAD

By Dan Styles

OF all the sins of Sodom listed in Ezekiel 16:49-50, “*fulness of bread*” seems the most benign. What’s wrong with a good meal leading to that inevitable statement, “I can’t eat another bite,” usually followed by a few more bites!? The Hebrew word *siba* translates as “*fulness*,” which means being satisfied or eating one’s fill. The related word *soba* has a similar meaning and is used in both negative (Exod 16:3—the children of Israel eating their fill in Egypt) and positive ways (Prov 13:25

“The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul.”) The implication is clearly negative here in Ezekiel 16 and likely refers to habitual over-indulgence enabled by an extravagant lifestyle. The ESV sums things up well by translating the phrase “*excess of food*.”

Gluttony is frequently associated with other sins. In Deut 21:18-21, the stubborn and rebellious son is called a glutton and a drunkard, clearly a total package of forsaking God’s

commandments and giving oneself over to an uncontrolled lifestyle of over-indulgence we see so prevalent today. In 1 Cor 10:7, idolatry, eating, drinking, and revelry are all packaged together when the Corinthians are reminded of Israel's failings in the wilderness. The apostle Paul says "*the enemies of the cross of Christ*" in Philippians 3:17-19, the Judaistic elite who had not forsaken this status for Christ, were those who had their "*god is their belly*" and who did "*mind earthly things.*" And lastly and most humorously, the poor Cretans were described in Titus 1:12 as "*always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.*"

Of course, one key element of leading an indulgent and over-satiated lifestyle is the ability to afford it. This was clearly the case with the Sodomites as they also enjoyed "*abundance of idleness.*" While sadly, many in the world today still struggle with sufficient food supply, many others are living in materially blessed situations where the constant pursuit of self-satisfaction is an option. Today, we see the world given over to excesses of all kinds, including over-eating, over-drinking, and a life of jumping from one episode of excess to the next. Those who have had the opportunity to live in a third-world country and then return to their more prosperous homeland are almost uniformly struck by the level of materialism and pursuit of wealth and the pleasures it supposedly brings, even if they hadn't noticed it as much before. This brings us to our central question for this article, "How should we deal with our material blessings, especially in the ecclesial context?" How can we avoid Sodom's mistakes in leveraging

their prosperity to cater to themselves? 1 Timothy is a great place to find guidance and direction for ecclesial life issues. It could be described as a "Guide for Ecclesial Life" and contains a mountain of information on how ecclesias should be organized and, most importantly, function. It is addressed to Paul's faithful helper, Timothy, who had been left at Ephesus to shepherd that ecclesia (1 Tim 1:3). It contains an ecclesial "mission statement" in 1:15-16. It covers the imperative of ecclesial preaching in 2:1-7. The epistle focuses on the importance of healthy teaching from God's word (4:13-16), avoiding unhealthy teaching that results in arguments and strife (6:2-5). Pastoral care should be a huge focus of any ecclesial family, ensuring that those with spiritual or physical struggles are attended to in love (5:10; 6:18). The ecclesial organization is addressed, including qualifications for the leaders (bishops) and workers (deacons) in 3:1-13. Not surprisingly, in such complete coverage of ecclesial issues, the topic of riches and how to use them is addressed.

In 1 Timothy 6, we see the Apostle start to address the issue of money in the ecclesia by stating, "*But godliness with contentment is great gain.*" (v. 6). This statement is targeted at the Judaizers who were, the main source of discord and ecclesial trouble in this epistle. They are first mentioned in chapter 1:4-7, where they are cited for "*vain jangling*" (empty or meaningless talking). While they desired "*to be teachers of the law,*" they were just prattling on about "*fables*" and "*endless genealogies*" which added no value to the ecclesial scene. Worse than that, their teachings, not surprisingly,

resulted in arguments and strife (1 Tim 4:7; 6:4-5, 20). If that wasn't bad enough, they were also looking to make some money with their dysfunctional teachings, "*supposing that gain is godliness.*" (6:5). Titus's sister epistle makes this behavior clearer in 1:11, "*teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.*" This disturbing trend of those seeking to enrich themselves from ecclesia work prompted the apostle to address the issue of money in general.

The apostle starts with a play on the word "gain" by stating that our true gain is "*godliness with contentment.*" Godliness will lead to "*treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.*" (Matt 6:20). Now that reserve of a godly life being built up in heaven is the "bank account" that matters! Hand-in-hand with godliness is contentment, the ability to be satisfied with whatever

material state God has placed us in, something the Apostle had to learn himself (Phil 4:11). The Apostle builds on this point in 1 Timothy 6:7 by stating the seemingly obvious, "*For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.*" For those of us that have had the somber experience of being close to a loved one or relative in their last days before they fell asleep, this lesson is especially brought home. All the stocks, bonds, and cash are as worthless to that person as the paper they are written on. The only thing that matters at that point are

the treasures laid up in heaven. In verse 8, the point is reinforced, "*And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.*" God has promised to take care of our daily needs if we seek His kingdom first (Matt 6:33). The question now becomes, what if we have been blessed with more than we need for daily survival?

Careful reading is essential for verse 9. It doesn't say the "rich fall into a temptation and a snare" but "*they that will be rich.*" We know many of God's faithful servants were blessed with riches, including Abraham, Job, and Lydia, to name a few. This list goes on. The issue is not wealth in and of itself, but that riches can easily become an

all-consuming focus if we are not careful. The ESV translates this phrase as "*those that desire to be rich.*" Not only can this path be tempting for many, but it can also become a snare, or a trap, as the NIV translates.

It can be a temptation to

head down this path of subjugating all else to the pursuit of riches, sacrificing family and ecclesia, which eventually bring tragic consequences. While lusting after the "*fulness of bread*" and other indulgences enjoyed by those of Sodom can sound attractive, such a short-term view is foolish and hurtful, as the Apostle points out. Interestingly the word "*drown*" is used to describe the effect of such foolish priorities. This is indeed the Greek word for "going under water." It is used only at other times when the disciples' boats began to sink after the great draught of fishes

What if we have
been blessed with
more than we
need for daily
survival...?

in Luke 5:7. The idea is not a financial reversal but that pursuing riches as a way of contentment is a trap, as Paul earlier states. Experts tell us that the material possessions and experiences they provide quickly lose their luster and leave human nature lusting for more (Eccl 5:10; 6:7). Those who head down this path of pursuit of riches find that there is always someone richer and ironically live in a state of envy (Jas 4:5). We can see how right Paul describes such a misguided approach as a trap, a downward spiral, a gradual going under water.

Careful reading is also required in verse 10. The verse doesn't say "money is the root of all evil" but "*the love of money is the root of all evil.*" Once again, if God blesses us with wealth, the key is not to fall in love with it but use it in the right way, as we will see in coming verses. Such covetousness causes us to "*err from the faith,*" which has the idea of straying away from the faith. The greatest tragedy is that such a life of self-indulgence ironically leaves one in a state described at the end of verse 10, being "*pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*" How could a life of pursuit of riches and self-focus lead to such a state, you might ask? The experts once again point out that the true sources of lasting joy are friendships, supportive communities, and serving others. None of these are

the focus of those that pursue riches at all costs, leaving them, in many cases, the most miserable. Hopefully, we see why the sin of "*fulness of bread*" is so serious. It leads us down a path of spiritual demise, misery in this life and neglecting our responsibilities towards our ecclesia.

However, Paul covers later in 1 Timothy 6 the right way to use the material blessings. As this topic is getting so much "press" in this short epistle, it clearly is an issue that can negatively affect ecclesias if we are not mindful of Paul's inspired advice. Ephesus was a prosperous commercial hub in the Roman Empire, and as such many believers were well off. Some owned slaves, as we see in 1 Tim. 6:2. The key issue for these rich believers is to be not "*high-minded*" or proud and to not "*trust*" in riches, which Paul reminds them are "*uncertain*" in v. 17. The key is where to place our trust. When we see tumultuous world events that could be the harbinger of Christ's return, are we more concerned about their negative impact on our stock portfolio or just excited that Christ could be right around the corner? Trust in God is Paul's charge, not in wealth! Neither has God called us to a life of self-depravation, as He gives "*us richly all things to enjoy.*" With the right attitude, God has given us things like food, planned time away from our

Indeed, wealth is a gift if used wisely, and many generous brethren and sisters over the years have made great positive impacts on the Truth, enabling things such as the purchase or building of new ecclesial halls, donating towards mission work or to the needs of our growing community of brethren and sisters in less affluent countries.

labors, and the beauty of His Creation as just some of the things we should enjoy (Acts 14:15-17).

In verse 18, Paul gets to the right way of using riches. Indeed, wealth is a gift if used wisely, and many generous brethren and sisters over the years have made great positive impacts on the Truth, enabling things such as the purchase or building of new ecclesial halls, donating towards mission work or to the needs of our growing community of brethren and sisters in less affluent countries. Note the focus is on the wealthy **doing** good and being rich in **good works**. While they certainly should be active in the work of the ecclesia and not above volunteering for various working roles, the rest of the verse clearly indicates that part of their activity in the Truth means “getting the checkbook out” and helping with the regular and special expenses of ecclesial life according to their blessings. The KJV finishes this verse “*ready to distribute, willing to communicate,*” Other versions make the meaning clearer, “*to be generous and ready to share.*” (ESV). Ecclesial families benefit when we see those materially blessed using those gifts to be hospitable, generously to ecclesial projects and needs in their local ecclesia and elsewhere. Many of us will know of such cases, although the generosity is quite anonymous in other cases. In any case, we are thankful they have decided to use their gift of wealth to enhance the fellowship and growth of the spiritual family both near and far.

Paul completes this section with a fun use of terms associated with riches. In verse 19, “*laying in store*” has the idea of “treasure away” or “laying up abundance for future use.” As we already mentioned, this is the treasure laid up in heaven for those who follow Christ (Matt 6:20). What a beautiful completion of this section that right use of riches in this life builds up the eternal riches, life in the Kingdom forever. The phrase “*a good foundation*” can also refer to a foundational bank account, one that is insured from losses, as Bro. Nicholls suggests in his book *Letters to Timothy and Titus*. Once again, our thoughts are drawn to the spiritual riches we hope to inherit in the kingdom age.

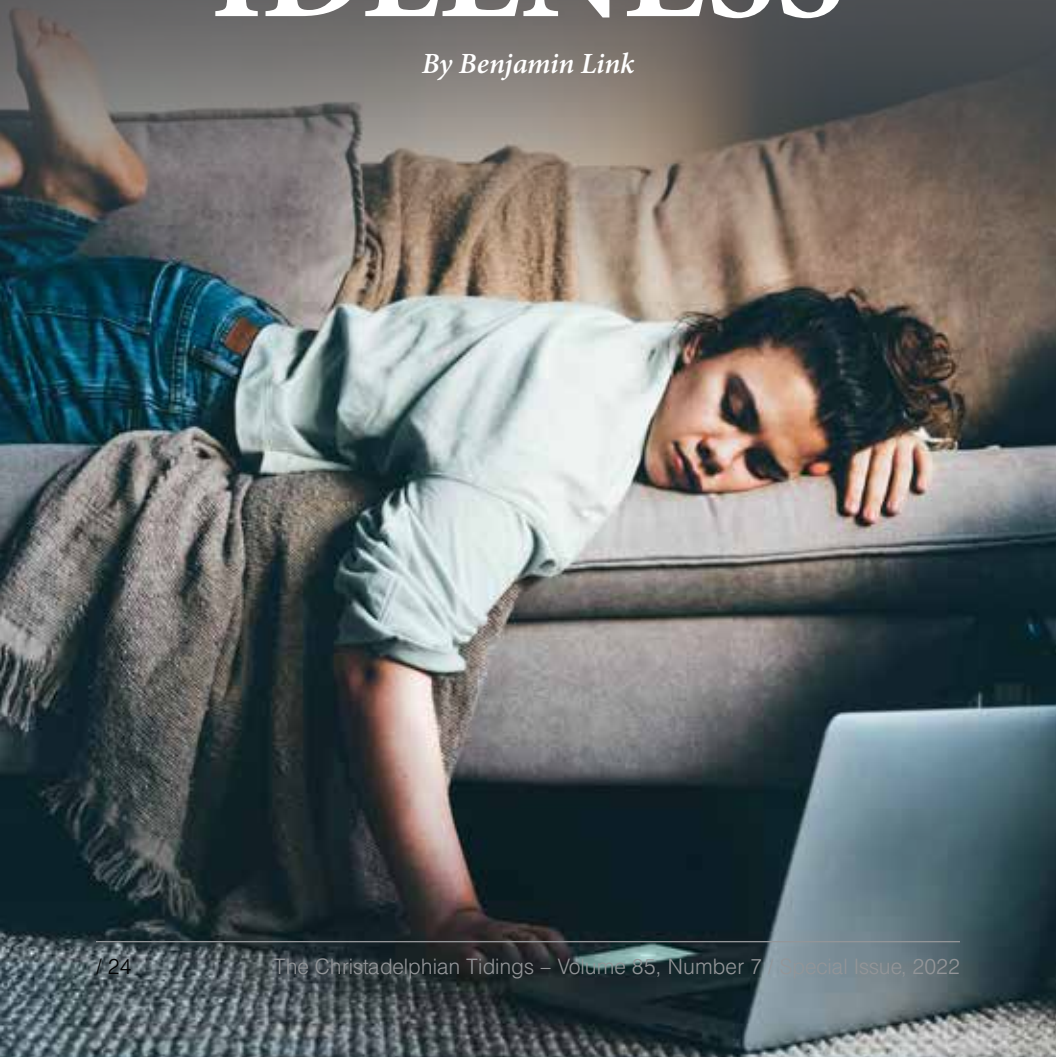
In conclusion, we see that “*fulness of bread*” is indeed a serious sin of Sodom, for it implies a life dedicated to the pursuit of riches and self-satisfaction. The Apostle Paul shows us the right way to view riches in our life. While never becoming an all-encompassing pursuit, if we are blessed with them, we have an opportunity to be generous. We do great good in the ecclesia, laying a treasure for ourselves “*where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.*” (Matt 6:20).

Dan Styles,
(Ann Arbor Ecclesia, MI)

SPECIAL ISSUE: ABUNDANCE OF IDLENESS

ABUNDANCE OF IDLENESS

By Benjamin Link



MY wife and I are shopping for our first home. It's exciting, but also a little overwhelming. There are so many combinations of lot sizes, floor plans and architectural styles. Each home is unique, but we also find that every open house we visit includes a few common elements: some form of central heating, running water, ranges and microwaves, washers and dryers. We couldn't imagine living without these conveniences. They are practically necessities today, but this hasn't always been the case. In 1890, only 24 percent of American homes had running water,¹ and each home had to haul seven tons of coal and 9,000 gallons of water on average each year.² Just imagine the effort of gathering fuel to keep a fire stoked, or heating water on a stove to wash.

Technological changes have not only simplified household tasks, but they have also transformed every industry. The economic engine of corporate America has been optimized and fine-tuned to exploit every marginal gain, and as a result, citizens of this nation have long enjoyed an increasing standard of living. University of Pennsylvania professor of economics, Jeremy Greenwood, writes "The average time spent working by an adult in the market declines with economic development... in richer countries, people spend more time on leisure."³ Academic researchers Aguiar and Hurst looked at survey data collected in the United States from 1965 to 2003 and determined that leisure time increased up to "8.1 hours per week for the average non-retired adult since 1965."⁴

This may come as a surprise to many of us who feel like there are limitless demands on our time, even after our duties at work and household tasks have been accomplished. But it is important to recognize that the trend in developed nations has been towards increasing time available to pursue hobbies, recreation and other outside interests. This is the time that (seemingly) belongs to us—our personal time. Despite the trend towards increasing leisure time, some of us have very little time of our own to offer our LORD. It may be a few minutes after working a double-shift or before leaving for our second job. Those few minutes devoted to the LORD are precious like the widow's two mites.

The rest of us have quite a bit more to sacrifice. We dutifully perform our daily readings and attend the ecclesial meetings. Still, like the wealthy donors Jesus observed casting into the treasury out of their abundance, we have so much left over that could be devoted as an offering to the LORD. Instead, that time often goes to video games, ESPN or HGTV, idle scrolling on social media and many other time sinks. The LORD teaches that "*to whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.*" (Luke 12:48). It is precisely because we have so much that we must be very honest about how we use our time.

This is a subject I find difficult to write about because it can easily become preachy and tedious, like the clichéd observation that we each get 86,400 seconds in a day, and shame on us for failing to make every one of them count. This sort of message usually fails to achieve any transformative effect

beyond a sense of guilt for mismanaging our time. With this danger in mind, we should preface our consideration by acknowledging the need for diversions from the regular tasks that occupy us. Even Jesus found moments of enjoyment and repose. He celebrated the wedding of a family friend and accepted invitations to dinner. He sought solitude in the mountain and found rest on a ship while transiting the Sea of Galilee. Yet in each of these familiar stories, Jesus found ways to glorify his father. Even in his lighter moments, our Lord's vocation and identity consistently shine through.

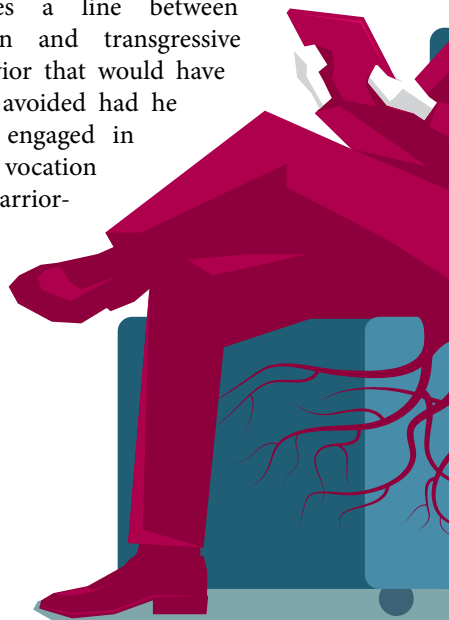
Remarking on the topic of leisure in 1931, one Christadelphian author wrote "Recreation is good. 'All work and no play' are not an arrangement which the scriptures commend."⁵ The same author goes on to address two general categories where our use of leisure time can become problematic: (1) "any recreation, however innocent and lawful... indulged in at the expense of express duty," and (2) "recreation which encourages thoughts and feelings which it is our duty to subdue and conquer."

The first category of leisure time consists of activities that are generally viewed as harmless but could divert us from our central pursuit as disciples of Christ. The author gives examples of biking on a Sunday morning or going to a concert in the park instead of a public lecture. While supporting ecclesial events is an essential part of fellowship, faithful attendance at the meeting hall is only one avenue by which we may show the LORD our devotion. Jesus teaches that *"where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."* (Matt 6:21). This

is a useful diagnostic for us. If time is money, then our leisure time is treasure and according to Jesus that makes it the measure of our heart's desire.

It's been said idolatry is "turning a good thing into an ultimate thing." When we take an activity, however harmless by itself, and elevate it into the object of our life's pursuit ("an ultimate thing"), then we have made a false god from it. There are probably more egregious forms of idolatry out there, but perhaps these harmless activities are all the more dangerous because they can slip under our guard. It takes discernment to know when our pursuit of otherwise innocuous recreation has crossed an invisible line and become an idol to us.

The second leisure category is generally a little easier to identify by its connection to the sinful desire. We see this when David lounges on his rooftop and finds himself lusting after a beautiful woman. David crosses a line between benign and transgressive behavior that would have been avoided had he been engaged in his vocation as warrior-



king. When recalled from battle, Uriah is more righteous than the king and refuses the comforts of his wife and home while his fellow soldiers are camped in the field of battle.

Like David, Ahab's treachery against Naboth seems to be associated with a time when he was idle at home. The prophet rebukes Ahab for releasing Ben-hadad, and *"the king of Israel went to his house vexed and sullen and came to Samaria."* (1 Kgs 20:43). This sets up the following scene: *"After this Ahab said to Naboth, 'Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house.'" (1 Kgs 21:2).* Like David, Ahab

has a wandering eye. The king mopes in bed (v. 4) when his desire is not gratified, and the story sadly leads to another righteous man's death.



How soon would the vineyard have left his mind if he had persisted in his campaign against Syria?

In the 4th Century, Jerome wrote, "engage in some occupation, so that the devil may always find you busy."⁶ This may be the source of the modern proverb "idle hands are the devil's playthings," meaning that indolence can lead us into sin. Expressed as a positive, the converse of this message gives us reason to be hopeful. The time we spend serving God can keep us from succumbing to temptation. When we fully commit our leisure time to a vocation ordained by God (such as supporting our spouse, raising children, serving the ecclesia or preaching the gospel), we can be delivered from downright harmful temptations.

In my experience, temptations have always seemed less attractive during life periods where I've been highly involved in ecclesial duties or enjoyed meaningful relationships built around the gospel. Periods, where I've been isolated and absented myself of useful vineyard work, are also times I recall feeling untethered and spiritually adrift. I realize this is only anecdotal evidence, but perhaps you've had these experiences also? I can't help but wonder if this is the intended message behind the constant exhortations towards industry in Proverbs: *"A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man."* (Prov 6:10-11). Of course, there is a valid surface-level interpretation, but God didn't give

us the wisdom of Solomon simply to protect us from going broke. There's a spiritual principle at work here. When Solomon implores us to rise from our sleep, shouldn't our minds fly to Paul's call to wakefulness: "*It is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed?*" (Rom 13:11).

We may not be spiritually asleep, but do we let ourselves doze? Do we stumble through life drowsy and nodding off? Are we like the long-haul trucker who startles awake in the wrong lane facing oncoming traffic? Paul warns us we cannot escape sudden destruction if we "*sleep as others do*" (1 Thess 5:6) but he also encourages us that as "*children*

of the light, children of the day... God has not destined us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." (v. 5, 9). We reject the black and dreamless sleep brought on by sin's soporific influence because we have been offered such a better state of rest. We look for refreshment in well-watered pastures, protected by a shepherd who invites us to lie down in true repose. But until he brings us to that place, may we remain alert and watchful, intent on following our shepherd's footsteps.

*Benjamin Link
(Stoughton Ecclesia, MA)*

¹ *The Enduring Vision*, Fifth Edition, Paul S. Boyer, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Clifford E. Clark, Jr., Carleton College, et al., *Technology and Culture*: Chapter 18


² Greenwood, Jeremy. *Evolving Households: The Imprint of Technology on Life*. United States, MIT Press, 2019. p. 48.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Aguiar, Mark, and Erik Hurst. "Measuring Trends in Leisure: The Allocation of Time over Five Decades." *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. 122, no. 3, Aug. 2007, pp. 969–1006

⁵ Jannaway, A. T. "Meditations." *The Christadelphian*, vol. 50, no. 592, Oct. 1913, p. 436.

⁶ *Letters*, CXXV xi.



*We look for refreshment in well-watered pastures,
protected by a shepherd who invites us to lie down in
true repose.*



APATHY IN THE LIFE OF A BELIEVER

By Noah Abel

IT'S a Sunday morning. You're at the meeting, and the Recording Brother goes up to the podium to give the ecclesial announcements. He greets everyone, announces that all upcoming events are by the Father's will, and dives into the events and activities coming up shortly. Same as the last Sunday. He then starts talking about the help needed. He mentions speakers needed for the upcoming Bible class schedule and volunteers to bring food for a study weekend next month, etc. Stuff for other people to do, obviously. After finishing up there, the brother then dives into the

usual list of physically and spiritually needy brothers and sisters. It's the usual names mentioned. You've heard their names in the announcements for weeks now. You yawn, glance at your phone, and wonder just how long he's going to stay up there yammering away (see Amos 8:4-6 for a Biblical example of this mindset).

This is apathy. Perhaps you did not recognize it by this term and just know the results of its effects. Maybe it's a small feeling that you know is wrong, but in the grand scheme of things, you dismiss it as a minor issue. Or

maybe you didn't even realize it was an issue. However, it is a danger, and the danger is genuine to us as believers living in the last days before the return of our Lord. The world is constantly pushing us to care about ourselves: pursue this career, make this amount of money, and buy that new thing. We are driven into more and more connections with people and activities around us. Sometimes these activities are seemingly harmless. Yet further connections outside can decrease those within ecclesial life, leading to a disconnect from what truly matters. Left unchecked and unrecognized by the individual in question, apathy can grow from a minuscule blight in the life of a believer into complete spiritual stagnation. It can quite literally ruin our lives without us even knowing. Therefore, it is vital we identify the dangers of spiritual apathy, to define apathy in ecclesial life, and draw out spiritual methods from the Bible to combat apathy in our own lives as we strive together toward that glorious day of Christ's return.

According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, "apathy" is defined as a "lack of feeling or emotion or a lack of interest or concern."

The English word apathy is derived from the Greek word *apatheia*, meaning without feeling or emotion or just plain indifference. Spiritually, the term apathy takes on a slightly different meaning. Spiritual apathy often places our care on things below rather than

those above, but it's not always as easy as that. Spiritual apathy is a lack of action in spiritual matters. It's getting stuck in the same old rut, performing service sometimes more with our lips than our heart. In question are our priorities, habits, and, most importantly, our actions (or lack thereof). What are we doing or not doing? Are we lazy? What are our priorities? Are we comfortable working in the Ecclesia? What are we concentrating most on in our lives? These are all vital questions that require real introspective work. They also bring up the question: How can we combat these feelings?

As with all things, the answers to our problems can be found within the inspired word of God. As Bible students, we are commanded to "*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" (2 Tim 2:15). So, let's search: what does the Bible have to say about apathy? How can we combat it in our lives?

Sometimes, apathy can stem from sheer laziness. Perhaps we have gotten used to chugging along on our work grind, coming to the meeting and Bible class, rinse, repeat (I certainly have found myself here multiple times). Maybe the idea of

adding a large workload in spiritual life has become nauseating. We may say, "Never! I would never think that!" However, it's an incredibly easy feeling to have. Solomon wrote, "*The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I*

Left unchecked and unrecognized by the individual in question, apathy can grow from a minuscule blight in the life of a believer into complete spiritual stagnation.

shall be slain in the streets.” (Prov 26:13). This frame of mind is perhaps one of the easiest forms of apathy for us to slip into. Like the slothful man in Proverbs, we can develop a thousand excuses to not do the work. We can start thinking, “Well, I believe in the gospel message; I attend all of the ecclesial functions, isn’t that good enough?” This is what many Christian denominations choose to believe, and we can see how tempting that is. However, some Bible reading shows just how dangerous this frame of mind is.

Take the parable of the talents, for example. Jesus, in Matthew 25:24-26, 30, at the end of the parable, states:

Then he which had received the one talent came and said... I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed... cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Not all the servants were given the same talents, and not all yielded the same results. Yet we can see what happened to the servant who chose to do nothing. Likewise, we are given abilities. Some more, some less. But our Heavenly Father desires action. In the chapter prior, Matthew 24:45-46 says, “*Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.*”

Like the servant who provides for the household, we will be rewarded at the return of Christ for our actions and judged for our inaction. James drives home this principle well in James 2:14-17 (ESV):

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Faith is not enough. We cannot just sit around letting others perform work in the ecclesia. To do so would be to render our faith worthless.

We must act! Action is the only surefire way to develop our faith, as the Scriptures show. Sometimes, this can be uncomfortable. But we know of many individuals in the Bible who felt the same. Moses is a case in point. In Exodus 4:10, he says to the Angel,

And Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.

Leading his people did not make Moses comfortable. Yet it was a work that needed to be done, and he did it faithfully. There are numerous roles in the ecclesia, each of equal importance. Be it speaking, playing the piano, or anything else; a role is there for all of us, so long as we answer the call and act.

Another major area that can cause apathy in our lives is our priorities. Is God truly first in our lives? If anyone asked, we would answer yes. But do our actions really show that? Could a stranger notice our devotion to the Truth from a short conversation or by observing what we do? It's remarkably easy to get so wrapped up in our own lives that we become isolated from ecclesial life and from what's truly important. The scriptures hold countless examples of this sad truth. A prime example of this is King Solomon, a figure we are undoubtedly familiar with. He began his reign so perfectly; a stunning figure of Jesus ruling in the Millennium, building a remarkable temple to God, dealing out wise judgments to all that came before him. Yet in his power and riches he got caught up in the pleasures that surrounded him. He let his priorities shift from his God to his countless wives, resulting in the division of Israel and Judah. Solomon wrote,

Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun. (Eccl 2:11).

Solomon became indifferent to the things of the Spirit, and turned to the things of the world, and he found it to all be vanity.

Haggai the prophet witnessed a similar issue in the days of Jewish exile in Babylon:

Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built. Then came

the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. (Hag 1:2-7).

The issue here was a matter of priority. The people were so busy building up their houses and doing business that they did not think to give time to God's house. Are we dwelling in "ceiled" houses? Do we truly prioritize spiritual life over everything else, as we are instructed to do?

Spiritual apathy is a real danger to us. However, we should not be discouraged by this, but be uplifted that our Father has provided His inspired word that's full of ways we can identify and combat these feelings! Most importantly, as believers, we need to remember that our Lord and Savior is returning soon. We can see this in the signs surrounding us. Will we be found ready and waiting, our lamps filled with oil, working diligently in service to our Father, or will we be caught with no oil in our lamps, apathetic to what's truly important?

Noah Abel,
(Ann Arbor Ecclesia, MI)

SERVING OUR NEIGHBORS

By Anonymous Sisters

Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matt 5:16 NIV).

THERE are many opportunities to shine our light as believers in Christ, and lots of good work to be done in our local communities. Our heavenly Father cares for the poor of this world and encourages us to share what He has provided us with those in need. He commanded His people Israel to do the same.

For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.' (Deut 15:11)

Leviticus 23:22 also speaks of being generous to both those living among us and to the foreigners. When we show the love of God to those in need, we are doing God's will and pleasing Him.

These "good deeds" we do to glorify the Father are something we do individually or as an ecclesia. Our ecclesia has participated in different ways of helping our local community, and we would like to share some of our experiences as an example for your ecclesia. Regardless of the size of your community, there are always ways to help those in need.



One of the most direct ways to help people is to provide food. Most communities have food pantries that accept food donations to those in need. We have had food drives in our ecclesia for such places, have donated food directly to the facility, and have volunteered hours of service sorting and distributing the food. This has also been a great experience to share with our young people. It is invaluable for our teens to be educated on the needs others are experiencing in their own communities. It can give us some much-needed perspective, regardless of age. *“The generous will themselves be blessed, for they share their food with the poor.”* (Prov 22:9).

We have also partnered with a local homeless shelter that provides food and clothing to those living on the streets. We have ecclesial drives for their needs (food, clothing, toiletries, fast food gift cards, etc.), and we also have volunteers who help onsite with office duties, computer work and preparing food boxes to be distributed.

Another place to share God’s love is at Domestic Violence Shelters. There are women and children there who have both physical and emotional needs we can help with. This kind of helping usually requires some education and training, but one member of our ecclesia took a 12-hour training course that well equipped her to be useful there. The tasks included transporting clients to their appointments, grocery shopping, and taking their children out to play while the mother participated in counseling sessions. Our ecclesia also did a building project in the backyard of a shelter and provided the residents with a new play structure for the children. There were many opportunities to share the love of Christ, and some families were even brought to Sunday School.

Contacting local Social Services, both county and private organizations have provided other opportunities for our ecclesia to contribute. We have given holiday meals and gifts, and provided bags of supplies for children taken into foster care—such as clothing, stuffed

animals, and homemade blankets. We include preaching materials or contact information for our ecclesia whenever it is accepted.

Recently, we partnered with a Christadelphian charity called The Garden Outreach Project www.thegardenoutreach.org. Our Sisters' Class made "Bags of Love" that we filled with Bibles, coloring books, art supplies, and toiletry and personal care items. These were distributed through a local Family Services organization to families that could benefit. The Garden Outreach Project website has helpful ideas of how you or your ecclesia can support your local community.

These are some ways our ecclesia has reached out to help in our community. There are so many possibilities to help that everyone can find a way to contribute. Whatever skillset God has given you, or whatever hobby you're interested in, there is a way to convert that into a means to help others. Of course, there are always financial ways to help, and those are meaningful contributions.

The blessing of helping in person has the opportunity to share the saving power of Jesus' love and derive the benefit of gaining personal perspective. We have so much to be thankful for every day, and we sometimes forget to appreciate all that has been given to us. Leaving the comfort of our homes and meeting people who are struggling will remind us of what has been done for us.

Serving in our Ecclesias

Serving one another in our ecclesial families is an integral part of our discipleship in Christ. Our Father's intention is for us to be born into and raised in a family structure that provides for our daily needs, nurturing, and guidance. It starts at birth, continues into adulthood, and throughout our lives. We are part of a natural family. When we take on the name of Christ, we become part of a spiritual family. These same benefits and challenges apply to our ecclesial family. As a unit, we provide (or make sure provision is made) for our family's daily needs, we look after the spiritual needs of

our family, and we have to teach and guide one another towards God's Kingdom. Our ecclesial structure endeavors to do all these things, but a very important part of its success is the responsibility of each member to do what they can to help. How can we share the love of Christ with our brothers and sisters? How can we lighten their load and bear their burden with them? (Gal 6:2) There are multitudinous ways to

make a positive impact in the lives of our fellow believers. We will share some that we have observed here and realize that there are many more. Hopefully, we will be encouraged by some new ideas and try to implement them in our way in our locale.

Each stage of life brings certain challenges, and it also brings opportunities to help. Let's start with

Whatever skillset
God has given
you, or whatever
hobby you're
interested in,
there is a way to
convert that into
a means to help
others.

young families. Children are a blessing from the LORD, and we enjoy each new addition to the ecclesia. This can also be a time of stress and fatigue for young mothers. There are many ways to lighten their load and build them up for the important work. First, they need to know that you see the struggle or remember it yourself and that you would like to help. You can offer to babysit, take the children on a walk or go to the park. You can offer to fold the laundry or bring a meal as a surprise. We know of an 86-year-old great-grandfather who would go to his granddaughter's house and take her children for a morning walk around the neighborhood every day. Just enough time for the mother to shower and clean up the kitchen. We also know



some grandmothers who invited young girls over for a tea party or rock painting session. These ideas are very practical and help the mother but also build a bond of love. A word of encouragement goes a long

way, too. Remind young mothers what important work they are doing. It is easy to forget when your days are consumed with feeding, cleaning, and caring for small children that these mundane tasks are vitally important to their development. Remind the young mothers how thankful you are for their efforts and how great a job they are doing. Another way to encourage young mothers is to provide a spiritual growth opportunity for them. It can be done by arranging a time and place where the mothers can have a devotional time together while their children are watched in another room or in the backyard by volunteers. An undistracted time to learn and share with other sisters can strengthen. We can also look around our ecclesia on Sunday mornings and see what young mothers and fathers we can help by watching their children during Sunday School or the Memorial Service so that they can listen without distraction.

Another group to consider in our ecclesias is our young adults and single brothers and sisters. It's important to think of ways to connect with and encourage every member of our ecclesial family. Sometimes there are people in our midst who don't have any natural family nearby or have moved in from another area to live or go to college at a nearby university. We must remember to invite these brothers and sisters into our homes for dinner and include them in our family activities. It is also good to think about them specifically when we plan ecclesial activities and ensure everyone is included. We all benefit when every member is actively engaged.

Sickness can visit our ecclesial family at any age, and there are ways we can help one another through those difficult times. Helping a person or family by

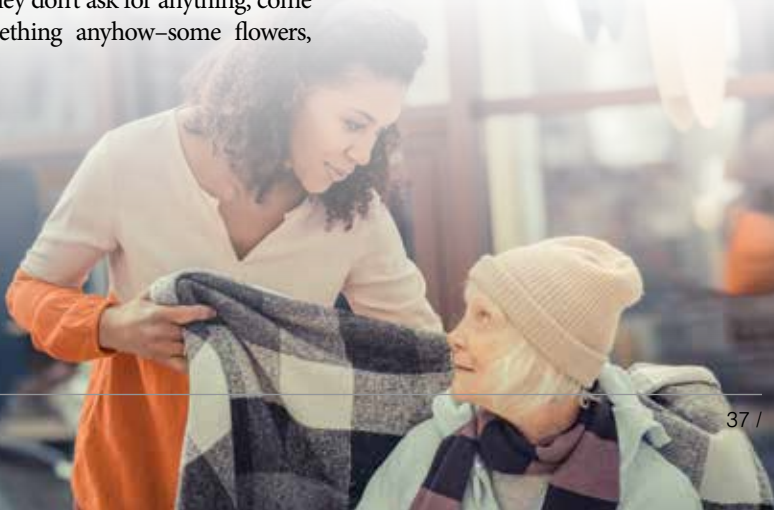
providing food is always appreciated. A very helpful website is www.mealtrain.com for organizing this kind of help. It is very easy to use and a great help. It is nice to let someone know you are praying for them and thinking of them while they are sick, so cards, visits, phone calls, and texts are extremely valuable. It is good to think of chronically ill people, as well, and send them some encouragement or surprise them with a meal or flowers. Sometimes it is even appropriate to set up a visiting schedule to keep up continual care for a long-term situation.

The elderly rely on the ecclesial family for practical help and spiritual encouragement. Whether they live independently or in an assisted living facility, they appreciate in-person visits. Their days can be long, and many of their activities are curtailed because of the frailty of their bodies, so it is a welcome change to have someone to talk with. It's often a good idea to let them know you are coming a day in advance so they can enjoy the anticipation, and you can ask them if they'd like you to bring anything. When someone cannot pop out to the store to get what they want, there is frequently something on their mind they'd like to have brought to them. If they don't ask for anything, come with something anyhow—some flowers,

candy, or a magazine. Anything to make the day a little different and exciting. Let us also think of those who are in the role of caregiver for our elderly or sick. They could use a word of encouragement, an offer to sit with their loved ones while they go out for a bit, or a surprise meal or gift. Some of our ecclesial families carry a very heavy load, and whenever we can acknowledge it and help, we are sharing the love of Christ.

Besides these ideas mentioned above, each of us has different interests and hobbies we enjoy. All we need to do is look around our ecclesial family and think of ways to share our interests with others. You have God-given talents others would enjoy learning or experiencing. What is it you like to do? Hiking, cooking, teaching, hunting, crocheting, painting, singing, woodworking, fishing, going for walks? The options are limitless. We only need to look outside ourselves and consider how we can nurture our ecclesial family by sharing our lives and activities and building stronger relationships.

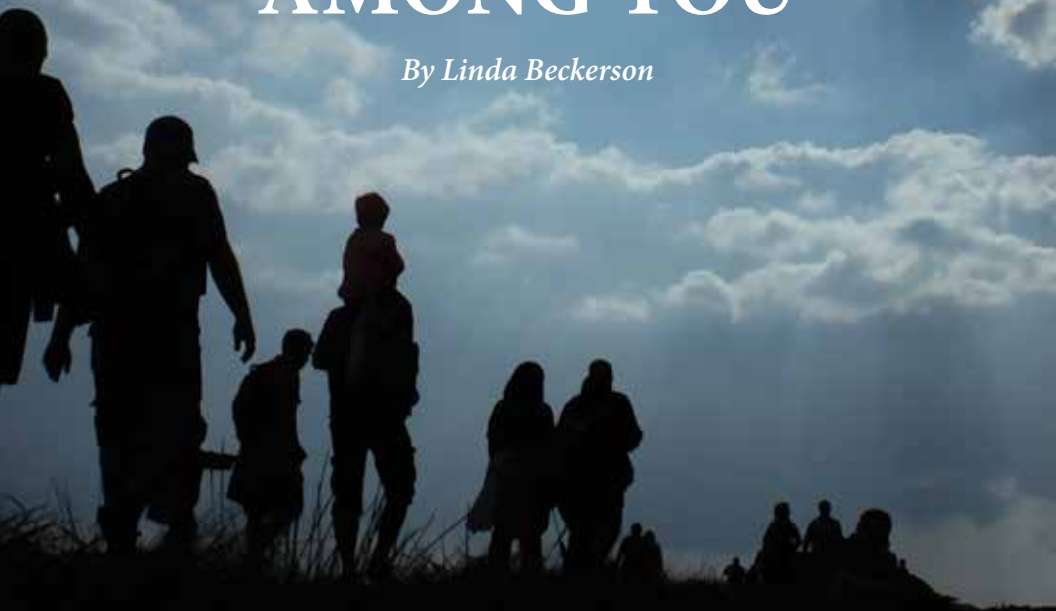
*Anonymous Sisters,
(Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA)*



SPECIAL ISSUE: NOT CARING FOR THE POOR

THE STRANGER AND FOREIGNER AMONG YOU

By Linda Beckerson



I*N the beginning.* Three words begin a book that holds so much love, history, and the plan of God embodied in 1 Timothy 2: 4: *“Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”* God began with Adam and Eve. In Genesis 1, He instructs them to *“Be fruitful, to multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it.”* Those mighty words are reiterated in Revelation 22:17 when Jesus says, *“Come. And let him that heareth say Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.”*

In the last year, the world has seen a level of globalization that has enabled us to travel to places we never could have imagined. This new age has also ushered in technology, making our preaching efforts more accessible.

Many countries with ongoing preaching efforts have political unrest and refugee camps that individuals flock to for safety. Many of the refugees have been born and raised in them and have known no other life. When there is an opportunity to leave, the refugees often apply to emigrate to countries like the USA and Canada. Immigration offers the refugees access to a new life, not living in fear of death and starvation by the rebel armies that also populate their home countries. Still, it's a new one with its different uncertainties and new obstacles. These obstacles come in the form of learning a new culture, a new language, and a new way of living. This is also when they are introduced to their new ecclesial families.

A family, consisting of a mother and six children, immigrated into the city where I live. They had been in a camp in Burundi for thirty-six years. She was

thirty-six when she immigrated into Canada with her children. and had never lived anywhere but the camps. Their camp home had mud walls, not brick or wood, and a tin roof. Each day they had to walk two miles to procure water. The schools were not free, and the children needed uniforms to attend. Jobs were scarce. Food was scarce. This is the story of the family I adopted when they arrived in Canada.

Part of their story is also about a brother who traveled and still does to Burundi to preach in the camp yearly. Over time there have been many baptisms because of his efforts, and several families have emigrated to the US and Canada as well. But what happens when they arrive? They do not all end up together, nor do they all end up in an area with ecclesias that can support them. What is our responsibility to any of these refugees when we find them anywhere near us? God has made the answer very clear in His word. Let's look at some Scriptural examples God has given us of His feelings about the stranger and refugee. God willing, it will inspire all of us to be a welcoming haven for them. God spoke to Moses about strangers in the land, and His command in Leviticus 19: 33-34 is quite clear.

When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

Also, in Deuteronomy 10:19, *“And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.”*

Israel had once been refugees taken to Egypt by Jacob many years before. They were called to remember this in their treatment of the foreigners in their lands. Most of us have been born here in North America, but many of us have our roots in countries around the world that our forefathers fled under many circumstances. They left due to war, persecution, and the hope of a better life, just like the immigrants we know of today.

So, what are we to do when we have immigrants arrive on our doorstep? The Bible says that we should reach out, treat them with His love, and help them in any way we can. That help may be material, such as finding a place for them to live (although most communities help with this when they arrive). But more importantly, it may be spiritual support. They will likely need help setting up their homes with the basics: dishes, beds, linens, clothing, etc. They may likely not speak English, so interpreters may need to be found, an opportunity for them to also learn the truth. We must find ways to transport them to meeting, Sunday School, and CYC and be very inclusive about their fellowship, including giving them Bibles in their language. None of these are easy tasks, and they require time and effort. We must, however, not sit back and wait for everyone else to pick up the slack. Yes, we are busy. Yes, we have jobs within and without the ecclesia. Yes, we have children who need us. But we are all God's children, and He does not ignore us. Nor are we allowed to ignore others who need physical help and, more importantly, a spiritual community to guide them to the Kingdom. Remember, God wants

all men to be saved. So, when people in need arrive on our doorstep, we need to understand that God has placed them in our care, just as we have been placed in His care.

While working with them to provide what they need, we need to understand they are not used to objects we have. My immigrant family had no idea what to do with a microwave I was so proud to have provided for them. It became a storage place. We gave them silverware, and they ate with their fingers. They kept their clothes in suitcases, not in the dressers we gave them. The donated clothes were not what they were used to. Their mode of dress is very different from ours.

What does Jesus say in Matthew 25? The King will reply,

Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick, and you looked after me, I was in prison, and you came to visit me". Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" (Matt 25:35-40).

Is not this the attitude we want to have? When we see someone in need (especially in these very trying circumstances), we just do it. No

thought is needed. Our role in life is to love our brothers and sisters, no matter who they are or where they are from, and to help them on their journey to the Kingdom. We have read many stories in the Tidings of new brothers and sisters being baptized once they have arrived in North America. What a blessing for them and us to be part of that.

David speaks of God's plan and purpose for the strangers among us:

Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob whose hope is in the LORD their God. He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—he remains faithful forever. He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. The LORD reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD. (Psa 146:5-10).

Are we willing to be part of the help of God?

We also need to understand that the worship we partake in on a Sunday morning may be very different than what new immigrants are used to. I know I was surprised a few times when at the end of a prayer, the mom would break out into a song in Swahili, and the children would begin to sing with

arms gently waving above their heads. Although I enjoyed and admired their tradition, my first reaction was to discourage this behavior; I had to learn there is no set way to worship God. Many ecclesias have a different order to their Sunday morning ritual. These are our traditions. It is the nature of man to create traditions and adhere to them. The joy of these young ones singing with their mother was nothing I have experienced here in North America. I googled a recorded meeting from Burundi, and sure enough, many were standing, swaying, and singing praises to God. It reminded me of how David danced, praised, and sang behind the ark, demonstrating his love for music. I had a sister remark to me that we may be very surprised in the Kingdom to have these people teach us how to worship with our hearts and more actively sing praises to God above. So, we must gently and lovingly bring them to our ecclesias and embrace the things we can learn from each other. Bridging the cultural divide while following God's principles, is the ultimate goal in order to walk together with these families towards God's Kingdom.

In conclusion, let us go back to the opening paragraph and remember that God wants **all** men to be saved (1 Tim 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9), and it is our task to fill their cups with His water of life, and to provide them with whatever necessities they may have physically—but more importantly—spiritually. We must do this with a willing, loving spirit for Him to fill this earth with His glory.

*Linda Beckerson,
(Ann Arbor Ecclesia, MI)*

STRENGTHENING OUR HAND

THE NORTH AMERICAN
REFUGEE EXPERIENCE

By Carol Link

FOR many of us living in the western world, the idea of being forced to flee our homes is unthinkable. Yet recently, in just the first weeks of hostilities in Ukraine, millions of people were forced to do the unthinkable. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the number of displaced persons has risen worldwide to over 82 million people. More than any time in the past, “persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and events seriously disturbing public order,” have brought people to the desperate decision to leave their homes.¹ The result is chaos.

Brothers and sisters are among those forced into the chaos. To comprehend the global toll, it is important to consider the individual's social, economic and psychological costs. We need to think about the displaced believer. For example, how much do we understand the experience of Christadelphian refugees who have spent years in overcrowded refugee camps? What is it like to be resettled in a foreign country? For our response to be faithful, it must be informed by the expectations of the Scriptures and from lessons we've learned from the past.

The Scriptural injunction is clear; it is to strengthen the hand of those in need. Christ directed the attention of his followers to the days of Sodom as a warning against mindless self-indulgence at the time of his return. (Luke 17:28-29). Sodom is described in Ezekiel 16:49 as being condemned for not strengthening “*the hand of the poor and needy*.” The uncaring attitude in Sodom stemmed from the same

societal conditions evident today: a great deal of pride, a shocking excess of food, and an obscene amount of personal idleness. With affluence has come, in some quarters, a disregard for poor and needy people. But Deuteronomy 10:17-18 says, “*Yahweh your God... loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.*” God's expression of love for the stranger, foreigner and alien, serves to powerfully guide our attitude toward the care for those in society around us who are displaced. Just as Israel's experience in Egypt as strangers heightened their sensitivity, the recollection of our past as “*strangers, having no hope*” (Eph 2:12,19) must propel us to empathetic action.

The support of refugee brothers and sisters goes beyond being a worthy endeavor. It is a responsibility. If our obligation to the stranger is love, what do we owe to those of the household of faith? (Gal 6:10). The Apostle Paul reasoned that neglecting family is “*worse than an infidel.*” An infidel deliberately rejects the faith (1 Tim 5:8). Taking care of our spiritual family, like providing for our natural family, is a matter of living the faith.

To the credit of our community, and thanks to the power of God's word, ecclesias worldwide have mobilized in an expression of faithfulness to care for our spiritual family. In the United Kingdom, ecclesias have been rejuvenated by the arrival of many asylum seekers. Some came as Muslims, others as former Muslims. They came seeking asylum but also seeking salvation by learning about the coming Kingdom of God and the

name of Jesus Christ.² Their quest galvanized an enthusiastic response by many brothers and sisters. Even the small ecclesial family in Germany came together during the height of the Syrian refugee crisis in Europe to help Christadelphians on the run. What have we learned over the last decade in North America that can shape our thinking?

The Story of Displacement and Resettlement to North America

The largest number of Christadelphians to be resettled in North America is from East-Central Africa. This is thanks to the tireless efforts over many years of the Christadelphian Bible Mission-UK in responding to the needs of people during conflict in that region. Bible classes were set up in camps all over the region to give people the hope of the gospel. Many heard and were baptized into Christ.

To help us understand the experience of Christadelphian newcomers to North America, I will tell the story of displacement and resettlement through the experiences of a fictional individual I will call Sister Kesi. The story is a composite of real experiences.

In 1994, due to spillover from the Rwandan genocide, conflict erupted in Kesi's village in the Democratic Republic of Congo. She was among the region's 6.6 million violently displaced from their homes.³ Thrust

into the chaos at the age of ten, she was tragically separated from her family. It was over a year before she was found by a former neighbor in a makeshift refugee camp in a distant country. She was returned to her family, but it did not take much effort to grasp the physical and psychological consequences of her early childhood experience.

By 2003 Kesi had married, but with the death toll in Congo reaching three million, life in the village was not the same. Government instability, rampant corruption and extreme poverty meant ongoing violence. Her husband often left to find work. One time, when he was away, armed men from distant regions entered her village. This time, she was the mother of small children. Once again, as when she was ten years old, she was alone and unprotected. With a baby strapped to her back and little ones by her side, she crossed Lake Tanganyika in a small, overcrowded vessel. At a camp in Burundi, she prayed for help, and after searching, she found a new family. There was a Bible class in the camp, run by the Christadelphian Bible Mission, and in time she was baptized into Christ. Hope for the future flooded into her life.⁴

Alone in America

Due to the chaos of an upended life, Kesi was never reunited with her husband. She arrived in North America

The largest number of Christadelphians to be resettled in North America is from East-Central Africa. This is thanks to the tireless efforts over many years of the Christadelphian Bible Mission-UK in responding to the needs of people during conflict in that region.

with her children, and her Swahili Bible marked “CBM” on the side. Under the care of the International Rescue Committee, she and her children were resettled in the south-eastern USA.⁵ The sad reality is there are no brothers and sisters nearby to help Kesi and her family with the spiritual challenges of resettlement.

Added to the disappointment of being isolated, she arrived just as the world was plunged into the Covid 19 pandemic. This led to further social isolation. Pandemic restrictions have meant no school for her children, no chance to learn English, and after a year, no resettlement agency support, no way to earn a wage, and therefore, no way to pay the rent. She is alone, and once again, unprotected and afraid. North American society can be socially isolating, especially compared to the open villages of Africa and the communal closeness of the refugee camps. Her older children, who grew up in the camp, have recently found YouTube videos about life back in the camp. Now they want to return. As irrational as this longing is, it is an honest expression of the relationships they miss.

Kesi is one of many, perhaps hundreds, of Christadelphian refugees who have been resettled into isolation.

Ideas for Strengthening the Hand

Ideas for strengthening the hand of

Special attention will need to be given to the families who have settled away from a Christadelphian ecclesia. The Williamsburg Christadelphian Foundation (WCF) has a program for Newcomers that specifically addresses these issues of resettlement and isolation.

those in need will include supporting resettled families and providing support for the nearby ecclesias since they may feel ill-equipped, especially if there are language barriers. Additionally, special attention will need to be given to the families who have settled away from a Christadelphian ecclesia. The

Williamsburg Christadelphian Foundation (WCF) has a program for Newcomers that specifically addresses these issues of resettlement and isolation.⁵

Here is a list of cities, states and provinces the Newcomers Program has compiled to identify where some of our isolated brothers and sisters are currently located:

Buffalo, NY
Erie, PA
Charlotte, NC
Granby, QC
Jacksonville, FL
Louisville, KY
Quebec City, QC
Salt Lake City, UT
Windsor, ON

As soon as the pandemic brought to light the benefits of video conferencing, a Breaking of Bread was started on Zoom to bring a dispersed group of Swahili speaking families together around the LORD’S table. Thanks to the tireless efforts of Bro. Benoit Mukendi, fellowship around the word

of God is renewed each first day of the week. Bro. Benoit, as the link-brother for the CBM East Africa, has his finger on the pulse of events in Africa, as well as in North America. Currently, ideas to expand, promote and support this effort are being explored.

Families from East-Central Africa often arrive with lots of children. Like God-fearing parents everywhere, these parents ask, how will our children make meaningful friendships in the truth? Long-established families in North America have benefitted for generations from attending Bible Schools together. It is time for newly arrived families to hear about such spiritual mainstays so that they can benefit too. The Newcomers Program wants to make sure the families from Africa with lots of kids know about and can attend spiritually enriching events. This happened recently. A group of young people attended the first major Christadelphian youth event to open after pandemic restrictions had been lifted. Friendships in the Truth formed during the early years of belief help establish a lifetime of support.

Language barriers are, without doubt, one of the most serious impediments to sharing the Word. Small meetings, lacking the resources to help newly arrived families, can easily be overwhelmed. Here is a key to overcoming the language barrier. Ecclesias can have a special class available Sunday by Sunday for the newly arrived adults. Lessons may begin with hand signals and stick figures, but over time, a lot of goodwill and mutual respect can grow. In the Baltimore meeting, we used first

principle lessons, provided in English and Swahili, from the CBM-Tanzania.⁶ As often happens, benefits flow to both student and teacher. The student feels important and cared for, while the challenge enriches the teacher. Scripture teaches that the outcome is always for our good when we express our reverence for Yahweh by doing the right thing, especially when it's hard to do (Deut 6:24). The good results are for both teacher and learner



Sadly, many who have arrived in North America with CBM Bibles in hand have disappeared. But it is also true that many have persevered in their commitment to God and the hope of His coming Kingdom despite the adversities. One of the challenges now for North American ecclesias is seeking out and providing for those living in isolation. Since refugee families are often large, supporting the parents by providing for the spiritual needs of their children is hugely important for their future.

Remember, You Were Once Strangers

Being “a stranger” is unsettling. Nothing is familiar. Life in North America for African refugees can even be threatening. Despair can set in. The solution from God’s word is the love and care of family. With all the genuine affection that goes with it, family is needed. This is what we have to offer our displaced brethren, and this is our responsibility. It is our duty to strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. The brothers and sisters in our midst who have been displaced

from their homes because of war and persecution are a top priority from the point of view of the Almighty. *“Do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”* (Heb 13:16). When we first meet our family from afar, the only thing that will matter at that moment is our shared relationship in Christ.

When a sister such as Kesi, who has experienced extreme trauma and uncertainty, arrives at the door of your ecclesial hall, chances are she will not be able to describe what she has been through. Without a shared language and shared experiences, it could be a long time before you know her story. Perhaps you will never know. The one thing that will matter at that moment of meeting is your shared relationship with Christ. Despite the outward appearances that suggest otherwise, you are bound together into the one body by love. (Col 3:12-15).

*Carol Link,
(Baltimore Ecclesia, MD)*

¹ www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html

² www.ukppn.info/

³ www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/09/record-number-of-forcibly-displaced-people-lived-in-sub-saharan-africa-in-2017/

⁴ The efforts of the UK CBM in the refugee camps of Tanzania, Burundi and Zimbabwe and with ecclesias the afflicted parts of the DRC were hugely effective in answering the spiritual needs of the displaced people. There was very little reported about the conflict in the media, probably because the region ranks “low” on US interest impact. Unaware of immigration patterns to North America, ecclesias began to receive African brethren and their families without knowing the circumstances that brought them.

⁵ For one year, newly arrived brothers and sisters are under the care of a resettlement agency such as the International Rescue Committee or Catholic Charities. Caseworkers oversee their needs for housing and start them on the employment path.

⁶ More information about the WCF Newcomers Program can be found at www.wcfoundation.org/newcomers-program.



ALCOHOLISM AND OTHER ADDICTIONS

By Robert Korbela

I can't let Sister J. drive my kids to Ecclesial functions anymore. We never know when she's going to be under the influence." "Brother and Sister X are getting divorced. She can't deal any longer with his behavior while drinking. He continues to drink and becomes abusive to her and the kids when he does."

These are paraphrases of **real** comments made by **real** members of Christadelphian ecclesias in North America. They represent comments regarding the problem of alcoholism and other substance abuse addictions worldwide.

The purpose of this article is to bring some light to bear on this challenging and devastating disease, to raise the level of awareness of the nature of the problem and of available resources, and help members and ecclesias deal with the problem in an afflicted individual or close family members.

This article reflects a professional interest on my part, as a physician, in the disease of alcoholism and substance abuse and the recovery from these diseases. There has naturally been a growing personal interest as well.

Though most of these comments will be directed towards alcoholism, other

substance and behavioral addictions (narcotics, nicotine, food, sex, gambling, etc.) will have a similar compulsive behavior pattern and have similar 12-step-based support group recovery available.

First, just a few statistics to clarify the magnitude/nature of the problem:

- Estimates range from 5-10% of adults who rarely drink will become dependent on alcohol. This is in concert with the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) estimate that currently, there are approximately 14.5 million in the US who can be classified as dependent on alcohol.
- According to The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University, up to 85% of current prison inmates could benefit from alcoholism or drug addiction treatment.
- There are 95,000 preventable deaths yearly directly attributable to alcohol.

Nationally, our young people are at risk. Some studies done by NIAAA have shown the following results.

Prevalence in 8th graders:

- 51.7% have tried alcohol
- 43.1% have had an alcoholic drink in the past year
- 25.1% have been drunk

Prevalence in 10th graders:

- 70.6% have tried alcohol
- 63.7% have had an alcoholic drink in the past year
- 48.9% have been drunk
- 1.9% have been daily drinking for at least 1 month at some point

Prevalence in 12th graders:

- 80% have tried alcohol
- 73.8% have had an alcoholic drink in the past year
- 62.3% have been drunk
- 3.6% use alcohol daily

More recent studies show a slight decline in these numbers, but the pattern persists. There is also the observation that a third of all alcohol users have also used illicit drugs in this age group.

Alcohol and substance abuse are real problems for our members and our young people. A recent study in one of the journals devoted to alcoholism research showed that an atmosphere of religiosity **does** diminish the likelihood of alcohol abuse for those teenagers genetically inclined to its development. However, we know that these problems are present in the community. Despite the reduced likelihood noted above, many arranging boards have had to deal with the fallout of substance abuse. One **hopeful** piece of evidence in our community is the increasing number of brothers and sisters in our midst who are recovering from addiction.

Our understanding is helped by consideration of the definition of alcoholism, written by the leading US physicians in the field of alcoholism and published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* after a 2-year study of the definition of alcoholism in the light of current concepts:

“Alcoholism is a ‘primary,’ chronic disease with genetic, psychosocial, and environmental factors influencing its development and manifestations.”¹

The disease is often progressive and **fatal**. It is characterized by impaired control over drinking, preoccupation with the drug alcohol, use of alcohol despite adverse consequences, and distortions in thinking, most notably **denial**. Each of these symptoms may be continuous or periodic.

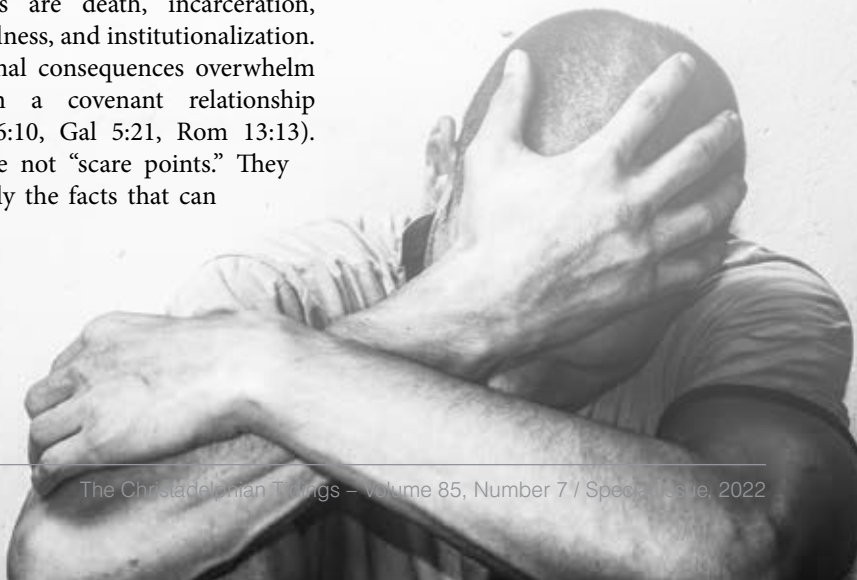
Thoughtful consideration of this definition, especially of each of the bolded words, can be edifying and will aid in recognizing and helping those among us who are afflicted. While alcoholism may lead to morally deficient behavior, the alcoholic himself is best considered **ill**. It is most productive if we can “hate the sin, but love the sinner.”

It is important to reemphasize that this discussion relates to those unable to stop drinking despite experiencing interpersonal, financial, legal, physical, or emotional alcohol-related problems, despite a strong personal desire and repeated attempts to modify or abstain from drinking.

The fatal aspect of this disease, if left untreated, is also commonly recognized. The only possible endpoints are death, incarceration, mental illness, and institutionalization. The eternal consequences overwhelm those in a covenant relationship (1 Cor 6:10, Gal 5:21, Rom 13:13). These are not “scare points.” They are simply the facts that can

encourage us to do the right things and make difficult and sometimes unpopular choices of actions. Ignoring the problem cannot be our response.

The non-fatal behaviors of the alcoholic are many, ranging from failure to complete vital family and ecclesial obligations, to angry outbursts, to physical and emotional abuse of one's family, to sexual misadventures, to poor school or work performance and job loss, to health problems including hypertension leading to stroke or heart attack, pancreatitis, cirrhosis, etc. These are grim and often late manifestations. But even early on in the disease, there is severe distortion in the family. The continuing unpredictability in the behavior of our loved ones, the marked self-centeredness, and the violent outbursts most often lead to great pain in the rest of the family members. There may be an obsession to “manage” the unmanageable alcoholic, anxiety for the bills and for the well-being of the other family members, anger towards the “loved one,” denial (excuse-making, hiding the real behavior), feeling guilty about



We must educate ourselves because help is available.
Overcoming chemical dependency *is* possible, and you *can*
direct someone for the help.

having caused the alcoholic behavior, and perhaps suffering the insanity of doing the same thing repeatedly, expecting different results.

With this brief description of the disease and its impact, you may wonder, “What can I do? I’m a layperson, not a professional or an expert here.”

You are taking the first step as you read this article. We must educate ourselves because help is available. Overcoming chemical dependency is possible, and you can direct someone for the help. For problems with alcohol, the most effective recovery method is to regularly attend Alcoholics Anonymous. While AA claims no monopoly on therapy for the alcoholic, it remains the premier treatment modality for this disease in the most recent and scientifically rigorous studies. Apart from AA, results have been meager. The experience of many brethren and sisters who are now in recovery reveals that participation in AA is fully compatible with their walk in the Truth. They also note that AA’s 12 steps have a basis in Scriptural principles.

It’s easy to learn about this resource. There is a website that will give you much additional info on the disease and recovery. It will also let you find a meeting in your local area. Here is the link: www.aa.org. If you explore this site, you will find contact data for local AA offices in 60 countries in the world, including most of our outreach

counties. There you will find meeting locations, literature resources, and, if necessary, a way to arrange personal contact with a recovering person.

Read the first 164 pages of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*. This book is inexpensive and widely available on Amazon or at your local AA office, which may be found on the web or in the white pages. In reading this book, you will find out much more about the disease and recovery program. Since you are part of the person’s ecclesial family, you may find the chapter entitled “the family afterward” especially interesting.

There are many brethren and sisters now who are recovering in AA. Get to know them if possible. Most of them are more than willing to help another recover if they are asked.

Other recovery groups are available for recovery from other forms of chemical or behavioral dependency, e.g., Narcotics Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous, Nicotine Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, Sex Addicts Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, and others. These all have websites that can be researched or consulted. Many persons are addicted to multiple substances, including alcohol, so a start in AA, the most established recovery group, is recommended.

A referral to Al-Anon can be beneficial for those family members (including

young people and spouses) living with an alcoholic and suffering from it. They can regain some normalcy in their lives, whether or not the alcoholic recovers. The link to Al-Anon is: al-anon.org.

What follows is especially for our brethren and sisters struggling with alcoholism today.

Problems With Alcohol?

If you are sick and tired of being sick and tired, you may be an alcoholic and need help. This message aims to tell you there is hope, help is available, it doesn't have to be this way anymore and you do not have to do this alone. Here is a link to a questionnaire you can use to help decide if you really have a problem with alcohol: www.minnesotarecovery.info/literature/20quest.htm

Many are convinced, and many studies support, that the 12-step program of Alcoholics Anonymous is the most effective way to abstain and combat this disease.

It is believed that one alcoholic talking to another is essential for recovery. In the meantime, please look at AA's website to learn what it is and what it does, and where the meetings are in your local area. If you decide, in all self-honesty, that you are powerless over alcohol and want to give up drinking, then make the first step. Call your local central AA office, find a meeting close by, and go to it. You'll find others there like yourself who are more than willing and able to help you begin your walk in sobriety. You don't have to do this alone, but you alone must do the work involved. What a blessing!

*Robert Korbelak,
(San Diego County Ecclesia, CA)*

¹ Journal of American Medical Association, Robert M. Morse, MD; Daniel K. Flavin, MD, August 26, 1992



FALSE INTIMACY

ARE WE DROWNING IN THE
CURRENT TSUNAMI OF
PORNOGRAPHY?

By An Anonymous Brother

The Tsunami is Here

THE first chapters of our Bible reveal a God who made sexuality core to the human experience. It was a beautiful gift to enjoy and a way for Adam and Eve to “*fill the earth and subdue it.*” (Gen 1:28 ESV). However, if we do not treasure and respect sexuality as God intended, it leads to

perversion, idolatry, shame, addiction, and even self-destruction. Its unitive and procreative powers are removed and debased.

The tsunami of pornography is no longer coming. It is here. Today, increasingly, we face a deluge of media and advertising that has corrupted God’s intention for sex and sexuality.

Recent research proves there is no room for smugness. We are all at risk, whether male or female, young or old. The sheer strength of these cultural currents can drown us in a raging sea. It is time to admit some of us desperately need a life preserver. We may need to acknowledge our weaknesses and reach out for help. Or we may need to extend a gentle, helping hand in love, all while recognizing that we, too, are subject to this temptation. (Gal 6:1-5).

In this article, we want to highlight the seriousness of the porn tsunami and briefly illuminate several sources of help. The endnotes hold supplementary resources. Furthermore, we hope the startling nature of this article will encourage independent efforts to discuss, research, understand and build helpful support structures in our relations and ecclesias. The solution requires a team.

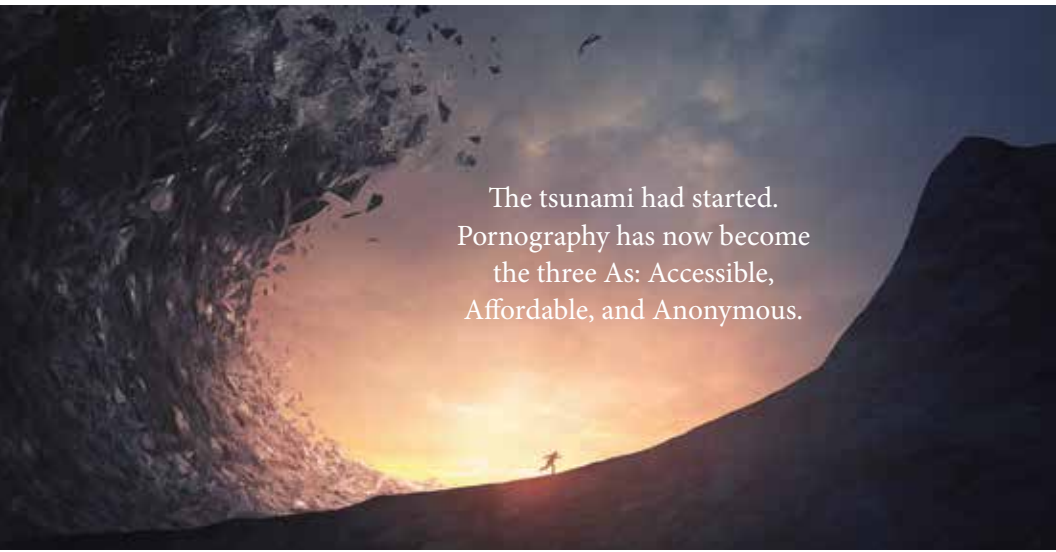
What Tsunami?

Our English word pornography originates from two Greek words. *Porne*

means prostitute, with the original notion being to buy, traffic, or sell a slave for prostitution. *Graphēin* means to write or to draw. Combined, the two words refer to obscene depictions of prostitutes and those enslaved in sexually immoral practices for the exclusive purpose of sexual arousal. Pornography includes writings, images, recordings, and even art.

Pornography has been around for centuries, but in 1993, it began to escalate. The Internet became widely available, and tens of thousands of websites were created to pipe this drug directly into homes, workplaces, university computer labs, and personal computers. The tsunami had started. Pornography has now become the three As: Accessible, Affordable, and Anonymous.

Several technological shifts made pornography more potent. In 2006, high-speed Internet facilitated the availability of high-resolution images and video streams, along with cybersex

A dramatic image of a massive tsunami wave crashing over a small figure on a cliff at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm orange glow. The wave is dark and turbulent, with white foam at its base. The figure is a small silhouette of a person standing on the edge of the cliff, looking out at the wave.

The tsunami had started.
Pornography has now become
the three As: Accessible,
Affordable, and Anonymous.

chatrooms and webcams. In 2007, the iPhone made it possible to stream pornography to a handheld device and even share lewd images of oneself through apps. Recently, virtual reality has enabled sex to be a full-senses, tech experience without a human partner! The tsunami is here. Today, teenagers or adults do not even have to get out of bed to watch pornography.

Covenant Eyes has produced some helpful accountability software, publications, and a summary of staggering statistics that underscore the seriousness of porn. They estimate \$3,075 is spent on porn every second on the internet, which translates into \$97 billion per year. One in five mobile searches is now for pornography. Seventy percent of 18-to 30-year-olds view porn once a month. Most teens and young adults (62%) have received a nude image from someone. Women are no longer passive users of porn. These stats mean pornography is affecting everyone—users and non-users. It increasingly fuels the objectification of men, women, and children, the breakup of marriages, increased violence, and decreased intimacy in relationships. Of particular concern is its highly addictive nature. Its obsession leads to financial crises, job firings, college dropouts, serious medical dysfunctions, sexual exploitation, and sex trafficking.

A Christian Tsunami? Really?

In 2015 a well-known Christian apologetics writer, Josh McDowell, commissioned a comprehensive study to assess the extent to which pornography has permeated Christian

families, churches, and our society at large and to understand its impact. He described the results, summarized in *The Porn Phenomena*, as a personal “wakeup call.” Two out of three youth pastors and more than half of senior pastors said porn is a current or past struggle—more than 50,000 US church leaders. Sixty percent of pastors said they were trying to stop using porn but could not. 41% percent of Christian males aged 13-24 and 13% of females actively sought out porn regularly. Comparatively, 71% of non-Christian males aged 13-24 and 36% of females actively sought out porn regularly. Josh McDowell also pointed out the rising use of pornography among women and its skyrocketing use in the younger generation; both believed to be due to the anonymity and accessibility achieved by smartphones.

Those are shocking statistics, especially within the Christian community. They led Josh to conclude: “We are in an epic spiritual battle, and our enemy is using pornography to destroy churches, pastors, marriages, and young people like never before. It is capturing the minds of the next generation, and few are sounding the alarm. Even fewer are offering real solutions.”

We may feel that Christadelphians have deflected this sexual tsunami better than other Christians. However, a 2008 online poll of over three hundred Christadelphians conducted for a Youth Summit showed that 68% of males and 10% of females over 18 viewed pornography sometimes, often, or always. These numbers are very similar to those obtained by Josh

McDowell. This poll was conducted over 14 years ago!

Simply put, if we think we are immune to sexual sin, then we are stronger than Samson, godlier than David, and wiser than Solomon.

Abide in God's Lifeboat

On Paul's voyage to Rome, his ship met a violent storm called Euroclydon. Paul advised his shipmates, *"unless these men abide in the ship, they cannot be saved."* (Acts 27:31 NKJV). Likewise, God's instruction and encouragement, combined with godly helpers, can supply us with a lifeboat to survive the porn storm.

Jesus summarizes God's life-saving advice when he reveals, *"You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman [or man] with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her [or him] in his heart."* (Matt 5:27-28 ESV). These words, spoken 2,000 years ago, capture the timeless wisdom of God. In God's view, pornography is about lust and sexual immorality. It is lust that eventually corrodes our hearts and minds, even if we have no intention of doing so. Lust is a strong temptation we need to flee from, just as Joseph did from the seductive offers of Potiphar's wife (Gen 39:12).

If we ignore God's loving instruction, it will eventually lead to dire consequences. It is akin to jumping out of the boat. Jude reminds us from history: *"Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire."* (Jude 1:7 NIV). God obliterated

these cities, in large part due to their unbridled sexual lusts. Nothing has changed centuries later. Paul's appeal to the Corinthians is similar: *"Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality... will inherit the kingdom of God."* (1 Cor 6:9 ESV).

Later, Paul really raises the bar with the Ephesians: *"Among you, there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality... these are improper for God's holy people."* (Eph 5:3 NIV). If we offer our emotions, passions, and time to pornography, we will gain absolutely nothing, and lose our whole life.

Understanding the Tsunamis

Did you know pornography acts on our brains just like crack cocaine, gambling, or alcohol? To recover from a porn problem, or help someone that is battling it, it is critical to understand there are scientifically proven physiological reasons to the struggle. When we do something that makes us feel good, such as watching or reading pornography, we activate neurons in the reward pathway of our brain. These neurons then release a chemical called dopamine which gives us a jolt of pleasure. The same thing happens when we enjoy a kiss or hug, or when we receive a "like" on Facebook.

However, certain substances and experiences, such as pornography mixed with masturbation, give us abnormally powerful jolts that the brain remembers. When repeated, our brains begin to crave these intense "jolts" and even demand larger "jolts" through "harder" material. Pornography quickly rewires the normal and healthy circuits

of our brain. High levels of dopamine also override the brain's natural braking chemicals. This makes it harder to stop and leads to compulsive behavior. To recover, the brain needs help to be rewired back to its healthy state of balance. Thus, telling someone who is struggling with porn to "just stop," or reminding them of God's principles, will have limited effect despite the best of intentions.

Dopamine and other brain chemicals also contribute to an "addiction cycle." This consists of seven cycling steps starting with a **1) Belief System** that has been damaged (spiritual and other values, priorities, boundaries, impaired self-worth) and **2) Impaired Thinking** (justifications, lies, excuses, delusion, paranoia). These two steps lead to a continual cycle of **3a) Preoccupation** (with sex, porn, drugs, winning), **3b) Rituals and Habits** (predictable steps leading to the act), **3c) Sexual Compulsions** (watching porn, cybersex chat rooms), **3d) Despair, Guilt, Shame** (for indulging again) and leading back to step 3a, more Preoccupation to soothe oneself. In the end these steps lead to a **4) Unmanageable Life** (financial and marriage trouble, other aspects of life out of control), and full circle back to step 1, to cycle through again.

It is important to note the impact of shame in the above cycle. Every addict feels shame. To "shame" a person further or repeatedly call them a bad person for watching porn only perpetuates the addiction cycle. It adds further fuel to the "Despair, Guilt, and Shame" step. The person feels even

more despair and guilt, which leads to more preoccupation with pornography to soothe themselves or cope with the shame.

Helps—Undergirding a Sinking Ship

So, how do we break the cycle of pornography, curtail the contributions of dopamine, and effectively rewire the brain? Paul and his shipmates dealt with their storm proactively. They used helps (or cables in the NKJV) to undergird the ship, nourished themselves with food, cast-off weights that were sinking the ship, and worked as a team to save each other (Acts 27:17-40). This serves as a model for our recovery.

Simply put, a "holistic approach is essential for lasting freedom [from pornography]. There are physical, emotional, spiritual, and relational factors must be addressed for freedom to last."⁶ We must turn knowledge into action and principles into practice. Most importantly, a resolve to change must come from deep within ourselves. Our recovery will not work if we are doing it to appease someone else or because someone else tells us to.

Proven holistic approaches include External and Internal Helps, often referred to as First Order and Second Order steps. External Helps are simple and concrete steps meant to break the cycle temporarily. Internal Helps require we soul-search and rewire our mind and heart. They take time and hard work. In his *Shadow* books, Patrick Carnes introduces some key steps, which are summarized on the following page, along with supporting verses where relevant.

External, First Order Helps	Helpful Verses
Remove and Destroy Unhelpful or Secret Media and Collections	Matt 5:28-30
Install Internet Filters, or better yet, Accountability Software - e.g., Covenant Eyes which reports usage to an accountability partner	Job 31:1
Change Computer Habits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - set a “curfew” when the Internet and computers turn off - set limits on the amount of time you spend on digital devices - locate technology in an open area, not behind a closable door - face screens in an office or home in a “viewable” direction - have parents, spouse, or a friend set a password on the device - remove anonymity (e.g., computer and web account users) 	Heb 12:1
Reduce Objectification <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - place pictures on your desk, people are human beings - discuss sexuality with our children in a positive, healthful way 	
Identify and Remove “Triggers” or Stimuli for a Relapse—habits, rituals, boredom, loneliness, pictures, smells, certain people	Gen 39:12
Fill the Void: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - find a hobby, exercise, do something different when tempted - enjoy off-line activities, play games, read, puzzles, go for a hike 	Matt 12:43-45
Reduce Stress—porn is known to be a coping mechanism for stress	Phil 4:6-7
Exercise Regularly—develop a healthy source for a ‘high’	
Educate Yourself on the porn problem (impacts on you and others, how addictions work, how to break free, success stories)	

Internal, Second Order Helps	Helpful Verses
Come to Grips: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - admit you are struggling with a problem (to yourself, and God) - understand you may have hurt others - firmly decide and commit to do something about it - recognize you need help to heal (dependence on God, other helpers) 	Matt 5:28-30
Develop Internal Boundaries: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - control, train the eyes, mind, and actions - develop an Internet “health/boundaries” plan 	Job 31:1
Interactive Support and Accountability: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - develop a trusted accountability partner to share with (Bro., Sis., other) - seek out a good Christian therapist, be cautious of untrained therapists - participate in 12 Step Program for Sex Addiction (similar to AA) - attend support groups (for addictions, trauma, depression) - re-establish and build strong social connections with friends, family - track your progress and reward yourself (on a calendar, with a partner) 	Heb 12:1
Enhance Your Spiritual Life: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - improve your relationship with God through prayer, meditation, reading - attend meetings - focus on others too—addict oneself to the ministry of the saints 	

Self-Control, Relapse and Forgiveness

The battle against pornography and lust is a battle for self-control, and this requires knowledge, helps and concerted action. God has provided each of us with these tools, and it is his deepest desire that we “*should learn to control [our] own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust.*” (1 Thess 4:5 NIV).

Research suggests pornography is a challenge for most of us. It is, therefore, important we develop compassion and a spirit of forgiveness for those who are struggling. This is not to minimize the seriousness of this tsunami. But a censorious approach will only worsen the challenges of those already treading water.

Finally, in our struggle to develop self-control, we may fall many times. This means we also need to have compassion for ourselves. Relapses are not failure, and relapses should not cause us to give up, “*for though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again.*” (Prov 24:16 NIV).

If the tsunami knocks us off our feet, and we acknowledge our need for God’s help, God assures us of His abundant mercy and forgiveness (1 John 1:8-10). He will make the storm a calm, still the waves, deliver us from our distress, and bring us to our desired haven (Psa 107:29-30), “*which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.*” (Heb 6:19).

An Anonymous Brother

References cited:

- Arterburn, Stephen and Fred Stoeker. *Every Man’s Battle*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: WaterBrook Press, 2000. Note that this is one book in a series, including *Every Woman’s Battle*, *Every Young Woman’s Battle*, *Every Young Man’s Battle*.
- Carnes, Patrick. *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction*. 3rd ed. Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden, 2007. Note this author has many other publications, courses, workbooks, and helpful recovery programs that can be found online by searching his name.
- Carnes, Patrick, David L. Delmonico, and Elizabeth Griffin. *In the Shadows of the Net: Breaking Free of Compulsive Online Sexual Behavior*. 2nd ed. Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden, 2001.
- Covenant Eyes. *Porn Stats*. 2018 ed. Owosso, Michigan: Covenant Eyes Inc., 2020. Various pages. Note that their website has many helpful publications and materials related to pornography and computer filtering and accountability software (www.covenanteyes.com/e-books/).
- McDowell, Josh, and Barna Group. *The Porn Phenomenon: The Impact of Pornography in the Digital Age*. Plano, Texas: Josh McDowell Ministry and Barna Group, 2016. Note Josh McDowell also wrote the best-selling apologetics book “*Evidence that Demands a Verdict*,” familiar to many Christadelphians.
- Shimer, Ted. *The Freedom Fight: The New Drug and the Truths That Set Us Free*. Houston, Texas: High Bridge Books, 2020. Note the Foreword to the book is by Josh McDowell.
- Weiss, Robert, and Jennifer Schneider. *Always Turned On: Sex Addiction in the Digital Age*. Deerfield Beach, Florida: Health Communications Inc., 2015.
- Wikipedia. “Pornography.” Accessed March 15, 2022. www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pornography
- Szalavitz, Maia. “The Science of Addiction,” In “The Science of Addiction: What We Know, What We’re Learning.” Special Issue, *TIME Magazine*, October 25, 2019.

MAKING LIFESTYLE CHOICES

By James Sullivan



BACK in college, years ago, I knew a young woman, a friend of a friend, you might say. She was a pleasant young lady, unoffensive in her demeanor and polite for the most part, but she had a rather promiscuous lifestyle. I asked her once about her choices, and she justified her behavior by using the expression “Any port in

a storm, right?” The phrase means that if you have problems in your life, you need to find a safe haven, and any haven is better than being caught alone in a storm. However, she used it to justify bringing home a different man every night. This trite cliché was her way of covering up what she knew was unacceptable behavior. Her rationale

was that she had the right to live as she pleased; after all, she wasn't hurting anyone. Life was hard, so we deserved our little distractions.

She, of course, was not alone in her lifestyle choices, nor in her justifications for them. Sometime later, I found myself working in a hotel with a couple of gentlemen who lived by what is commonly called an "alternate lifestyle." They were reasonably pleasant, unoffensive in their demeanor, and polite. But they were very protective of their right to live in whatever way was acceptable to them and felt no one had a right to judge them for it. The underlying presumption in both these cases and so many more is that it's perfectly acceptable to live your life as you please, as long as it's not hurting anybody else. We live in a society that agrees with and promotes that presumption. This is the mantra by which "civilized" society exists. So, if you want to smoke cigarettes or drink too much, gamble away your savings, sleep around, or share your bed with someone of the same gender, you have that "right." But is it right?

Adam had the right to eat the forbidden fruit or not. He chose to eat. Was he right? David had the choice of bringing Uriah's wife to his bed or leaving her alone. He chose the former. Was he right? Saul had the right to persecute the people of "The Way," and he did. Was he right? The young lady I knew had the "right" to sleep in whatever bed she chose. Was she right? As a grown adult in a free society, you can, for the most part, watch whatever you want, say whatever you want, hate whomever

you want, condone whatever you want, do whatever you want, just as long as you don't cause harm to another person. But is it right? Throughout history, man has had the "right" to do what he believes is right in his own eyes and live life the way he wants. Throughout history, man has chosen the wrong path. Why? God explained it in Genesis 6:5, *"And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."*

The Bible says *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."* This shows that this is His creation and not our own. We should be trying to live by His rules and not our own. However, as we know from the lessons of Scripture and the lessons of life, man still does not recognize nor accept God's ways. God has promised us the day will come when He will be *"all in all"* (1 Cor 15:28), and man shall live in harmony with his Creator. But that day is not today.

So, how are we, as God's children, supposed to behave in a world that does not obey God? Well, there are two important points to consider to address that question. The first is our relationship to the world around us, and secondly, how do we follow the Father and reflect His character in a world that rejects Him?

Before we were baptized, we were both in the world and of it, meaning the rules we lived by were the same as those that run the world (often referred to as "the will of the flesh"). When I knew the young lady back in college,

I was not a Christadelphian, and I didn't know God. While I thought her behavior was dangerous (from a health consideration) and morally shaky. ("What would your parents think?") I didn't have a major issue with how she lived her life. After all, that was her choice. So, when she said, "Any port in a storm, right?" my only response was, "You experience an awful lot of stormy weather." I was a sinner, living as the world lives, worthy of condemnation and "without hope," as Paul says. (Eph 2:12).

So, what does change when we're baptized? Are we now no longer sinners, and are our sins not worthy of condemnation? Well, we know that's wrong. Even as baptized believers, we know we still sin, and if judged by ourselves, we are still worthy of the same condemnation. When we put on Christ, we accept this truth, but we also accept that by the grace of God, we could live a new life in Christ and be judged by our faith in him.

So, where does this put us concerning sin? Well, it can't place us above sin since we haven't overcome it. Only Christ has. Instead, it places us beside sin, outside its condemnation but certainly not beyond its power. It is not until that glorious day when we are fully changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye! (1 Cor 15:52). By standing beside sin, we can see sin for what it really is. The depth of evil, disobedience, and the overwhelming sense of self-obsession,

self-justification, and blindness toward God. The realization can be overwhelming when we see how evil this world is. To a disciple of Christ who understands redemption and where we stand in relation to sin, this realization should be overwhelmingly humiliating because, in our lives, we have been as much a part of sin as anyone. Paul said to Timothy, *"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst."* (1 Tim 1:15 NIV). Paul is telling Timothy that everyone should be honest about their failures because their sins condemn them. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and no one gets to place themselves above anyone else, save for the Lord Jesus Christ. *"All we, like sheep, have gone astray,"* explains Isaiah. *"We have turned everyone to his own way, and the LORD has placed on him the iniquity of us all."* (Isa 53:6).

By the grace of God, we, who have put on Christ, get to stand aside from sin and the world and see it for what it is, rebellious and destructive. This offers us the humble opportunity to be witnesses to what is the true, righteous, and loving will of God. Man has been at odds with God since the day Adam and Eve ate the fruit, and the world has been on a collision course with fate since the Almighty declared the seed of the woman would crush the head of the seed of the serpent. Since "the fall," man has been in rebellion against God.

Man has been at odds with God since the day Adam and Eve ate the fruit, and the world has been on a collision course with fate since the Almighty declared the seed of the woman would crush the head of the seed of the serpent.

There have been periods of reformation when he has turned back to his Father, but those moments always fade as the will of the flesh reinforces its power over man's conscience and drives him back into self-obsession and self-will.

At the same time as all this has been going on, the Father has maintained a "remnant" that sees and understands that His true will is playing out until it reaches its ultimate goal: all the earth full of His glory. That remnant could see that a redeemer would come, the seed of the woman, who would be bruised, but not crushed, by the seed of the serpent. That remnant saw that seed of the woman in the man Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who "*bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.*" (1 Pet 2:24 ESV.) As part of that remnant, today we can see by the ways of this world that a day is coming very soon when Christ will return to establish a Kingdom that will never end.

So, how are we to live in this world with all that God has blessed us to see? Peter tells us that we are to live righteously in the passage just cited. We are to stand out from the world as a reflection of all that the Father has offered in his son, just as the remnant has lived all through the annals of time. In his Letter to the Philippians, Paul offers these instructions as to how to live in the present age.

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world. Holding forth the word of life. (Phil 2:12-16).

We are to be blameless, harmless, without murmurings and disputing. Is this how we, as God's chosen, live today? Sadly, this is not always the case. Because of the abundance of the revelations shown to us, we can sometimes act very harmfully toward those that know not God. We may forget our first love, that we have been saved, not by our righteousness, but by the grace of God. As Paul told the Ephesians:

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear...Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Eph 4:29,31-32 ESV).

We must live before the world as Peter expressed it when he said, "*Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evil doers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*" (1 Pet 2:12 ESV) Glorifying God on the "day of visitation" will be the ultimate

statement that we have truly put on Christ and reflected his character.

By the time I worked with the two men mentioned earlier, my life had changed from what it was in college. By then, I had come to know the Father and the Son and been baptized into Christ. I had committed myself to live a new life in his name. When they discovered I was born again, they began to ask me a series of questions about how the Bible judges their lifestyle choice. In the past, they had been told that the Bible had either singled out their behavior and condemned them for it or that God loved them no matter what, so they shouldn't worry about it. Though we weren't friends, we did have an honest and respectful relationship. They knew my choices, and I knew how they chose to live. Though it was several years ago now, I can still remember the essence of our conversation. I told them the truth. I told them that the Bible condemned their behavior. I told them, concerning those that said differently about Scripture, that they were wrong, that you don't get to play around with the word of God to make it fit what you want it to say. I told them that the Bible condemns all sinful behavior and that *"all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."* This doesn't make their life choices right or any more acceptable in the eyes of God, and it simply places their choice in the context of all the wrong choices made by men against God throughout history.

When I was young, choosing to live promiscuously or homosexually was shunned by society and kept hidden. Today, choosing that lifestyle is more openly accepted. We have a tendency, as Christadelphians, to say that the old days when these lifestyles were shunned were better. Why? Was sin less sinful in those days? Was God's condemnation less warranted fifty years ago than it is today? One hundred years ago? Four thousand years ago? Of course not. Sin has always been sin. It is disobedience to the Creator and worthy of the same condemnation. But sin must have its time.

In the meantime, man in the flesh will choose how they want to live for themselves. They will justify their behavior by the rules of the day: "any port in a storm," or "Who am I hurting?" or even eventually the depths they reached at Sodom when they said about the angels of God, *"Bring them out to us, that we may know them."* (Gen. 19:5). In the end, God will destroy the will of the flesh, once and for all, in the same way he destroyed Sodom in the days of Lot. Ezekiel explains,

Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good. (Ezek 16:49-50).

But God will destroy the flesh because it was against Him that the flesh rebelled. It is our job, as God's faithful, to reflect the character of Christ toward all men, whatever their sinfulness may be. About the character of our Lord, Peter said,

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously (1 Pet 2:21-23).

No guile, no reviling, no threatening. This is how we're called to live because that's exactly how he lived on this earth. When they brought before him the woman taken in adultery, the Lord Jesus Christ posed a question to those who sought to stone her. He said, *"He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."* (John 8:7). Slowly, they all turned away and left. How could they stay knowing that they had brought only one of the two adulterers before Jesus for condemnation? They had condemned themselves in their deceit. But the woman stayed who had been caught in the act. As the others turned away, she had a golden opportunity to flee, yet

she didn't because, truthfully, she had no place else to go. Her sin had been exposed, so where would she go if she fled? Those that walked away could go back into hiding, hiding in sin, hiding from judgment and condemnation, but she couldn't. Her sin was out there for all to see. All she had to hold onto at that moment was the one kind statement made by the man who was now kneeling before her, writing on the ground. As he stood back up and looked around, he said to her,

Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?" She said, "No man Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more.

The one individual there who had the right, by his criteria to cast a stone, chose not to, that's the man who has saved us.

That's the man we serve. We who were once dead in our sins are now alive in Christ. All we have to hold on to is the salvation that comes through him. On the day of our baptism, we made a public confession of our sins, and now we stand always before him in sincerity and truth, reassured in our weakness that neither does he condemn us.

*James Sullivan,
(Stoughton Ecclesia, MA)*



ABOMINATIONS: THE OTHER ONES

By Joseph Robinson

TAKE a few seconds and think of the food you like the least. Not just a food you don't prefer but something you really can't stand the thought of eating. For me, that would have to be anchovies. Their appearance and smell make it hard to fathom putting one into my mouth. Once you put it in your mouth, the taste and texture make it hard to believe it will stay down for very long. To us, this is a feeling of absolute disgust.

We know God views the abominations of men similarly. Solomon wrote,

*These six things doth the Lord hate:
yea, seven are an abomination unto
him: A proud look, a lying tongue,
and hands that shed innocent*

*blood, An heart that deviseth
wicked imaginations, feet that be
swift in running to mischief, A
false witness that speaketh lies,
and he that soweth discord among
brethren. (Prov 6:16-19).*

When reading a list of things abominable to God, it sure would be nice if it the list of sins only applied to the most wicked people in "the world." However, when reading this list, we can all appreciate these are mindsets, attitudes, and actions we all partake in too often. What starts in our minds can easily become an action that is an abomination to our Father.

Our tendency is to put certain sins, certain actions and certain types

of people into a box and distance ourselves from them. Solomon clearly shows that none of us are too far away from that box.

Yet the goal of this article is not just to bring to our mind how many bad decisions we all make, for I think we all realize that, but as Ephesians 2:12 tells us, without the saving work of our Lord Jesus, none of us would make it. Bringing these things closer

time of Hosea and Amos (Hosea 7:10 and Amos 6:8). It is also our main problem today. Solomon's words about pride are timeless and relevant today.

Therefore, in Proverbs 6, Solomon moves on to a lying tongue, which is differentiated from a false witness who breathes out lies (ESV) but references the same idea. We are not just referring to someone who is a pathological liar, but to all of us who sometime stretch

When we realize we are all in the same boat,
it can help us show more grace.

to home can help us all when we deal with a brother or a sister, or a family member or friend who has committed or is committing a sin we rank as an abomination. When we realize we are all in the same boat, it can help us show more grace.

The first one on the list is a proud look. This is a good place to start if you ever wanted to be all-encompassing and include all humanity. This doesn't even go as far as saying you have prideful actions. No, you just need a "*proud look*," or "*haughty eyes*," as the ESV translates it. Those natural feelings of accomplishment after graduating near the top of your class, or feelings of self-worth after a big promotion at your job, can very quickly become the proud look that is an abomination to God. David tells us in Psalm 10:4 this attitude leads us directly away from God, and is why God finds it so concerning. Pride appears to be at the root of the sin of Sodom (Isaiah 3:9). In fact, pride was the root of the sin of Israel during the

the truth or leave out important parts of the truth because we are not willing to deal with the consequences of speaking truth. As we read in Proverbs 19:9 about a false witness, holding back information with the intent to deceive is equated with lying. If we find ourselves only telling half-truths to protect our own name or reputation, this may fall into the category of a lying tongue. If your parents, your spouse, or a good friend asked you a question, and you had to justify in your own mind how you answered that question, there is a good chance you have had a lying tongue. Suppose someone asks your opinion on a controversial topic, and you hold back knowing that sharing the Biblical view might make you unpopular. That falls into the category of a lying tongue. Our God is a God of truth and wants us to worship in spirit and truth, the reason He finds these actions so abominable.

If there were one item on this Proverbs list we could try to claim innocence of,

maybe the next one would be that item. Likely, most of us have never literally shed anyone else's blood, let alone shed innocent blood. But you must wonder if, figuratively, we have? Have we ever knowingly or unknowingly blamed someone else so we didn't have to take responsibility for the actions we have committed? Have we ever looked the other way when someone else is being mocked or derided? Have we partaken in activities in the ecclesia that in some way cut others out? 1 John 3:15 highlights the fact there are many ways to "shed innocent blood" beyond any literal blood being spilled, and all too often, most of us find ourselves doing exactly that. Our Father cares deeply about every one of his sheep and cannot stand when one of them is hurt. Continuing in the Proverbs verse, we can all relate with a heart and a mind that too often veers into evil imaginations. While we might be able to

stop ourselves from doing many things that come into our mind, it becomes a lot harder to stop thinking about them. These wicked plans, as the ESV states, are the thoughts that come into our mind when someone challenges the way we are parenting or how we conduct ourselves at the meeting. These are the feelings of revenge we have in our mind when someone says something hurtful to our family or us. We know from Jeremiah 17:9 that *"the heart is desperately wicked," and when we act on these evil thoughts, we commit abominations.*

"Feet that run swiftly to mischief" might be the one where many may say it is easy to avoid because their feet never run, let alone run swiftly. However, like everything else mentioned as an abomination to God, we probably find ourselves in these situations far too often. Think about the last five places your "feet" have traveled to, whether



they traveled by car, train, or bike. For many, these may be places like school, work, or the house of a family member or friend. While these are hopefully not places we are actively running to evil, are there opportunities to exercise spiritual growth at these places? And what about those of us who rush into judgments, or situations without carefully considering the entire story. Do our "feet" carry us to thoughts about others or the situations they are in that lead us away from the Grace of God? We may never actively run, but too often, we may find ourselves chasing mischief in other ways.

As we have discussed the idea of bearing false witness when discussing a lying tongue, we will skip to the last abomination listed to see if we fit that one as well. As you might have guessed by now, there is a good chance that each of us fits the bill. Proverbs states that God finds those who sow discord among their brethren and sisters abominable. Sowing discord is not limited to someone who goes around gossiping or spreading news about other people, although that often does sow discord. We can sow a lot of discord in our families, our ecclesias or any relationship if we always find ourselves in arguments. If we have decided that our view is right, and if convincing others our view is right becomes our primary focus, we may end up sowing a lot of discord. If being right about a particular topic becomes more important than being loving, we are most likely sowing discord. The wearing of "masks" during the last two years of a pandemic has shown us how applicable this statement is.

Going through this list of abominations to God might lead us to the conclusion we are hopeless and shouldn't bother to try. All too often, each one of us participates in actions that are thoroughly offensive to our Father. However, God has provided hope in this same Proverbs passage. Yes, God does view all these actions as truly dreadful, but He does not say that the believers who commit these actions are an abomination.

The Scriptures are full of people who, just like us, have committed many of these same abominations, yet God still loved them and desired godly repentance. In one incident in his life, David just about covered this entire list, yet he is described as a man after God's own heart. Manasseh was a king who, for most of his life, lived out every abomination possible, but when he turned to God, he was forgiven. It is the same for each one of us. Through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, our Father does not dwell on the abominations that we commit but has forgiven us and wants us to go and show the same forgiveness to others. Reminding ourselves that we can be just as guilty of these abominations, yet have been forgiven, should help us love and forgive others when they fall into an abomination.

We hope this walk-through of Proverbs 6 has reminded us that we all do fall short of the glory of God, but when we come to know Him and the grace that He offers, we can bring that perspective and grace to our dealings with our brothers and sisters.

*Joseph Robinson,
(Ann Arbor Ecclesia, MI)*

An aerial photograph of a dense green forest with a heart-shaped lake in the center. The lake's surface is a clear blue, reflecting the sky and the surrounding trees. The forest is composed of various shades of green, from deep emerald to bright lime green, suggesting different types of trees and sunlight filtering through the canopy. The heart shape is well-defined, with a slight indentation at the top and a pointed bottom.

SPECIAL ISSUE: CONCLUSION

LET US HEAR THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER

By Alan Markwith

BEFORE we get to the conclusion, let's go back to the beginning. The Tidings Committee annually works to decide on a theme for a Special Issue as a combined July/August issue. This year the theme selected was "Contemporary Issues."

We chose to address this theme by looking at root causes that lead to serious contemporary issues that can endanger our salvation. Those root causes are identified in Ezekiel 16, as Bro. Bill Link referenced in his introductory article. With that foundation laid, the focus was then brought to some issues under the category "abominations," which is a serious word according to our Heavenly Father. While the theme is Contemporary Issues, we reflected on Ecclesiastes 1:9, "*What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun.*" Our biggest issues today are what have always been those things that are represented within our flesh.

For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. (Rom 7:18 - 25)

Where do we go from here? Within this efficiency of just twenty-three words, there is the richness of meaning. "*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.*" (Eccl 12:13-14).

Fear God

While one of the criminals crucified with Christ hurled insults at him, the other criminal responded to him, "Don't you fear God?" It is here I want to ask you to make a note to yourself to read Proverbs 2, at a time convenient for you.

In that chapter, you will see the fear of the LORD. You will see the wisdom of God, His righteousness, what He wants and expects from us, and what we need to do to meet those expectations. By the end of that chapter, the fear of the Lord is seen in His goodness and severity, how we must be awed by Him because of the good He wants for us, and yet understand the terror of the LORD if we are disobedient according to His righteousness and justice. Fearing God is made up of blessings and curses, "*Behold, I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil.*" (Deut 30:15). Only God can set this kind of choice before us, but He has given us the power to choose. The criminal on the cross next to Christ appreciated the fear of God. He discerned right and wrong clearly.

Just two chapters forward from our theme chapter is Ezekiel 18:32 (NASB)

where God declares, “*For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,*” says the Lord GOD. “*Therefore, turn and live!*”

What God wants is for us to know Him and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. But not just in an intellectual way. “*Now this is eternal life—that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent.*” (John 17:3 NET) The notes in the NET version highlight for us that this “*eternal life*” is not just unending life of prolonged duration. Rather it is a quality of life, derived from a relationship with God. Having eternal life is herein defined as being in a **relationship** with the Father, the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom the Father sent. For John, this knowledge is not intellectual but relational. It involves being in a relationship.

Fearing God, and knowing God, is accomplished in keeping His commandments. “*For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.*” (1 John 5:3).

Keep His Commandments.

This brings us to the second part, “*and keep his commandments.*” Do we need to ask which commandments, as did the wealthy man that came to Jesus? He asked what he must do to inherit eternal life? Jesus responded: “*Keep the commandments.*” The wealthy man replied, “Which?” Or, in a separate incident, the lawyer asked what the greatest commandment is. Jesus replied;

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.

And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets. (Matt 22:37-40).

So, it comes down to this simple question, brothers, sisters, and friends, young and old. Are we up to the task? I believe every contemporary issue we face can be dealt with rightly when we fully appreciate what these two commandments are saying. They are not just sayings. They are commandments.

When we love God with the intensity of this commandment, “*with ALL your heart, with ALL your soul, and with ALL your mind,*” the issues of life are put into perspective, and we are then equipped to handle them. We are able to overcome what needs to be overcome, to put into balance what is unbalanced. When we know God in the way He revealed himself to Moses in the mountain, we can then understand when the wrath of God was about to be executed upon the children of Israel for not trusting Him. Entering the promised land, Moses fully realized the power of God was not wrapped up in His might, His strength, but in His character that He had revealed.

*And now, I beseech thee, let the **power** of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The LORD is long-suffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according*

unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now. (Num 14:17-19).

You have read our articles centered around some very fundamental risk factors, or root causes of sin. If we, as a people of God in Christ, can get those things right, fighting off pride, not being focused on our fulness, being willing to work, and extending ourselves to the poor and needy, these abominations will not arise. They will be fought off and not take root in our lives. By managing these root causes, many other contemporary issues we didn't cover could be more easily addressed.

For a long time, I thought that James 1 described two actions to achieve "pure religion."

*Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, **and** to keep himself unspotted from the world.*" (Jas 1:27).

Then I noticed that the "and" was in italics, signifying it was not necessarily in the original text. What a wonderful guide this becomes for us. If we want to "keep ourselves unspotted from the world," let us be busy visiting (caring for) "the fatherless and the widows" (those most vulnerable and in need) "in their affliction." By following this pattern,

If we, as a people of God in Christ, can get those things right, fighting off pride, not being focused on our fulness, being willing to work, and extending ourselves to the poor and needy, these abominations will not arise.

we can be better positioned to work through any issue as it comes up in life and bring it into proper perspective.

The handling of life's contemporary issues is wrapped up in John 3:21, "But he that **doeth truth** cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." Let's be sure as we work through the issues of our day that we do so by "doing truth." Truth, but not merely truth as spoken. The truth of an idea, reality, sincerity, truth in the moral sphere. To exemplify truth in this life, to express the form of truth in one's habits of thought and modes of living.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Eph 5:1-2 ESV).

Jesus said, "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." (John 13:13-17 ESV).

*Alan Markwith,
(Hamilton Greenaway Ecclesia, ON)*



What is harder is modeling true gratitude, especially in the face of our problems and unmet needs. Yet this is the perspective we must learn.

"Fulness, Faithlessness and Family Dysfunction"

Nancy Brinkerhoff, Denver Ecclesia, CO

THE CHRISTADELPHIAN
TIDINGS
OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

is published monthly, except bimonthly in July-August, by The **Christadelphian Tidings**, 567 Astorian Drive, Simi Valley, CA 93065-5941.

FIRST CLASS POSTAGE PAID at Simi Valley, CA and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Christadelphian Tidings, 567 Astorian Dr., Simi Valley, CA 93065.

Christadelphian Tidings Publishing Committee: Alan Markwith (Chairman), Joe Hill, John Bilello, Peter Bilello, Linda Beckerson, Nancy Brinkerhoff, Ruth Link, Kevin Flatley, Jeff Gelineau, William Link, and Ken Sommerville.

Christadelphian Tidings Editorial Committee: Dave Jennings (Editor), Section Editors: Nathan Badger (Life Application), TBA (Exhortation and Consolation), Jessica Gelineau (Music and Praise), Steve Cheetham (Exposition), Richard Morgan (First Principles), Dave Jennings (Teaching and Preaching), Jan Berneau (CBMA/C), George Booker, (Thoughts on the Way, Q&A), John Bilello (Letters to the Editor), Jeff Gelineau (News and Notices, Subscriptions), Melinda Flatley (Writer Recruitment and Final Copy), and Shawn Moynihan (Books).

Subscriptions: The Tidings Magazine is provided **FREE** for any who would like to read it. The Magazine is available in PDF Format online at **tidings.org**. If you would like to order a printed subscription to **The Tidings** you may do so simply by making a donation to cover the printing costs. The Suggested Donation for printing and shipping is **USD \$50.00**; (we ask for a Minimum Donation of USD \$25.00 for a printed subscription.)

All subscription information is available online at **www.tidings.org**. You may subscribe online and make donations online or by mail to the above address. Information on how to subscribe in other countries is also available online at **www.tidings.org/subscribe**.

The Christadelphian Tidings is published on the 15th of the month for the month following. Items for publication must be received by the 1st of the month. Correspondence to the editor, Dave Jennings at **editor@tidings.org**. Publication of articles does not presume editorial endorsement except on matters of fundamental doctrine as set forth in the BASF. Letters should be sent via e-mail to **letters@tidings.org**. Please include your name, address and phone number. The magazine reserves the right to edit all submissions for length and clarity.

©2022, **Tidings Publishing Committee**. In the spirit of Christ ask for permission before reproducing any material—**editor@tidings.org**

HAS YOUR ECCLESIA REVIEWED *ECCLESIA*SAFE?



EcclesiaSafe

CHRISTADELPHIAN TIDINGS

*Resources to help your ecclesia provide a safe,
abuse-free environment that glorifies God.*

ecclesiasafe.org



To make a donation or to subscribe, visit us at

WWW.TIDINGS.ORG

The brothers and sisters who write for *The Christadelphian Tidings* do so on a voluntary basis, and the Magazine is provided FREE to any who would like to read it. The magazine is available in digital formats online at www.tidings.org.

If you would like to order a printed subscription to *The Tidings*, you may do so simply by making a donation to help cover the printing costs. The suggested donation approximates the actual cost of printing and shipping which is US\$50.00, and minimum donation is US\$25.00. If you can afford to donate more, please do so in order to help out those that cannot afford to.

*Stay connected and up to date. Find us
on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter!*



The Christadelphian Tidings of the Kingdom of God
Periodicals postage paid at Simi Valley, CA
Send address corrections to: **The Christadelphian Tidings**
567 Astorian Drive, Simi Valley, CA 93065-5941