

TIDINGS

Volume 87, Number 11, December, 2024

160 YEARS OF THE CHRISTADELPHIAN MAGAZINE

Building faith in the
Christadelphian community.

TIDINGS

Volume 87, Number 11 / December, 2024



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E D I T O R I A L

160
YEARS
OF
THE CHRISTADELPHIAN
MAGAZINE

Our Editor Interviews
The Christadelphian Editor, Mark Vincent

THE *Christadelphian Tidings* magazine began as a Sunday School newsletter in Pomona, CA, in 1939. We are now pleased to be serving the Christadelphian community for eighty-five years. However, in Birmingham, England, *The Christadelphian* magazine has been publishing in the worldwide community for nearly twice as long. It represents a wonderful heritage of over a century and a half of Biblical scholarship and fraternal intelligence. We are thankful that the work continues today under the editorship of Bro. Mark Vincent. We had the opportunity to meet with Bro. Mark last April and felt that it would be good to reintroduce the work of *The Christadelphian* to our North American community.

Editor: Bro. Mark, could you please tell us a bit about the beginning of *The Christadelphian* and who some of the editors have been over the years?

Absolutely, my pleasure! The magazine was started about 160 years ago by Bro. Robert Roberts (whose chair I still have in my office, along with that of Brother C. C. Walker, who was evidently slightly taller!). It was initially called *The Ambassador of the Coming Age*, with the very first issue dating from July 1864. The name “Christadelphian” initially appeared in small letters on the cover, but the font size of this gradually grew, and the magazine was officially renamed *The Christadelphian* in July 1869.

The magazine has remained in print constantly since then. Other editors included brethren C .C. Walker, John Carter, Louis Sargent, Alfred Nicholls, Michael Ashton, and Andrew Bramhill. I took over about a year ago, and it’s



Robert Roberts's chair

been quite a steep learning curve—challenging but enjoyable and quite different from what I was doing before in a large corporation focused on investments!

The Christadelphian magazine has had an important role in the community’s history as its main global magazine. It’s a place where news and activities can be shared across the worldwide community and has acted as a “place of record” for ecclesial formation and membership. It has featured some truly excellent exposition, practical guidance, and exhortation over the years, and it has generally been seen as a trusted voice for the community on doctrinal, expositional, and practical matters.

Editor: What should we know about the CMPA? What is the relationship between the CMPA and *The Christadelphian* magazine?

CMPA stands for The Christadelphian Magazine and Publishing Association, the board of trustees behind the



Christadelphian Office and the magazine and to whom we are accountable. The CMPA is a Limited Company and a charitable body. As such the board of trustees has formal legal responsibilities as well as spiritual ones.

Neither the Office nor the CMPA has any formal responsibility or authority in the community. We are not a head office in that sense, and we do not make fellowship decisions (these are ecclesially based). However, through our publications, we do seek to be a trusted source of quality material, both about the Bible itself and about Christadelphian doctrine and practice. Over the years, the CMPA has been the main global publisher for the community. We currently have about 200 books in print, a whole range of booklets (some for preaching, some internally focused regarding community beliefs and practices), and other key Christadelphian materials, like the hymn book, the Statement of Faith, the *Ecclesial Guide* and the Bible Companion.

Editor: What else does the Office do?

There are three main aspects to it. The first is publishing, which I just talked about. Besides books and *The Christadelphian* magazine, we also publish a youth (and beyond!) magazine called *Faith Alive!* We are also a digital publisher. All our material is available digitally, and we have a subscription service called the Digital Library, which allows you to access all the back copies of *The Christadelphian* magazine (that's about 43,000 articles!) along with all our books—for a monthly fee. We plan to add to this resource considerably over time and hopefully improve the search functionality very soon, which, I'd be the first to admit, is not where it needs to be just at the moment.

So that's the publishing. But we also distribute our books, along with other Christadelphian books not published by us, plus Bibles and children's books, all around the world. Finally, the Office serves as a central hub for the community. We answer queries (from within and outside



the community), and provide advice on difficult individual and ecclesial matters, such as fellowship questions. We have been involved in helping with various reunions that have taken place between different Christadelphian fellowships in the past. We also provide the news-sharing service I spoke of earlier and house the main archival documents of the community as well as two research libraries. It's a lot! Most people who visit here (which everyone is very welcome to do if they are in Birmingham, UK!) are surprised that there is so much here and so much work that gets done.

And there's lots more still to do, as we shift the business and our output to be as relevant and accessible as possible in the modern age and as we seek to share and expound the unchanging and powerful teachings of Scripture. We recently did an online presentation about our work and some of the strategic decisions that lie ahead of us (a 30-minute presentation, plus Q&A). You can watch a replay here: tinyurl.com/2024OfficeUpdateRecording.

Editor: What is the relationship between *The Christadelphian*/CMPA and the ALS Diary?

It's not a formal one, but we are close. The Auxiliary Lecturing Society (ALS) is the main UK preaching organization with its own committees. We do work very closely together and provide publishing and other services to ALS. The ALS Diary is the primary global directory of the Central Fellowship, and we sometimes give guidance to it because of our role in announcing global ecclesial news and receiving fellowship-related communications from the brotherhood.

Editor: Why is North America of interest to *The Christadelphian Magazine*?

That's easy: it's because North America is a key part of the global worldwide fellowship! One of our great strengths as a community is that sense of unity of faith and practice across geographic and national boundaries. *The Christadelphian* magazine has an important role in sharing our global

activities and bringing us all together. We live in an increasingly fragmented, individualistic, and atomized society where everyone “*does what is right in their own eyes.*” It’s important to unite around what we have in common and strengthen one another in our faith. The magazine has a role to play in this: publishing edifying Biblical content, sharing news of our worldwide activities, and reminding us of each other.

We have always received and published news from North American ecclesias and had strong connections with brothers and sisters there. It has felt as though some of this has waned a bit in recent years, and we’re quite keen to rekindle that sense of being globally united. So please do send us your ecclesial news and activities, please do send us articles to consider for publication, and please do take a look at our publications (www.thechristadelphian.com) and the magazine to see whether you think it might be a helpful contributor to your discipleship and your ecclesia’s wellbeing and sense of belonging. It’s powerful to have mechanisms by which we stay connected, and the magazine and the Office help provide this.

Editor: What is the charter of *The Christadelphian* magazine?

We want to publish great Biblical content that enthuses, educates, and supports discipleship. We want to have helpful Biblical exposition but also to share community pieces so that we can learn from one another about our activities and experiences. We want to provide practical and exhortational content to inspire us all in our walk to the Kingdom. We want material that

helps defend our faith in a culture so alien to the gospel (“apologetics”). We want to deal with practical issues from modern life that challenge us. All of these and more.

One of the subheadings for *The Christadelphian* magazine over the years, which is still on our inside cover, is “Dedicated wholly to the hope of Israel.” This statement is a powerful focus and makes an important connection with the Promises and the distinctive Biblical understanding we share, which separates us from so much of mainstream Christianity. We recently merged with *The Testimony Magazine*, a magazine known for its excellent Bible study and for strongly defending the faith. Its subheading was “For the study and defense of Holy Scripture.” That’s important for us too. One of the mission statements of the CMPA is “Helping to develop the mind of Christ in the body of Christ.” With God’s blessing, that’s what we would like to try to do.

Editor: What excites you about the global Christadelphian community? What about any concerns?

I don’t know of any other community with such love and close attention to the Word of God. I don’t know of any other community whose doctrinal understanding is as Biblically aligned as ours and where there is the same commitment to the Promises and the apostles’ teaching. But there’s more than those points about doctrine and beliefs or even our approach to the Scriptures (all of which are really special). It’s also the warmth of the community, the precious unity that we share wherever we go in the world and meet other brothers and sisters. We are united around the things

concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, and we seek to follow the commandments of Christ in our practical behavior and discipleship. We take it seriously; it's our life.

Of course, there are challenges. In some respects, the community feels quite polarized. The way modern society worships the individual and their personal feelings or wants to the exclusion of everything else is a challenge for us all, both individually and ecclesially. It makes it harder for us to appreciate the importance of unity if we see it this way, ('so that's how it is, and if others don't like it, that's their problem!'). Social media and the Internet have also not been good for us in some significant ways (of course, I realize there are other ways in which they've been very positive). I don't think we necessarily know or read our Bibles as well as we used to. The more we can get back to the Scriptures and enthuse one another about the wonderful things God has done for us through Christ and which He promises in the Kingdom as revealed in the Scriptures, the more readily we will overcome these challenges.

Editor: Tell us about your relationship with the *Tidings*. How important is this to you?

We have had a very positive working relationship with *Tidings* for many years, and we hope this will continue until our Lord returns (the same would be true for our collaboration with organizations like the Christadelphian Bible Mission, Auxiliary Lecturing Society (ALS), military service

committees, Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, and *Lampstand* in Australia). You (Bro. Dave) and I are often in contact by email, and we also have periodic video catchups between the editors and chairs of the two organizations. This is helpful for discussing plans, concerns, and matters that may impact the brotherhood. From our separate perspectives, it's a great opportunity to have the two organizations work together and share thoughts. Having lived in America for about five years myself, I know several of the *Tidings* Committee members personally and have great respect for them, as I do for the magazine's efforts.

Editor: Why are you partnering with *Tidings* and *Glad Tidings* on the new multi-language magazine, *The High Calling*? Why is this important to you and the CMPA?

The typical audience for *The Christadelphian* over the years has been the developed Western world. We have a business model that rests primarily on subscriptions and book sales, and those areas are where there is disposable income enabling people to purchase our books and magazines (and for us to cover our staff costs and other overheads). But our community is increasingly much wider than the developed world. There are thousands of brothers and sisters in new regions of the world, and our charitable purpose is to serve the whole community, not just those in North America, the UK or Australia and New Zealand. We want to be able to serve all our brothers and sisters worldwide and share quality

content with them. *The High Calling* is an excellent way of providing some of our content and helping our non-English speaking brothers and sisters in those other areas, who increasingly form the main part of our community.

Editor: This might be a good opportunity to communicate any special offers the magazine has for our readers in North America.

As I mentioned earlier, we don't have as much North American input into the magazine (or as many North American readers) as we used to, and we'd love to change that. If you haven't seen the magazine recently, please do take a look. We're happy to send anyone a past issue or two as a free PDF sample. It's a constant work in progress, but we are making a lot of effort to get a good variety of content and for there to be at least something that would be of interest to everyone in each issue. We're always open to suggestions which you can send to me at editor@thechristadelphian.com.

As I mentioned at the start, *The Christadelphian* has been the main global magazine of the community since 1864. If you think that's a significant legacy and that our work has value and should continue, we'd encourage you to subscribe. We need your support as a subscriber to be able to do so. We're launching a new digital or digital-and-print subscription for 2025. You can sign up for this beginning December 1st at www.thechristadelphian.com/mag. The cost for digital is about \$4.00 USD per issue, and once you sign up, payment is made automatically monthly by card. The printed magazine is

an extra \$2.00 USD. International postage is expensive (\$5.25 USD per issue). Another option, if you desire a hard copy, could be to consider an ecclesial print subscription for five copies or more, and postage costs fall significantly then (we can also do digital ecclesial subscriptions—contact us if that is of interest). Subscriber feedback does suggest that people tend to be more likely to read the magazine when they have a print copy rather than just a digital one. Contact us by email if you want to discuss ecclesial subscription options. These have to be renewed every year (enquiries@thechristadelphian.com). We recently wrote to all North American Recording Brothers offering to send a sample copy of the magazine for each family in the ecclesia and enquiring how many to send. We haven't had a huge response to that offer, so if you're keen to see a sample, nudge your recorder or let us know yourself how many to send! We would love to welcome you as subscribers in the new year!

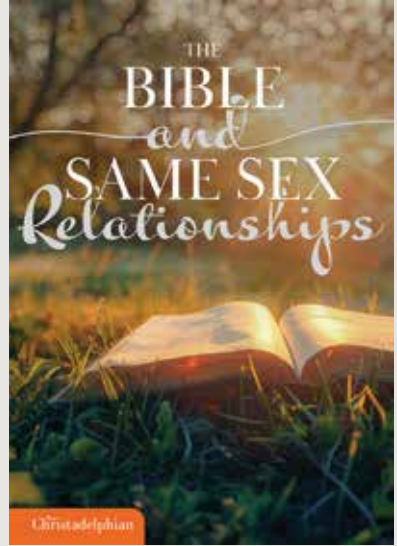
Editor: My thanks to Mark for answering these questions. We value your subscription to the *Tidings*. You may want to consider adding *The Christadelphian* magazine in the new year.

Dave Jennings

The Bible and Same-Sex Relationships

ARTICLE SERIES

With permission, *The Christadelphian* magazine has allowed us to make one of their recent series of articles available for free to readers of the *Tidings*. The series is called, *The Bible and Same-Sex Relationships*, and provides an important Scriptural review of what the Bible teaches about same-sex relationships. You can access this booklet at <https://mytidings.org/ssr> or scan this QR code:



The Christadelphian

FREE ISSUE

The Christadelphian magazine is pleased to offer readers of the *Tidings* a free PDF copy of the November 2024 *Christadelphian*. You can download your free copy at <https://mytidings.org/ctest> or scan this QR code:



A close-up photograph of a hand holding two dice over a gambling table. The dice are translucent red with white pips. The table has a grid pattern and some text, though it's out of focus. The background is dark, and the lighting is dramatic, highlighting the hand and dice.

GAMBLING NOTHING FOR SOMETHING

By Nathan Badger

Do you remember Pete Rose? When I was a kid, I knew him as an exceptional major league baseball player and skilled manager. But I also remember when he was caught gambling on his own team. In 1989, he became a bigger legend after being banished from baseball for life. Gambling ruined Pete's life.

When Pete passed away last month, it occurred to me how much the world of gambling has evolved. Once confined to Las Vegas and Atlantic City, gambling has proliferated. It is estimated that 43 million Americans bet a combined \$23 billion on the 2024 Super Bowl! Casinos are everywhere. A myriad of lotteries are in every corner store. Mobile devices have made it so easy to gamble 24/7 from our bedroom, office, or sports arena.

Gambling can be tempting. But is it just about "having fun?" As Christ's disciples, where do we fit in the alluring world of gambling?

Nothing for Something

What is gambling? Gambling is when people take the chance of losing money or belongings and when winning or losing is decided mostly by chance. There are many kinds of gambling, including lottery tickets, casino games, bets on sports or video games, and even playing bingo or cards. It can be done in person, online, and now through apps on mobile phones.

Gambling is designed so that the winner, on average, is always "the house"—the business that offers the gambling opportunity. Over an average of plays, the player is always

the loser and inevitably wins "nothing for something." The odds of winning are stacked against them. If this were not the case, the gambling industry would go bankrupt. Today, computers and algorithms are craftily utilized to ensure the sequence of wins and losses lures players to continue playing despite losing, and then the house makes greater profits.¹

By the Numbers

You may have noticed the flood of ads for gambling companies like FanDuel or DraftKings. Canada, and most US states recently legalized sports betting. These ads have helped transform it from an industry with \$400 million in revenue to over \$11 billion in just five years (in the US alone).² A recent Canadian study observed:

All of this is contributing to the normalization of gambling. Something that we conventionally think of as a very risky and a very dangerous practice [is framed] as something that's actually just fun and harmless.³

A few statistics illustrate the staggering amount of money the world spends on gambling. It is hard not to reflect on what these gambles could be more profitably spent on:⁴

- The global gambling industry is projected to reach revenue of \$531 billion by 2025 (that is, losses by gamblers!). It is estimated to hit \$1 trillion by 2030.
- From 2017 through 2023, the market size of the global online gambling industry alone jumped from \$30 billion to \$86 billion.

- In March 2024, the global sports betting and lottery industry was valued at an additional \$244 billion dollars.
- In **Britain**, over 8 billion British pounds worth of National Lottery tickets were sold between 2022 and 2023.
- **Australians** bet about \$244 billion in 2023. In comparison, the Australian government spent just under \$223 billion on social security and welfare in 2023.
- **Americans** like to gamble. A whopping 60% of adults say they have gambled in the past year. They wagered a record \$120 billion on sports betting in 2023.
- In **Canada**, there are over 19 million active online gamblers among its 41 million population. On average, viewers now spend 20% of Canadian sports broadcasts watching sports betting ads.

Principles

What does God think about gambling? Is it just fun and harmless? The Bible does not specifically address gambling, but that does not mean God endorses it. The following six principles help us evaluate gambling from God's perspective.

1) The Love of Money

Although it can feel exciting, "strategic," entertaining, or like an escape, the heart of gambling is a desire to get money. According to Paul, the pursuit and love of money brings heartache, ruin, and pain. He warns us not to be fooled: "*Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into*

many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction." (1 Timothy 6:9).⁵ Furthermore, he observes, "*The love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pang[s] [griefs NIV].*" (v. 10).

If we are gambling to make more money, and it significantly impacts our time, money, and mood, then we need to ask ourselves honestly: is it because we love money or God? The love of money, whether through gambling, work or other, is not a happy end and does not bring us closer to God's Kingdom. Even if we do become wealthy, riches can "*surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky.*" (Proverbs 23:5 NIV). Instead of pursuing money, Paul encourages us to "*Flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.*" (1 Timothy 6:11 ESV). If we love and invest in these qualities, our lives will be much happier regardless of our bank account.

2) Quick and Lucky Riches

Gambling entices us to "get rich quick" by testing our luck. Ironically, gambling is purposely designed to be unlucky. God encourages us not to rely on luck, chance, or quick gains for our daily living but to earn our living through honest, hard work. Proverbs counsels: "*Wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it.*" (Proverbs 13:11). Likewise, Paul encouraged the believers in Thessalonica to "*earn their own living,*" and "*If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.*" (2 Thessalonians 3:10, 12). In other words, God intends us to

work for our daily provisions and not to simply rely on the “chance” of hasty gains through gambling.

In Isaiah’s day, Israel forsook the LORD for fraudulent gods of “Fortune” and “Destiny.” This behavior angered God: *“But you who forsake the LORD,... who set a table for Fortune, and fill cups of mixed wine for Destiny, I will destine you to the sword.”* (Isaiah 65:11, 12). Israel set up tables of offerings and invested their resources to test their luck on them—exactly like gambling. But all of this was wasted. The implication is that “chance” or “luck” can become a god we worship. “Get rich quick” schemes push God out of our lives and replace him with something far less reliable. Later, God contrasts the joy and fullness of his own servants with those who worshipped the gods of chance and fortune—the latter were hungry and full of shame (v. 13).

3) Trust God

If we rely on gambling to make money, it is time to ask ourselves who we trust: God or money. Jesus asserts we *“cannot serve both God and money.”* (Matthew 6:24 NIV). Our trust and faith should be in God rather than in money and gambling. It is easy to forget that everything we have is from God. David trusted this when he declared, *“For all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours... both riches and honor come from you... in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all.”* (1 Chronicles 29:11-12).

God has, therefore, promised that if we are in need, we can pray to Him, and he has the supreme ability to help

us. If we are poor, out of a job, in debt, cannot pay our bills, and have no money for our family, then God wants us to trust Him for help. He delights to help us! The odds of “being taken care of” (winning) are much higher if we rely on God than if we turn to a casino or lottery ticket. Paul encouraged the first century believers to develop this trust and faith when he promised: *“My God will supply every need of yours”* (Philippians 4:19) and, *“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.”* (1 Timothy 6:17 NIV).

4) Greed and Covetousness

Gambling is typically fueled by an intense and selfish desire for something we wish we had or something that someone else has. It enthrones our personal desires instead of God (Exodus 20:3, 17). It directly appeals to covetousness and greed, *“which is idolatry.”* (Colossians 3:5). Instead, Paul encourages us to be content with what God has given us—even if it’s different from what someone else has. Paul wrote:

We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.” (1 Timothy 6:7-8 NKJV).

When we gamble, we are selfishly frittering away resources that God has blessed us with. We earn wages, *“only*

to put them in a purse with holes in it” rather than investing them in God’s house (Haggai 1:6, 9 NIV). Instead, the Bible repeatedly shows that God wants us to be good stewards of his gifts and to share them selflessly with Him and His people. This attitude is the opposite of greed and covetousness—giving rather than getting. Peter reminds: *“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.”* (1 Peter 4:10 NIV).

5) Addiction

Sadly, gambling can progress from being a problem to becoming an addiction. “Problem gambling” involves more than losing money. It describes gambling when it gets in the way of work, school, or other activities; causes mental, physical, or financial harm; damages a person’s reputation; or causes problems with family, spouse, friends, finances, and even work. Gambling addiction is a chronic (lifelong) condition that involves compulsive seeking for or performing gambling activities despite severely negative or harmful consequences. If we become addicted, we cannot control the impulse to gamble. So, telling someone not to gamble, shaming them, or giving up on someone is not helpful.

Today, the gambling experience is purposely engineered to take advantage of a chemical process that exists in all our brains and is associated with all addictions. The layout of casinos, design of phone apps, and additional feel-goods such as colors, lighting, sounds, or nearby food venues all encourage the gambler’s brain to keep playing.

The anticipation of winning, despite many losses, and the excitement of a realized win are also potent stimulants to our brains. They cause the chemical dopamine to be released into our brain nerves, which provides an additional intense feeling of pleasure and reward. This dopamine rush further reinforces the enjoyment we are already feeling and makes us want to play again... and again—even if we lose. Over time, this repeated pleasure pathway can cause our brains to become rewired and override their natural braking system. It is almost impossible to stop without intervention and help.^{6 7}

Is gambling a “master” of our lives or a loved one? Paul exhorts the Corinthians by correcting some of their popular sayings: *“I have the right to do anything,’ you say—but not everything is beneficial. I have the right to do anything’—but not be mastered by anything.”* (1 Corinthians 6:12 NIV). In other words, Paul recognized that not all pursuits were beneficial, and our pursuits were not to rule us. Rather, **we** are to rule and have mastery over our bodies. Since the gambling industry seeks to become a master over our brains for their profit, we are wise to avoid gambling altogether.

6) The Poor and Vulnerable

How should Christ’s disciples treat the poor and vulnerable? God exhorts us to look out for the poor and disadvantaged and issues strong warnings against those who try to take advantage of their plight. Proverbs pointedly warns:

Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy

honors God. (Proverbs 14:31NIV)

One who oppresses the poor to increase his wealth and one who gives gifts to the rich—both come to poverty. (Proverbs 22:16 NIV).

Overall, gambling exploits and preys on the desperation of the poor. It is founded on the losses, pain and suffering of others. For one to win at gambling, many others must lose. In 1999, the National Gambling Impact Study Commission found that those with incomes of less than \$10,000 spend more on lottery tickets than any other group, while high school dropouts spend four times as much as college graduates.⁸ More recent studies have determined that the majority of gambling revenue comes from lower and lower-middle-income households and that the rate of problem and addictive gambling is much higher among lower-income homes, the homeless, Indigenous peoples, jobless, those living in disadvantaged neighborhoods, and those with substance or mental health disorders. Relative to the rich, the poor gamble more of their income.^{9 10} In the world of gambling, the poor and vulnerable become poorer and more vulnerable. They are the financial backbone of the industry.

Even if we gamble for “fun” or “entertainment” and not for the love of money, it is difficult to justify these reasons against the predatory side of the gambling industry. If we gamble, we are participating in and benefiting an industry that knowingly treats the disadvantaged in ways that are clearly at

odds with God’s values and commands.

I Need Help!

If we are struggling with gambling or know someone who is, this is not an easy battle. It is important we recognize when we have a problem and deliberately seek help. Firstly, by regular prayer to our Father. But also, through the help of trusted friends and even specialists who can assist us with support and proven treatment. Sheer willpower and good intentions are rarely the solution to any addiction. Here are some starting points—links are found in the sources:

a. Understand Problem Gambling and Gambling Addiction:

The Science Behind Gambling¹¹ is a great intro article with a helpful video.

b. Therapist:

A professional and qualified therapist who has skills with problem gambling is a very valuable resource. The website Psychology Today¹² is a great tool for finding a therapist where you live.

c. Gamblers Anonymous:

Find support and proven skills at a local meeting.¹³

d. Helplines:

Talk to someone, find support and additional programs and resources:

- **USA**—(800) GAMBLER from the National Problem Gambling Helpline. (Their website also has some great resources.)¹⁴
- **Canada**—Provincial gambling helplines are listed on the Canada Safety Council website.¹⁵ The

Center for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) is also a great resource:¹⁶ (416) 535-8501 ext. 2.

The Facade

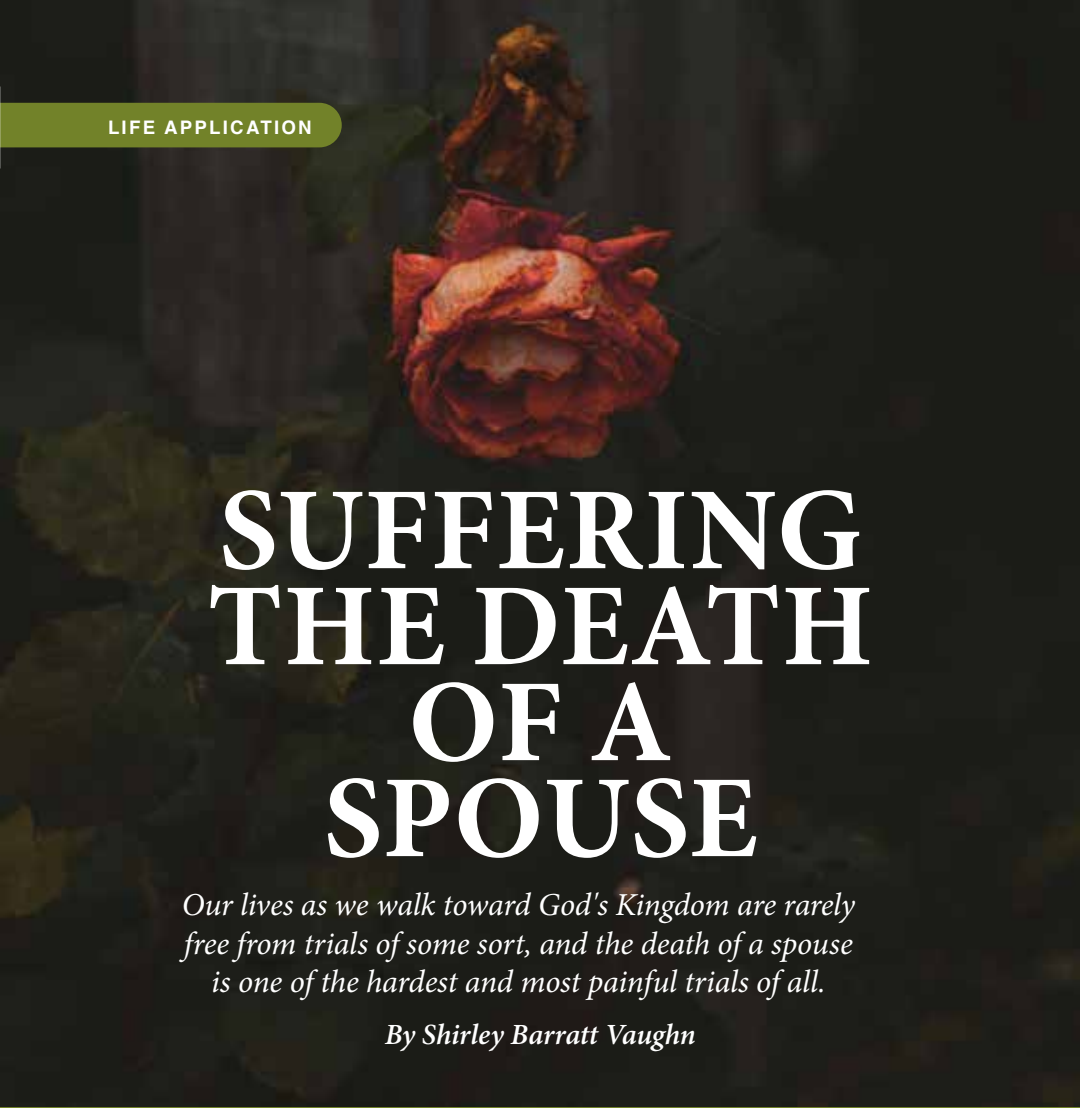
The gambling industry is growing in leaps and bounds. It is “in our face” more than ever before. And it is tempting to have fun or solve our problems with a couple of quick bets. But gambling is a façade—its outward appearance conceals its disturbing inner reality.

Any way we roll the dice, gambling challenges God’s principles, which are meant to guide us toward his Kingdom.

It does not bring happiness and frequently destroys the lives of those who are sucked in by its alluring offers. Instead of investing our money in “nothing for something” games, Jesus encourages us to “*lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven*” (Matthew 6:20) and to trust and love him rather than riches or money. Rather than run the risk of addiction, we are wise to avoid gambling altogether. Gambling is simply a bet that is not worth playing.

*Nathan Badger,
Cambridge Ecclesia, ON*

- 1 Schull, Natasha. *Addiction By Design—Machine Gambling in Las Vegas*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012.
- 2 Statista Research Department. “*Sports betting in the United States—statistics and facts.*” Statista.com. September 30, 2024. <https://www.statista.com/topics/8581/sports-betting-us/#topicOverview>
- 3 McMillan, Dexter et al. “Hey sports fans: you spend up to 20% of every game watching gambling advertising.” CBC.ca. January 19, 2024. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/marketplace/sports-betting-gambling-advertisements-1.7086400>
- 4 These statistics were gathered from a number of reputable sources on the web.
- 5 All Scriptural citations are taken from the English Standard Version, unless specifically cited.
- 6 “How the brain gets addicted to gambling.” *ScientificAmerican.com*. November 1, 2013. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-the-brain-gets-addicted-to-gambling/>
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- 15 Canada Safety Council: www.canadasafetycouncil.org/gambling-addiction/
- 16 Center for Addiction and Mental Health: <https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-illness-and-addiction-index/problem-gambling>



SUFFERING THE DEATH OF A SPOUSE

Our lives as we walk toward God's Kingdom are rarely free from trials of some sort, and the death of a spouse is one of the hardest and most painful trials of all.

By Shirley Barratt Vaughn

I received an urgent call early Monday morning not to leave for work because some dear friends were on their way over. I was initially a little perplexed because the timing was bad, and it would make me late for work. But then I started to feel that deep uneasiness, that gripping fear that starts somewhere in the pit of your stomach. This request was unusual, and something must have been wrong! I did a quick mental check

of our family. Where was everybody? That week in August, we were spread everywhere. James, our youngest (15), was safely asleep in bed, Luke (19) was at the Manitoulin Youth Conference, having just arrived from the UK. Josh (20) had left at 5 am that morning on the four-hour drive to San Francisco for a summer work job. Chris, my beloved husband of 23 years, was in Jamaica on a two-week Bible Mission trip. I was soon to learn the tragic and

devastating news that at age 51, he had suffered a heart attack in Jamaica and died. Overnight, I had become a widow, a single parent, and a whole lot more besides, and from that moment on, our lives were completely turned upside down and would never be the same again.

Our lives as we walk toward God's Kingdom are rarely free from trials of some sort, and the death of a spouse is one of the hardest and most painful trials of all. We know that death is an inevitable part of living. James 4:14 tells us, *"For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."* We know this in theory, but it is almost impossible to be prepared to lose a precious life.

In some cases, death occurs after a long and painful illness, with much suffering for the patient and the family. In other cases, it was a tragic or unexpected shock. Whatever the circumstances, we are left reeling, facing the daunting task of reorganizing our lives and adapting to the massive changes.

As the months and years go by, you will never ever stop missing that person, but sadness will gradually mingle with joy as we treasure, remember, and celebrate all they were. Memories become part of our ongoing lives as we live in hope and anticipation of the promise of eternal life (1 John 2:25).

Grieving Is a Process

Grieving the loss of a loved one is a process that one must work through and embrace as we *"walk through the valley of the shadow of death."* (Psalm 23:4). Many people react in quite diverse ways, and grieving stages do not have a schedule or timetable.

As the months and years go by, you will never ever stop missing that person, but sadness will gradually mingle with joy as we treasure, remember, and celebrate all they were. Memories become part of our ongoing lives as we live in hope and anticipation of the promise of eternal life. (1 John 2:25)

As the days go by after the initial huge shock, we gradually realize the full impact of the loss. We can become unstable, including feelings of desperate grief, panic attacks, fear, dread, and anger. This huge event overshadows everything else, and we sometimes feel we are losing our faith and trust in God.

There are often feelings of guilt as we wonder if we contributed to the death or did not do enough to prevent it somehow. There are often many regrets and "if onlys" and so many unanswered questions. Nothing else seems to matter anymore; everything is measured from that event. Behavior can become rash and sporadic, disorganized, anxious, and unsettled. Unfortunately, many essential decisions must be made during this time, and it is not easy to be rational and wise.

But we must allow the pain we feel and share those emotions and tears as it eventually leads to healing. We sorrow much because we loved much. If we do not “work through” these feelings and emotions, we can become frozen in grief or angry about our situation, much like Naomi was when she returned to Israel from Moab. Though this is understandable, we do not honor the dead by almost dying with them in this way. We need to watch for illness and depression that can come on from unresolved feelings of guilt or bitterness. It helps to keep communicating with others who have suffered similarly before, and they can often give wise counsel. Eventually, we can take what we have learned from this painful experience and reach out to others who are suffering in a similar way. It is wise not to swing too quickly into a new relationship, as your emotions are very vulnerable and not always to be trusted.

Although people try, no one can truly understand our specific loss and pain. We can feel completely abandoned by God and man and in deep despair. We feel so alone and isolated, and at these times, it may help to pour out our hearts and souls by writing our feelings and thoughts in a journal. David poured out his deep personal feelings so beautifully in the Psalms, and they come alive as we read them over and over and find similar feelings and expressions that speak to us.

My tears have been my meat day and night. (Psalm 42:3).

My heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen upon me. (Psalm 55:4).

Hear my prayer O LORD, and let my cry come unto thee. My heart is smitten and withered like grass: so that I forget to eat my bread. (Psalm 102:1, 4).

But God has promised He will never give us more than we can bear, and He will never leave or forsake us. The death of his saints is precious in His sight (Psalm 116:15). The God who loves us and brings these things upon us is our refuge and strength in times of trouble. We know that “*all things work together for good to them that love God.*” (Romans 8:28) And we also know that we “*can do all things through Christ which strengthens [us].*” (Philippians 4:13 NKJV). Our God is the “*God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation*” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NKJV), and from His holy hill He hears those desperate prayers on our knees when we feel we just cannot go on. He gives strength from above and helps us to accomplish things we never thought possible before. “*My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.*” (Psalm 73:26).

There are many different strength words, but strength in this verse is the word *tsur*, which means a sharp rock. We can become as strong and solid as a rock when God becomes our strength. (Psalm 46:1).

The LORD Chastens Those He Loves

We don't make light of the discipline of the LORD and don't lose heart as the Lord chastens those He loves. As hard as it is to do this, we rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character, and character hope (1 Peter 1:7). In the end, we can say along with David, *"It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes. I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me."* (Psalm 119:71, 75).

Our family, our friends, and our Christadelphian community are wonderfully caring and supportive during times of trouble. Those who

have lost loved ones will always be grateful for the amazing love, compassion and support that is shown.

The knowledge that the collective love and caring of brothers and sisters all over the world are praying for you and your family is a huge source of comfort and strength.

Patient listening ears are extremely helpful as we share our grief. Our tears are a sign of the great love we felt, and if we do not allow ourselves or others to mourn after loss, it can become difficult to embrace the changes and work towards healing. We need to tell our stories repeatedly as daily we grapple with the enormity of the loss and what it means to us.



But sometimes, in trying to help grieving families, we can seem to minimize this tragedy in their lives by discounting the present hurt and pain with a reminder that they will see their loved one in the Kingdom. The hope of resurrection and the promise of the coming Kingdom do give us wonderful comfort, and we don't sorrow as others. In fact, the dreams and anticipation of being there with the Lord and meeting our loved ones again on the resurrection morning give us amazing hope and help us sleep at night. However, those assisting the bereft must be careful to remember that our hope for the future does not take away the tremendous sorrow and struggle of living without the deceased every moment of everyday life now. Jacob, spoken to by the LORD Himself, was given extraordinary promises for the future and an absolute certainty he would see his loved ones again. Still, Scripture often mentions how he grieved intensely for Rachel and Joseph. Grieving families or individuals will need our patience and ongoing utmost tender love and care, as it can take many years to adjust.

You cannot take away the pain and loneliness, but there are simple things you can do that are immensely helpful. Remember, "Love is kind," and it is not hard to think of kind things to do. I will never forget the wonderful brother who arrived at my door one day with a load of wood for our fire when winter was coming or the thoughtful invitations to dinner occasionally. Cards, letters, emails, and texts with

words of consolation and sympathy and a thought of something you miss or still remember about the deceased can be sent and retold for years to come. Brothers and sisters can help by sharing Bible readings now and then or even on a regular schedule if needed. Give special attention to holiday times and special events, as these can be a very painful time of renewing sadness.

There are times of deep despair when we just cannot seem to pray, yet we know it is an amazing source of help. Offer to sit and pray with the family or individual, or let them know that many are praying.

Think about your own skills and see if they could be helpful in some way. Offer to take over one of the tasks done by the deceased regularly. It can be overwhelming in the loss of a spouse with children or teenagers for the remaining parent to manage everything alone. The whole family structure changes with the loss of a family member, and the feelings and sense of family are badly shaken.

In conversations, avoid minimizing the loss by using the "at least list." Some might say, "At least he or she did not suffer," or "At least you have your children," or "At least you had a happy marriage," or "At least you had them as long as you did." All these things are true, and those grieving tell themselves these things day after day, but it does not take away the pain and agony of missing today!

Many get uncomfortable and apologize when they bring up the deceased's name, and it brings tears. They quickly

want to change the subject and get onto brighter things. The true meaning of sympathy is to share your feelings or identify with another. The only way this can be done is to sit with them and listen, and probably cry with them. Encourage the person to talk about the loved one if they can and encourage and share a memory. Just bring them up naturally in conversation, and do not feel awkward when they are mentioned. Simply say, "I'm sorry," and share a hug when the tears come. Mentioning something people remember about my husband is a beautiful gift they can give me.

Time is a great healer, and we finally reach a resolved mindset when we begin to integrate the loss into our lives, pick up the threads and begin again. Naomi's bitterness was turned to joy and gladness when Obed was born to Ruth and Boaz. "*And he will renew your life and shall sustain you in your old age.*" (Ruth 4:15 NIV). We regain a sense of purpose and reason, and a more balanced view is gradually restored. Our hearts will always ache to have them back, and we will always long for what should have been. But we become more accepting that we are not betraying the deceased by going on. We are not leaving them behind, but rather, we are taking them with us in our hearts. We can find joy in the memories of when they were with us and treasure the gifts they left with

us. How you courageously live without them is an honor to their memory. It is what they would have wanted.

God Shall Wipe Away All Tears from Our Eyes

We have looked at many of the struggles and trials in the loss of a loved one, and now our hearts turn to our dear Lord Jesus Christ. He suffered the greatest and ultimate loss, that of life itself so

that we might live. He is our redeemer and friend, who knows our hearts, feelings, and pain. He will never leave us or forsake us. Our daily prayer is that God will give us strength like a rock to turn to him with brave endurance in our grief and sorrow. May we all say, like Job, "*The*

LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away: blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21).

The joy of the Kingdom and life everlasting is set before us. At the conclusion of the Millennial Age, we can be assured,

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (Revelation 21:4).

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*Shirley Barratt Vaughn,
Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA*

MARY AND MARTHA

By Leo Houben and Patricia Ferguson



MARY, Martha and Lazarus lived in the quiet village of Bethany, a day's journey from Jerusalem. When their brother fell gravely ill, the sisters sent an urgent message to Jesus, who was in the city. Time passed, and they wondered why he had not come to heal their brother. Then, by God's will, Lazarus fell asleep. As was the custom, villagers and synagogue members had prepared a meal of consolation after the entombment.¹ Their hearts heavy with

sorrow, the sisters longed to hear the voice of Jesus, yearning for the peace and comfort of His words.

On the fourth day of Lazarus's death, Jesus arrived. Martha hurried to meet him. *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now, I know that God will give you whatever you ask."*² (John 11:21-22) Martha knew she would see her brother again in *"the resurrection at the last day."* (v. 24).

It was now about a week before the Passover and crucifixion. After speaking with Jesus, she returned to Mary and softly whispered, *"The Teacher is here, and is asking for you."* (v. 28). They exchanged a glance, fully aware of the tension surrounding Jesus, especially because of death threats from the religious authorities. Discretion was essential.

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was, she fell at his feet and filled with emotion, and she cried, *"Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* (v. 32) In other words, "Where were you in my grief when I needed you most?!"

As Jesus, his disciples, and the mourners approached the tomb, some Jews questioned why he had not intervened to heal Lazarus. *"Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind have kept this man from dying?"* (v. 37). Their whispers of doubt deepened the tension.

"Remove the stone" (v. 39 NASB) Jesus commanded. A gasp rippled through the crowd, and then deep silence filled the air until Martha replied, *"But, Lord, four days have passed; the smell will be unbearable."* (v. 39 NASB). Where was her faith? Even in the presence of Jesus, Martha hesitated to fully trust in his power as the Son of God. Her doubt revealed a gap between her faith and her words. Gently, Jesus reminded her, "Didn't I tell you if you believe, you will see the glory of God? I am the resurrection and the life." Martha humbled, bowed her head in silence.

It was then she recalled a previous visit with Jesus and his disciples. Martha had been very busy with meal preparations

and serving their guests, while Mary enjoyed time with her Lord. Martha was quite upset and expressed her annoyance to Jesus. She was insistent in demanding that her duties be fully shared by her sister. He listened and understood her grievance and then replied. *"You are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed. Mary has chosen what is better."* (Luke 10:41-42).

At that moment, she heard the stone rolling away and remarkably, there was no foul odor. Jesus looked upward and prayed, *"Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."* (John 11:41-42).

Then, with a powerful voice, He called out, *"Lazarus, come out!"* (v. 43).

A silence fell over the crowd as a faint shuffling sound echoed from the tomb. They stood motionless, wide-eyed with fear as a figure slowly emerged. In a moment, several rushed forward to remove the burial wrappings. Lazarus's body showed no signs of decay. Even among the harshest critics, there could be no doubt that Lazarus was certainly dead before being raised.

In reverence, Lazarus prepared to kneel before his Lord but was instead drawn into a tender, warm embrace by Jesus. Moved by that moment, those around them began embracing one another. Some were still grappling with doubt, while others were overcome with awe, their hearts filled with joy as they marveled at the miracle unfolding. Mary and Martha now understood why Jesus delayed. This extraordinary

Their love for God and His Son inspires us to unite in purpose, setting aside distractions that could lead us astray and separate us.

miracle further glorified his Father and would bring many to believe.

The sisters clung to their brother, their hearts overflowing with joy as they walked home alongside Jesus. Yet, a sense of unease fell over Martha. She noticed a group of Jewish officials nearby, whispering among themselves. There was no doubt in her mind they were already plotting to report to the Jewish council what they had seen.

A week later, a large crowd of Jews learned Jesus was approaching Jerusalem. They waited to see him **and** the man who had been raised from the dead. The chief priests were alarmed by the growing influence since the resurrection.³ Interestingly, the Jewish leaders had not pursued the deaths of others who had been raised from the dead. This particular miracle provoked a powerful reaction as it threatened their authority. Lazarus' resurrection was undeniable evidence of a miraculous event, and yet the priests plotted to put him to death to eliminate this proof.⁴

What can we learn from this dramatic account? We have been privileged to see these two women, both quite

different in temperament, mutually share a love of God's Son. Martha, the organizer, was taught by Jesus that there are higher things that must be prioritized above her present goals, like time spent with him and putting spiritual understanding into everything she does. While Mary expressed her faith differently, she dropped her lesser responsibilities, burdening her sister and others.

Their spiritual growth became an anchor as they endured the heartbreak of Jesus' trial. They witnessed their beloved Lord's grievous suffering at Calvary, their faith sustaining them through the darkest hours. Their love for God and His Son inspires us to unite in purpose, setting aside distractions that could lead us astray and separate us. By being mindful of our fellow believers, we can walk together purposefully, anticipating His return.


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and Patricia Ferguson,
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Orangeville Ecclesia, ON*

¹ The body was placed headfirst into the tomb (*kokhim*), with a small slab at the tomb's entrance with the person's name written on it. Members of the synagogue include family and friends.

² All Scriptural citations are taken from the New International Version.

³ Sadducees rejected the resurrection of the dead and did not believe in the existence of angels. Pharisees believed in the resurrection and angels.

⁴ Within two weeks is a fair conclusion since the raising of Lazarus occurred shortly before Jesus was crucified (John 12:9-10), and the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus occurs at the end of Luke 16.



When storms of life are raging,
And we fear that we will drown,
You are our peace,
You are our peace,
And in darkness grove within us,
And we want to run away,
You are our joy,
You are our joy.

STORIES BEHIND THE SONGS

By Jessica Gelineau

THE members of The Seventh Day¹ have become known in the global Christadelphian community for creating and sharing spiritual music. Their recent release is a double album entitled *Window to Infinity*.² The album contains 23 original songs recorded with the highest level of professionalism the team has achieved. The new album has made its way to streaming devices and the hearts of many believers.

The songs on this album represent a variety of songwriters, some of whom are just beginning to share their work with the wider community. Here, we spotlight for you three songs by three songwriters known for songs such as *Wings of Dawn*, *Good News of the Kingdom of God*, and *Here at Last*. The songwriters are Sis. Aletheia Burney, Bro. James DiLiberto and Bro. Phil Rosser.

The songwriters were requested to choose one song that held spiritual significance in their lives and to share more about the creative process behind this song.³

Lord, I Know You're Here

Aletheia Burney

Lord, I love the night,
I see You in the stars
as I gaze into that window to infinity,
And even when the city lights
shine neon bright,
enough to fill my eyes,
Even when I cannot see You,
Lord, I know You're there.

Lord, I love the dawn,
I see You in the sun's rays
as they climb across

that distant blue horizon,
And even when the highway noise
drowns out the sound of
birdsong on the air,
Even when I cannot hear You,
Lord, I know You're there.

Lord, I love the light,
I feel You in the midday sun
and taste You on that summer sea breeze,
And even when I close the doors
and windows and hide behind these walls,
Even when I'm in the dark,
I still know You're there.

Lord, I love the sound
Of a heartbeat in the quiet
as I listen for Your still, small voice.
And even when the life I lead
barely leaves enough space to breathe,
I know that if I find the stillness,
Lord, You're there,
You have always been there,
You will always be there,
Father, You will never leave me,
Lord, I know You're here.

This song is close to my heart because it was inspired by a specific scenario and a specific place. The structure of the song is simple, with just four verses. It goes from night to dawn, to midday, to dusk. In that way, it may be a little unconventional. If you were going to follow that pattern, you would start in the morning and work your way to night. But it was inspired by being out under the night sky, and then over maybe the next week or two, another verse would come, and then another, and the song became more like a collection of journal entries.

The second verse came about when I had gotten up early in the morning when I was living in a house on a hill with this incredible balcony overlooking the river, just near the city of Perth in Western Australia. I could see one of the main highways full of people commuting to work. There's incredible bird life here, even in one of our biggest cities. So, you have these connections to real life reflected in the lyrics.

For some context behind the third verse, it was the middle of summer, and I talk about closing the doors and windows, which in Australia can be necessary just to survive the heat. I think having included these kinds of tangible and sensory anchors to places and times, hopefully will make this song relatable to other people as well. Many of us know what it is like to live in a city, have light pollution, and not be able to see the night sky. To have that connection to nature is not so accessible all the time. We know what it is to lead busy lives and to intentionally step out of that, seek the still small voice, and find God in silent spaces and wilderness recreations.

Rise to Our Help

James DiLiberto

Awake!

Why are You sleeping? Only silence

Can You hear my desperate cry?

Come out!

Why are You hiding in the shadows?

Will You hide Your face from me?

I am here!

Did You forget me? My affliction

You know the secrets of my heart.

Rise to our help
for the sake of Your steadfast love,
redeem us.

Please do something!

We're taking anything we can.

In this battle we are losing, are You willing?

Save me!

'cause I am falling, my breath is failing

This pit is dark and I'm so lonely

Save me!

The waves are breaking, and I am sinking

I'm reaching up to take Your hand

Rise to our help
for the sake of Your steadfast love,
redeem us.

Please do something!

We're taking anything we can.

In this battle we are losing,
are You not willing?

Awesome in wonder,
mighty to deliver,

We're desperate

for the power of Your Presence.

Are You not with us?

Are You still with us?

You have broken me
(my face is to the ground)

You have covered me
(with the shadow of death)

I am a scorn to my neighbors...

I'm not alone, so...

Rise to our help
for the sake of Your steadfast love,
redeem us.

Please do something!

We're taking anything we can.

There are a lot of mental health challenges in my family. We have depression, anxiety, and children on the autism spectrum. There are times in your life when you just need some help. And when it's not coming, you can get angry at God. There was a time when my wife was having a lot of challenges with migraines, and I remember I kept praying day after day for help with it, and it wasn't coming. I remember running outside when it was raining. It was like a movie. I ran outside in the rain, shook my fist at the sky, and screamed at God for the first time. I yelled at God. I screamed at Him, asking Him, "Why are you not doing anything? Why are you sleeping?" And I was so mad at God for not seeing me (or not feeling like He was seeing me!).

Halfway through COVID, I was having similar feelings. "When are You going to come to our help here?" Around that time, in the Bible readings, we had gotten to Psalm 44, and I remember reading the end of Psalm 44 and thinking, "Can you say that to God? Is that all right?" Then I realized, wait, I've been there before. I've said exactly that before.

We know what it is to lead busy lives and to intentionally step out of that, seek the still small voice, and find God in silent spaces and wilderness recreations.

I sat down and put a chord progression together in a minor key. With lots of tension and anger, I started singing some of the end verses of Psalm 44, word for word. I could not believe what I was singing. "Why are you sleeping? Why are you hiding? What is going on with you? I'm here. Did you forget me?" At the very end of that Psalm is this pleading—I know You're sitting, but now, please rise to our help. It's not for me. It's for the sake of your steadfast love. Not for me, not for my problem's sake, but for the sake of your steadfast love, redeem us.

Sis. Aletheia recently helped me see a key change in the verse about God's steadfast love. So, when you get to that



Aletheia Burney, Phil Rosser and James DiLiberto

musical shift, you're metaphorically at the end of the day. You're saying, "Give me something. God, just give me something. Do something. I'll take anything you can. Just give me a little bit of relief. Just give me something. Give me a breadcrumb. Because we're losing in this battle right now."

Some of the other Scriptural allusions here would be the person with leprosy with Jesus, asking him, "Are you willing?" He says, "Lord, if you're willing." Sometimes, we don't know if God is willing. We don't necessarily know. That can be an open question to God or Jesus.

The song gets to maximum tension and instrumental turbulence in that second verse. Lyrically, I had initially only thought about Peter falling in the waves, reaching up to take Christ's hand. Even in the presence of Christ, he was falling. Bro. Phil helped me bring in more imagery there, evoking the loneliness and isolation we all have sometimes felt. Similar to what Joseph would have experienced while in the pit or when John the Baptist was in prison.

We experienced this globally during COVID 19, being locked in and isolated. I think everyone got a sense of that loneliness we can experience in really dark places, even to the point of facing death. It's one of the reasons for the line about the shadow of death in the outro (concluding section). It's from Psalm 44, but at times, we, as believers, are a scorn to our neighbors. The shadow of death surrounds us. Our loved ones die. In those moments, sometimes we can ask, "Are you still with Israel when she was losing battles?" They would say, "Is the Lord among us, or not?"

At the end of the day, we ask God to rise, but we leave it all in God's hands. It's the idea of "Not my will, but Thy will be done." Or "Please do something. We're taking anything we can, and we'll leave it up to you to provide and leave it there." That's why it ends on that cliffhanger.

One more thing: this is the only song on the album that is a duet with my wife and me. It's very autobiographical of our challenges since the pandemic and our children's struggles. So, this song is my favorite because it's been the



most therapeutic for me and my family. It hasn't been a happy time, but it has worked something far greater in our hearts.

The King

Phil Rosser

Dry were the tears from the eyes
from the ones who recognised
the voice of the King

When He cried to the Father of Lights
and the Father heard His cry
when the darkness covered Him

Turned were the captives now set free
by the righteousness of liberty

When the King passed through death's gate
and brave was the face of the slave
on the day salvation gave
the heartless hope
to the voices that sung

How long, O Lord,
will you forget us now forever?
How long, O Lord,
will you hide your face from me?

Now there's a change of the scene
Now prisoners are set free
Now there's a change of the scene

Hosanna to the Son of David,
Hosanna to David's greater Son
Hosanna to the Son of David,
Hosanna to David's greater Son

I'll change my life, I'll change my heart
now that I live by the Son of God
I'll change my mind, I'll be set apart,
the King of light has conquered dark

Hosanna to the Son of David,

Hosanna to David's greater Son
Hosanna to the Son of David,
Hosanna to David's greater Son
You changed my life,
You changed my heart,
now I live by the Son of God
You changed my mind, set me apart.
The King of light has conquered dark

Hosanna to the Son of David,
Hosanna to David's greater Son
Hosanna to the Son of David,
Hosanna to David's greater Son

Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna to the King
Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna to the King
Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna to the King

The King was the song in this collection that I had been very reluctant to re-record from my early demos. It's a very personal one in terms of how the life of Jesus affects and impacts me. The song is an imagined scene of Jesus coming up to the gates of Jerusalem just before he's about to be crucified and people welcoming him as their king, hoping all their burdens would be lifted. For those people at that time, they did not understand Jesus was going to release them of the far greater burden of sin and death, and that's what was on his mind. They were thinking about their immediate problems, but he was thinking about their eternal position.

For me, The King is one of those songs that took a while to mature to where it is now. It has a lot of the DNA of the early demo that I did, but some of the changes have added a lot of richness to the song.



It was quite late in the recording process with James that I said, “Hey, how about we change that bridge around the second time instead of, I’ll change my life, let’s say, ‘You changed my life.’” In the life of a believer—when the work of Jesus initially impacts you, say, after you have recently been baptized, you really desire to do something for Him and to change your life. But as shown through the slight changes of that second bridge, there’s a change of thinking as we age. We learn that this is not about me at all. It’s not about what I can do for Christ. It’s about what Christ is doing for me and through me. I think this progression in the lyrics shows how we often start with a desire

to do something and come later to the realization that Christ is working in us. Being such a personal song, *The King* also reflects a little bit on Hymn 330, my favorite in the *Green Hymn Book*. “I heard the voice of Jesus say, come unto me and rest.” If you look over from *The King* to that hymn, you’ll notice a lot of similar elements, for example, a key change from the minor to the major for the second half. I love that hymn and how it can move people to think about how Jesus is calling them to lay down their burdens and rest on the eternal hope in him.

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- 1** The Seventh Day team includes Aletheia Burney, Timon Burney, James DiLiberto, and Phil Rosser. They would like to acknowledge the fantastic work of Joseph Cheek and his team at Island Recording Studios and thank all the contributors to the album. The Seventh Day official website: <https://www.theseventhday.com.au> The Seventh Day Instagram Page: <https://www.instagram.com/theseventhdaycollective>. The link below is to a previous Tidings article by Sis. Kristin Atwood, based on an interview with The Seventh Day (James DiLiberto, Aletheia Burney, Phil Rosser, and Timon Burney). Reading this article lets you learn much more about the team’s philosophy, methodology, and past projects. Aspiring songwriters and musicians also receive encouragement about using their interests to serve God and other believers. <https://tidings.org/articles/www-theseventhday-com-au/>
- 2** You can listen to the *Window to Infinity* album, which can be downloaded on Bandcamp at <https://the.seventhday.bandcamp.com/album/window-to-infinity>. It can also be found on all major streaming platforms, including Spotify and YouTube. Readers interested in obtaining a CD copy, please contact info@theseventhday.com.au. If you’re enjoying the songs on the album, you might like to know that of the twenty-three songs in the *Window to Infinity* album, twelve can be found in the new *Blue Worship Book*, and one is in the *Orange Worship Book*! Visit <https://www.theworshipbook.com> for sheet music and more.
- 3** These stories were extracted from Episode 10 of the *Good Christadelphian Music Podcast*, hosted by Bro. Levi Gelineau and Bro. Levi Myers. You can find this episode and others of *Good Christadelphian Music* on any podcast platform. Go to <https://christadelphianmusic.com/podcast>.

PART 6 – FINAL

NOAH: SAVING YOUR FAMILY IN A DARK WORLD

By Dennis Bevans

WE have arrived at the conclusion of our thoughts together on Noah as we close out the story in the Genesis record and pick up Chapter 9. Verse 1 is similar to Genesis 1:22, 28, with one significant difference. We see the omission of “*subdue and have dominion,*” which is for the parable of creation and the 7,000-year plan. In verse 2, we can compare the animals being brought to Adam to be named as they were to Noah’s ark without fear. The

rules changed because of sin. The proper covering required the shedding of blood, as already discussed. The world will revert to this Edenic state in the Kingdom age, as noted in Isaiah 11:6-9.

Another contrast to Genesis 1 (specifically verses 29-30) appears in verse 3. The creation ends with a planet of vegetarians. We saw the introduction of sacrifice in Chapter 3, emphasized in Chapter 4. We also noted the clean animals by sevens and the unclean by

twos, showing there was a distinction created already in an unrecorded law. It is, therefore, obvious meat was eaten before the Flood, but that may have been by allowance. Whereas in Genesis 9:3 it reads more as a command. At least, that is how I figured it when ordering a steak.

However, verse 4 makes a very clear distinction. The word “*life*” is the Hebrew *nephesh*, which is a breathing creature. It is often translated “*soul*,” and it is frequently referred to in this context considering wrested Scripture. Without going too far down this trail, we will address it quickly. *Nephesh* is used in Genesis 1:20, 21, 24, and 30 and translated as “*life*” and “*creature*.” In Genesis 2:7, it is first translated as “*soul*” when Adam became a breathing creature, as were the animals created on days 5-6 before him. The next usage is verse 19, where the “*creatures*” are called to Adam to be named (same word *nephesh*). This sequence is the equation of life: body of dust + breath of life = living creature (or *nephesh*). Without the breath of life, we are all dust (the curse of Adam includes “*from dust thou wast, to dust thou shalt return*”). This is a good place to insert Ezekiel 18:20, which begins with “*The soul that sinneth, it shall die*.” Leviticus 17 gives us the law based on our Genesis record in the early chapters. Let’s look at verse 14.

*For it is the **life** of all flesh; the blood of it is for the **life** thereof: therefore I said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh: for the **life** of all flesh is the blood thereof: whosoever eateth it shall be cut off.*

All three uses of the word “*life*” are *nephesh*; therefore, the life is the blood thereof! If our blood is moving, by definition, we are living creatures. Without the movement of blood and distribution of oxygen through the breath of life, we are no longer living creatures (or living souls) but rather dead souls. When that process happens to a clean animal, they are eligible for food, but with a catch (back to Genesis 9:4). The life is the blood, so it is against the command of God to eat living creatures (purpose is food to sustain life, not torturing animals). Verse 5 reminds us that God hates violence. Recall that this was one of the reasons he flooded the world. In fact, the next verse shifts gears to murder and states capital punishment for murder as the divine command. This command will be reiterated in the law and extend into the Kingdom age (e.g., Zechariah 13:3). We compare this to today, and man’s thinking gets very fuzzy.

Verse 7 is a repetition of the “*be fruitful and multiply*” command, the Hebrew exclamation point. God then uses the next few verses to bring us to some closure. The word “*covenant*” is mentioned 7 times after the Flood (verses 11-13, 15-17). The word *nephesh* is also used 7 times after the Flood (translated as “*life*” in verses 4-5, “*lives*” in verse 5, and “*creature*” in verses 10, 12, 15-16). The phrase “*flesh*” is also used 7 times after the Flood (Genesis 8:17, 9:4, 11, 15-17). Remember that 7 equals the covenant’s completion, which helps us segue to the next token, just in case you thought we were done with that “7 stuff.”

Look at verse 12. The word “*token*” is the same word used regarding circumcision (Genesis 17:11) and the Passover (Exodus 12:13). Cutting off the flesh to be separate and dedicated to God individually (circumcision) and nationally (the crossing of the Red Sea as a type of baptism) connects both stories to the Flood. This covenant is made to “*perpetual generations*” at the end of the verse, so it is everlasting! The next verse introduces the token. This display is not necessarily the first rainbow but the first time it is called out as a token. Rainbows are only visible between the sun and water. White light that is pure from the sun hits water particles and reflects into 7 colors, and then returns to white as it exits. The concept, the doctrine of truth from God (as the rain in Deuteronomy 32:1-2) shines upon the flesh, and if it has been “*through the waters of life*,” it will flow through them as united and pure as one body with many colors. God’s purpose includes men and women. Therefore, if we have no cloud (of witnesses), we can have no rainbow! On our own, we cannot return God’s pure light, but as one united bow, we can do so by His design.

God always keeps his promises (from Genesis 8:1 for this specific promise). This consistency encourages us to look forward to Him keeping the one about His Son returning to earth to establish a

Kingdom that will never be destroyed! The next couple of verses instruct us that God looks for rainbows too (Genesis 9:16). The phrase “*everlasting covenant*,” at the end of the verse is used 14 times in the Old Testament (two **sevens**). However, it only appears once in Greek (see Hebrews 13:20-21).

*Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the **everlasting covenant**, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

This effectively provides us all with an exhortation to be like Noah in these last days.

Verse 17 repeats the covenant language for emphasis, and then the record moves to a not-so-flattering part of the story. Like most Biblical stories, we have examples of weakness and failure that contrast with the glory and success of their potential. This example gives us hope as we compare our walk to those men and women of faith. Verse 18 mentions “*Canaan*,” which is a commentary from Moses (e.g., the rivers in Eden, the comment on the first marriage, and the description of the land Lot viewed in the plain of Sodom).

Like most Biblical stories, we have examples of weakness and failure that contrast with the glory and success of their potential. This example gives us hope as we compare our walk to those men and women of faith.

This region was part of the promised land for Abraham and his seed, which Moses sought but did not achieve in this life.

Look at verse 20. The word “husbandman” in Hebrew is actually two words, meaning man of the ground. This ties to creation (ground is the word *adamah*), Cain (Genesis 4:3, 10), and even the introductory comments on Noah from our first article (Genesis 5:29, “*And he called his name Noah, saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD hath cursed.*”). Whenever we see the word “vineyard,” we should always look for clues about the inheritance. Exodus 23:10-11 adds another 7 if you want to chase it down on your own. In a section so full of spiritual implications and echoes, it is a shame that what actually transpires is an abomination.

Verse 21 tells us he was uncovered, an easy tie to Genesis 3:7: “*And they knew that they were naked.*” This condition motivated them to create their own covering for shame and actually designating the fig as a symbol of natural Israel in the process. The word “saw” in verse 22 is the same word used in chapter 6 in a couple of places to connect here. In verse 2, “*The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair,*” which is an obvious reference to attraction. Verse 5: “*And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth,*” the result of lust from verse 2. In verse 12, “*And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt,*” with noted wickedness and violence in the next verse. The Hebrew is “to see, look at, inspect, perceive, consider.” This is

not a casual glance word. Interestingly enough, we have connected the story of Noah to Habakkuk 2:14 a couple of times. Let’s consider verse 15.

Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that puttest thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!

Verse 16 is even more graphic, so you can read that one independently. The Genesis record is being discreet concerning the Noah account, but the connection to verses like this and the events in Sodom and Gomorrah suggest something far more vile than the KJV word “look.”

Let’s continue in Genesis 9:23, where his other two sons demonstrate respect for the vulnerability of their father. “Saw” is the same word when they “saw not,” meaning they did not inspect, but it is obvious they noticed him. The word “knew” in verse 24 is the intimate knowledge word. The word “done” is the same as the word “made” in Genesis 1:31. There is no need for further graphic descriptions here, but I think the point is made. This is disrespect, at a minimum, and a vile abomination. As a result, the punishment fits the crime in verse 25. This is a severe punishment if it were for a mere passing glance. We should close this section by commenting that nothing good ever happens when one is drunk and naked. Good advice for young and old.

The next couple of verses close out the narrative on Noah by reminding us of his righteousness (in spite of this noted mistake), and so we will close by doing that as well. Verse 29 tells us he lived to

be 950 years old. Notice this language is actually the close of Genesis 5 with “*and he died.*”

We must recognize that though we have recorded a terrible decision and subsequent story in the life of Noah, it does not define him in Scripture. All of us have made bad decisions and know what it is like to pay the price for not only our poor choices but also the poor choices of others. As we look at this family as an example, we need to remember they were spared despite their sinful nature and circumstances. None of us want to be remembered for our worst decision. Unfortunately, this story is the end of the Genesis matter but not the end of the matter in Scripture. This verse is the only place where Noah’s error is recorded. The life of Noah is Biblically remembered for good and used as an example of glory. Despite our sinful circumstances, we, too, can be accounted as righteous and adopted into the family of God.

Let’s go back to a verse we have looked at a couple of times already in Heb 11:7:

*By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the **saving of his house**; by the which he condemned the world, and became **heir of the righteousness** which is by faith.*

Noah was not a perfect man, but he was “*perfected*” by the challenges he overcame. Ezekiel compares him to Job and Daniel as the top examples of righteousness. Jesus cites him favorably for his preaching and example. We

look here toward the end of the Biblical record, and he is praised for “*saving his house,*” which reminds us we are all works in progress.

Verse 13 adds:

*These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having **seen** them afar off, and were **persuaded** of them, and **embraced** them, and **confessed** that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*

He was not of this world but rather rose above it in faith as an example for us. Let’s close with the last couple verses in Hebrews 11:39-40 to include our hope.

And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

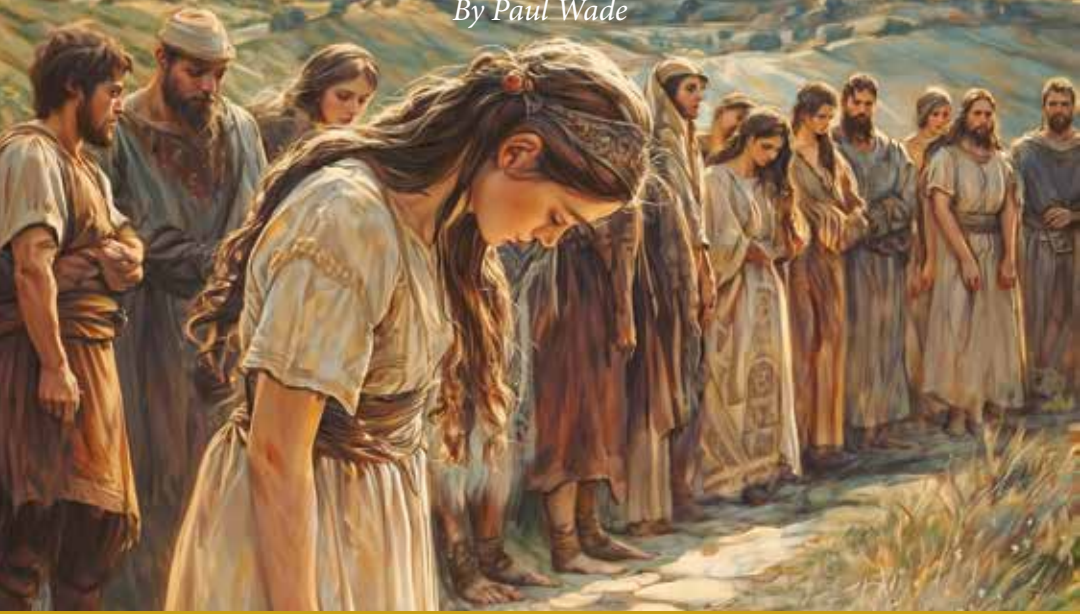
Let us all be like Noah and obey unto the saving of our families, that we might be redeemed by the blood of Jesus and found worthy of a place in the Kingdom of God. Or rather, that we might be perfected with Noah, having obtained a good report through our faith, God having provided some better thing for us, that they, without us should not be made perfect.

Even so, come Lord Jesus.

*Dennis Bevans,
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ABOMINATION AND JEPHTHAH'S VOW

By Paul Wade



SOLOMON wrote, “When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay.” (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5). In a way, we make a vow when we are baptized. It is a commitment to change, to stop doing our own will, and to start doing God’s.

Perhaps when Solomon wrote this passage, he was rephrasing Numbers 30:2, when Moses wrote, “If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth.”

Some may think the word “vow” is too strong in regard to ourselves.

However, the dictionary defines a vow as “a solemn promise or pledge to God, dedicating oneself to an act, a service or a way of life.” The word “commitment” is defined as “a pledge or promise to do something.”

Of the two definitions, the one for vow seems to be the better of the two to describe the action taken at baptism. Even though we make such a vow at baptism, we know we cannot fully keep it because we all fail. This circumstance is where redemption comes in. All vows under the Law of Moses were redeemable by an amount of silver or by some means determined by God. Without redemption, we are all lost, which is why God provided it.

In Scripture, our faith is likened unto tried silver, but we are redeemed and justified by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The psalmist wrote, “*For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried.*” (Psalm 66:10). So, we are first redeemed and then tried or tested. In a verse concerning God’s people, we read, “*And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day.*” (Deuteronomy 15:15).

Jephthah’s Vow

When one thinks about vows in Scripture, Jephthah often comes to mind. But just what was it that Jephthah vowed, and what did he do to fulfill his vow to God? There are certainly a lot of differences of opinion on these two questions.

Many make three assumptions about

Jephthah’s vow, which may lead to an improper interpretation.

1. That Jephthah’s vow doesn’t really make sense, and therefore he didn’t really know what he was saying.
2. That a person can satisfy a vow to God by disobeying His direct commands.
3. That the various versions of the Old Testament have inaccurately expressed Jephthah’s vow.

Each of these assumptions needs to be addressed based on the Word itself, but not necessarily in the order presented here. A brief amount of groundwork should be considered. Without detailing the whole story of Jephthah from Judges 11, here is a summary of the details.

First, it was God Himself who placed Jephthah in a position to deliver Israel from the oppression of God’s enemies. In 1 Samuel 12:11, Jephthah is one of four men selected by God. “*And the LORD sent Jerubbaal, and Bedan, and Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and ye dwelled safe.*”

Now, let’s look at the vow Jephthah made.

And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD’s, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering. (Judges 11:30-31.)

It was certainly Jephthah's intent in his vow to dedicate something to God if He would deliver the children of Ammon to him without fail. But the wording of his vow is so uncertain that it is presented differently in almost every version of the Bible.

Nevertheless, it was a normal practice under the Law in those days to make a vow of an individual's services to God. In Leviticus 27, vows are discussed (vv. 1-27), and this situation is the first item covered. Therefore, to fulfill his vow, Jephthah was expecting to give God a person, not an animal—more precisely, both a person and a burnt offering.

His vow was in two parts. *“Whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD’s.”* There is no use laboring the point of whatsoever versus whomsoever, as the Hebrew word *asher* can be translated by either of those two English words. However, with the assumption that Jephthah intended to give to the LORD a person, the word “whomsoever” is a better choice. Jephthah's vow manifestly signified something of significant value to him; thus, it amounted to a considerable sacrifice. Since the very nature of his vow involved a person, it must refer to someone over whom Jephthah had complete control. The possibilities are limited to two persons—a favorite servant or his daughter. Consequently, the conclusion becomes inevitable that Jephthah was vowing unto God someone for whom he had great affection, someone whose loss he would mourn bitterly. As mentioned, it

needs to be recognized that the vowing of persons was perfectly normal under the Law, making provision for such acts of devotion to God in Leviticus 27:2.

The second part of the vow was, *“And I will offer it up for a burnt offering.”* The Hebrew text of this phrase is ambiguous and, once again, has been rendered in quite a variety of ways. The Interlinear Bible, which attempts to translate the Hebrew as accurately as possible, renders the second part of Jephthah's vow as, *“And I will offer it instead of a burnt offering.”* However, there is another possibility. Hebrew pronouns are completely uncertain and can be translated as he, she, or it. In addition, it often becomes a matter of choice as to which noun the pronoun is referring. This phrase can just as accurately be translated, *“I will offer to Him (i.e., to the LORD) a burnt offering.”* This grammatical construction can be found in quite a few places (Zechariah 7:5, Joshua 15:19, Nehemiah 9:28, Job 31:18, Isaiah 22:20). We do know that whatever Jephthah vowed and however he fulfilled his vow, it was right in the eyes of the LORD, because he is included in Hebrews 11:32, with those who will be saved by faith. We can be equally certain that the fulfillment of his vow was not the offering of his daughter as a burnt offering since that would have been a direct disobedience to the Law of God.

Even with all this evidence, some still feel Jephthah had no other option but to offer his daughter as a burnt offering. It is necessary to examine the problems this conclusion raises.

The biggest of the issues is that human sacrifice is an abomination to God, and this is well documented in Scripture. (Deuteronomy 18:9-12). The New International Version (NIV) adds the word “sacrifices” in verse 10, which is appropriate because there is no other reason for a person to do this. Thus,

lesson when Samuel reprimanded him:

And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. (1 Samuel 15:22).

[S]ome still feel Jephthah had no other option but to offer his daughter as a burnt offering. It is necessary to examine the problems this conclusion raises...

the NIV begins verse 10, “Let no one be found among you who sacrifices son or daughter in the fire.” This is a direct command from the LORD and is not isolated. Another of those places in Scripture is in Jeremiah 7,

For the children of Judah have done evil in my sight, saith the LORD: they have set their abominations in the house, which is called by my name, to pollute it. And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart. (Jeremiah 7:30-31).

What could be plainer than these words about what God has commanded? God says in both these quotations that to participate in any way with human sacrifice was an abomination to Him. When God commands something, it must be obeyed. Saul learned this

Or, in Jephthah’s case, “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifices, and to hearken than the fat of a young maiden.” If Abraham had been allowed to go ahead and sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering on Mt. Moriah, then perhaps there would have been a precedent for this sort of sacrifice. But God stopped him after Abraham had displayed his faith in God’s promise to him. Even though Christ offered his own life as a sacrifice for sin, this was not a burnt offering.

Revelation states clearly that no one who works abomination will make up Christ’s multitudinous bride. “And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” (Revelation 21:27).

However, there are other problems. Another obstacle to Jephthah offering his daughter as a burnt offering is that under the Law there was no such thing as a female burnt offering. In both

Leviticus chapters 1 and 8, we are told that all burnt offerings must be male.

Since, under the Law, there is no such thing as a female burnt offering, if Jephthah had offered his daughter, then that amounted to murder. The Law in Leviticus 24:21 also covers that too, *“And he that killeth a beast shall restore it: and he that killeth a man, he shall be put to death.”* In case you may think, *“But it does not specify a woman,”* take into consideration that the word man is from the Hebrew *adam*, and when God created both man and woman, as stated in Genesis 5:2, He called both of them *adam*, *“male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created.”* There is no mention in Scripture that Jephthah murdered his daughter and that he sought forgiveness for such a terrible deed. When King David ordered the death of Uriah, Scripture is quite clear that God forgave him of his sin.

The procedure for preparing a burnt offering is given in Leviticus 1:12-13. The animal had to be skinned,

dismembered, some parts washed, and all but the skin placed on the altar. There was a specific order. The head first, followed by the fat, the inwards, and then the legs. It is hard to imagine a man could do this to his own daughter or that by doing so, the offering would be pleasing to our Heavenly Father.

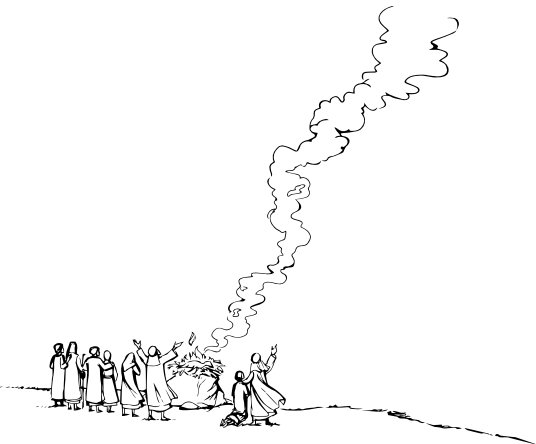
If God had directed that Jephthah do that, then, of course, it would have been right in the sight of the LORD. However, God directed exactly the opposite, and His specific command was that a person make no such offering.

The problem with concluding Jephthah had no option but to sacrifice his daughter as a burnt offering is that it denies that God has offered redemption and assumes that keeping the letter of the Law is more important to God than keeping His direct commands. Both conclusions are wrong. Jesus spent the better part of his ministry fighting this kind of thinking; the doctrine of the Pharisees.

I believe the answer to these problems about vows can be found in a careful review of Leviticus 27. Three offerings of God were listed, and each was to be kept separate. These three offerings are:

1. Vows (vv. 1-27)
2. Devoted things (vv. 28-29)
3. Tithes (vv. 30-33)

Under the Law of Moses, vows were always redeemable by the amount of silver specified or by the amount of silver set by the priest if the exact vow did not have a previously set amount. The vow of Jephthah is addressed explicitly in Leviticus 27:2-4:



Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When a man shall make a singular vow, the persons shall be for the LORD by thy estimation. And thy estimation shall be of the male from twenty years old even unto sixty years old, even thy estimation shall be fifty shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary. And if it be a female, then thy estimation shall be thirty shekels.

Leviticus 27:28 continues with the subject of devoted things, *cherem*, also known as accursed things. They were almost always associated with what was taken in war. They had to be utterly destroyed or given to the High Priest on God's behalf. They could not be redeemed because they belonged to God already. Tithes could not be redeemed unless a substitution was made.

We are told specifically how Jephthah's vow was fulfilled in Judges. *"And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel."* (Judges 11:39). There is certainly nothing in these words that indicate that he offered her as a burnt offering, which would have been a violation of the Law on two counts. One does not fulfill a vow to God by directly disobeying His commandments—on this, we can be certain. The actions of Jephthah were not only acceptable to God but indeed pleasing to Him.

Where the confusion lies is the fact that God gave Jephthah the victory in

the war with Ammon, but his daughter was not part of the spoils, nor one of the devoted things from that war, but the subject of a vow made by him. According to Leviticus 27, this vow could have been redeemed by the amount of silver specified, but Jephthah decided to dedicate his daughter to God as a living sacrifice rather than as a burnt offering, which would have been a direct disobedience of God's Law. Based on Scripture, there is little doubt that his daughter was dedicated to the LORD for the remainder of her life. As was stated earlier, this conclusion is indicated by the closing verses of Judges 11, which helps us to determine what happened.

And he said, Go. And he sent her away for two months: and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains. And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel, That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year. (Judges 11:38-40).

What can we learn from these verses? If she was going to be put to death at the hands of her father, why not bewail her death instead of her virginity? It would be because she would never marry and be dedicated to the LORD. This is how Jephthah's vow was fulfilled. Notice how the words in verse 40 go together: Jephthah *"did with her according to his*



vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man.” The fulfillment of his vow, therefore, was that she would never marry.

Scripture is specific about how the vow was fulfilled, “*And she knew no man.*” God certainly knows how to express what He wants us to know, and He could have easily stated that at the end of the two months, she was offered as a burnt offering. However, this clearly is not said.

We know that such virgins existed because they are mentioned in Judges 21:12, where wives were found for the tribe of Benjamin to make certain that

the tribe continued. These were virgins who were dedicated to the LORD and served Him at Shiloh. Under normal circumstances, they would never have married because they belonged to God. But this was no normal situation. The other tribes had vowed not to give any of their daughters to the Benjamites. Because of this, God allowed these virgins to marry, although they had been dedicated to Him.

As stated earlier, it appears that Jephthah made a proper burnt offering of a male animal in harmony with the Law in addition to giving his daughter to God.

A further point needs to be made concerning the word “*lament*” in Judges 11:40. This word is translated in a variety of ways. The Authorized Version margin may have this right, suggesting the proper translation is “to talk with.”

The Hebrew word *tanah* is only translated “*lament*” twice in Scripture. Both occurrences are in Judges. Several English words can translate *Tanah*. However, it never has the meaning of “to lament” or “to mourn.” There are several good Hebrew words to express that thought, one of which is *abal*, and another is *saphad*. Both these Hebrew words have been translated by English words lament and mourn. But God, through His Spirit, used the word *tanah*, which means “to attribute honor to a person, to celebrate an action of a person, to rehearse a matter with a person or persons, and to talk with a person” (as suggested by the AV margin). This would be rather difficult to do if Jephthah’s daughter were dead! Most of us celebrate our birthdays and get together with others. However, this is not a time of mourning. The only other time this Hebrew word is used in Scripture is found in Judges.

They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the LORD, even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of his villages in Israel: then shall the people of the LORD go down to the gates. (Judges 5:11).

The word *tanah* here is translated “*rehearse*.” Those who had the responsibility of sitting in judgment of God’s people would sit at the city gate and converse with each other about “*the righteous acts of the LORD*.” In other words, they talked with each other about God’s righteous judgment toward Israel. This would help them determine how best to render judgment themselves toward the people of God. Thus, in this only other use of the Hebrew word *tanah*, they talk with one another about the “*righteous acts of the LORD*.” In the account recorded in Judges 11, this, too, was a “*righteous act of the LORD*” because it allowed Jephthah to fulfill his vow without disobeying the direct commandment from God.

Also, in Judges 11:40, the four days when the daughters of Israel would talk with Jephthah’s daughter could very well refer to the four times a year when the children of Israel observed the four main feasts of the LORD.

What can we learn from this? The answer is dedication. Jephthah’s daughter displayed this, and we need to be displaying our dedication to the things of God. As stated earlier, when we are baptized, we too have made a vow to repent and stop serving ourselves to serve the LORD God Almighty and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This vow is redeemable in prayer, leaving us justified through the blood of our redeemer.

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PART 3
EDENIC
LAW
AND THE
BOOK OF
ROMANS

By Richard Morgan

GOD wants us to be fruitful, but we are involved in a lifelong struggle against our own fleshly nature. However, God knows what He is doing by justifying us because of our faith. Paul's thesis statement in Romans states the gospel is *"the power of God for salvation."* (Romans 1:16).¹ When God justifies us, something powerful happens because, through God's process that begins with justification, fruitfulness is possible despite the natural desires of the flesh.

A useful analogy for understanding the power of the gospel is to think of a plant. When we are receptive to the gospel and justified by faith, it is like God has planted a seed in our hearts. Then, because of God's kindness, we are motivated to repent (Romans 2:4), so the seed begins to sprout and grow. Finally, the plant will produce fruit. This is God's method—His work in us as the gospel becomes powerful in our lives.

The Blessing

That's why Paul calls justification a *"blessing,"* a keyword at the beginning of Romans 4. As Paul transitions from David to Abraham, he finishes with one last quotation from David, which explains *"the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works."* (Romans 4:6). The word *"blessing"* occurs twice in Paul's Davidic quotation from Psalm 32. He sums it up in verse 9 by asking the question, *"Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised?"*

Why is justification called a blessing? In the first few verses of chapter 4, Paul begins mentioning Abraham, the preeminent example from the Old

Testament of someone justified by faith—*"Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"* (Romans 4:3, citing Genesis 15:6). The word *"blessing"* is the key word when Abraham first encountered God:

And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Genesis 12:2-3).

The words *"in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"* is a foundational statement regarding the gospel. In fact, in Galatians 3:8, Paul says this is the gospel:

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."

Peter also mentions the blessing of Abraham but extends it beyond justification to repentance:

You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, "And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed." God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness. (Acts 3:25-26).

Peter and Paul don't contradict each other but illustrate that Abraham's blessing is a process. Coming back to our analogy, justification, or the forgiveness of sins, is the seed being planted. But it doesn't end there because

the kindness of God in forgiving us motivates us to repent, and we turn from our wickedness.

Before the Law

Having said that justification is a blessing, Paul then establishes that Abraham was justified before he was circumcised (Romans 4: 9-11). Paul's point is that justification happened before Abraham ritualized his religion, let alone before the Law of Moses. Abraham was not saved by ritualistic adherence to law:

For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. (v. 13).

In the next verse, Paul says something which is key to the gospel message:

For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. (v. 14).

The gospel is about the power of God, **not our own ability to follow law**. If we are saved by law, we are no longer a work of God in which he plants a seed and makes it grow. In effect we have rejected animal skin and chosen to keep our fig leaf garments on.

Or, to put it another way, we must allow God to bless us. The word “*blessing*”

can be thrown around in religious circles without truly understanding what it means. So, what exactly does it mean to be blessed by God? As it pertains to the gospel, we've already seen that it involves justification and repentance. But it is more than that. Many Old Testament passages detail how God blesses his people, for instance:

He will love you, bless you, and multiply you. He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock, in the land that he swore to your fathers to give you. You shall be blessed above all peoples. There shall not be male or female barren among you or among your livestock. (Deuteronomy. 7:13-14).

Ultimately, blessing has to do with fruitfulness, as we can see from the passage above. *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* says,

To bless in the OT means “to endue with power for success, prosperity, fecundity, longevity, etc.” In other words, coming back to our plant analogy, blessing is about what justification and repentance ultimately lead to.

The gospel is about the power of God, not our own ability to follow law. If we are saved by law, we are no longer a work of God in which he plants a seed and makes it grow...

After the seed is planted and grows it finally produces fruit, which is the purpose of the plant. In our lives God knows what he is doing. He knows that if he justifies us by faith, it will motivate us to repent and bear fruit, the fruit of the spirit—and ultimately fill the earth with his glory.²

Fruitfulness happens to be integral to the covenant that God made with Abraham. For instance, God says, “*I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you.*” (Genesis 17:6). The gospel, preached to Abraham, has been designed by God to help us become fruitful. God’s method works; it is the power of God for salvation.

The ideas of blessing and fruitfulness are not only fundamental to the Abrahamic covenant and gospel message, but they find their roots in the most foundational passage in the entire Bible, Genesis 1. The first time the words “*blessing*” and “*fruitful*” occur is in Genesis 1:22, where God blessed the animals. He created and told them to be fruitful. A few verses later, after creating the man and woman, “*God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.’*” (Genesis 1:28).

We recall what Paul said about the blessing in Romans 4, that it came to Abraham before circumcision and before the Law. That principle finds its origin in Genesis, where the blessing comes before the commandment,

which was not given until later. God blessed humankind and told them to be fruitful before the commandment and events in Eden took place. The principle is that God works outside the bounds of law. His purpose is not tied up with our ability to follow law. The Law illustrates the sinfulness of human beings, as we discovered in Genesis 3 and as Paul will outline in Romans. But it was never designed to prevent sin, earn righteousness, or gain salvation.

Life Out of Death

Having established that Abraham’s faith came before he was circumcised and before the Law, we can conclude that salvation is a work of God. In Romans 4:16-22, Paul drives the point home by illustrating the depth of Abraham’s faith. He answers the question “*Why his faith was counted to him as righteousness?*” (v. 22).

In verse 17, Paul reminds us of the time when God told Abraham, “I have made you the father of many nations.” The significance of this statement is twofold. First, as Paul says at the end of the verse, God “*calls into existence the things that do not exist.*” God didn’t say, “I will make you,” but “*I have made you.*” In God’s estimation, the promise was so sure that it was as good as done.

However, verse 17 has a deeper significance. Just before the words “*calls into existence the things that do not exist,*” Paul also wrote, “*who gives life to the dead.*” These words are key to Abraham’s faith and all faith.

First, notice how the words “*calls into existence the things that do not exist*” echo the definition of faith given in Hebrews 11— “*By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.*” (Hebrews 11:3). Our minds are here taken back to the creation account in Genesis and how out of nothing “*the things that do not exist*” God created an abundance of fruitfulness. Before “*the word of God*” began its creative work, the Earth was a barren rock, hurtling through space. Somehow, by virtue of a miracle, that dead rock blossomed with life.

Which brings us back to our plant analogy. Hebrews tells us God used his word to create, as we see in Genesis 1. The word of God is likened to a seed in Scripture, and in a seed is the invisible design of what the seed will produce. When God plants the seed of the gospel in our hearts, that invisible design will grow and bear fruit.

So it is, coming back to Abraham’s faith, that “*He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s*



womb.” (Romans 4:19). Like the pre-creation dead rock later known as the Earth, Abraham’s body was as good as dead. Not only was Sarah barren, but she had gone through menopause (Genesis 18:11), and her womb was dead. So, Paul defines Abraham’s faith as an understanding that God “gives life to the dead.” This idea is not a blind faith, but was first seen in creation, as we’ve just considered, when God took a pile of dead dust of the ground in the shape of a man and “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” (Genesis 2:7). God can bring life out of death.

What about us? We struggle with these bodies of flesh, but the process works when God plants the seed of the gospel in our hearts. Paul wrote elsewhere, “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins.” (Ephesians 2:1). What “made us alive” (v. 5) and “raised us up” (v. 6)? Not our ability to follow a law but from God “being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us” (v. 4) because “by grace you have been saved” (v. 5). The gospel was designed by God “so

that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith.” (vv. 7-8). Salvation is a work of God.

The word of God is likened to a seed in Scripture, and in a seed is the invisible design of what the seed will produce. When God plants the seed of the gospel in our hearts, that invisible design will grow and bear fruit.

Faith understands that God can bring life out of death, and that’s why Paul ends his words on justification by faith in Romans 4 by writing, “It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” (vv. 24-25). Our justification is intimately linked with the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead, and through that, we understand that God can bring fruit out of the spiritual deadness of our bodies. This is the principle taught by God providing animal skins for Adam and Eve. For that to occur, a death had to happen, but a death that brought life, all fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Christ.

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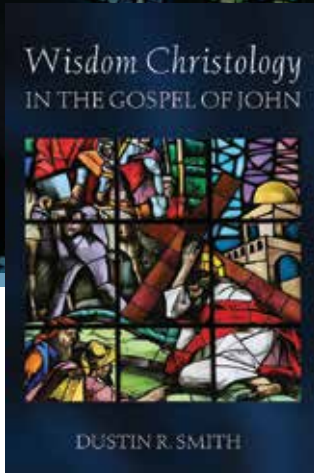
¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the English Standard Version.

² R Laird Harris, Gleason L Archer Jr., Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Moody Publishing, 2023

WISDOM CHRISTOLOGY IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

BY DUSTIN R. SMITH

Reviewed by Dan Weatherall



DUSTIN R. Smith has packed a wealth of research into this volume, titled *Wisdom Christology in the Gospel of John*.¹

(For ease of reading, we will refer to this simply as *Wisdom Christology*.) This is a substantial academic book, but despite this, it isn't inaccessible to the well-informed and motivated Bible student. There are plenty of insights as you make your way through the book.

What is Wisdom Christology All About?

First, let me give you an overview of the central thesis. Smith

argues that John's gospel is particularly indebted to Jewish Wisdom Literature in how it presents Jesus, which results in a well-developed "wisdom christology." I hear you ask, "What is wisdom christology?" Exactly! It's not a widely used phrase, especially in a church context, so it needs an explanation.

Smith explains in detail the Jewish traditions of describing wisdom as a person, beginning with the famous figure in Proverbs, Lady Wisdom (e.g., Proverbs 1:20-21). Beyond Proverbs, wisdom was regularly personified in literature (both within the Old Testament and also in books written between the Testaments—more on that later), such that it became a literary motif—an early meme (an image created from a literary reference) if you will.

Smith's argument is that people knew the "personified Wisdom meme." It became so widespread that you could reference "Lady Wisdom" by simply referring to some of the following things:

- Crying aloud in the streets to the simple (Proverbs 8:20-21).
- Being with God in creation (Proverbs 8:22-31).
- People searching for her and either finding her or failing, based on whether they are wise disciples or foolish opponents (Proverbs 1:28-29, 2:1-4, 8:17).

Wisdom christology, more specifically is when Jesus himself is inserted into the meme. When Jesus is portrayed with attributes of personified wisdom, it's a way of explaining who Jesus is and what he revealed to humanity. The New Testament has many examples of wisdom christology, such as Matthew 11 and 1 Corinthians 1. Smith's contribution is collating all observations made in John's gospel, adding his own, and preparing a systematic presentation of wisdom

christology in the gospel of John, as the title suggests. Jesus becomes the fulfillment and ultimate expression of everything that the literary character of personified Wisdom was.

Why is this important? Well, accurately identifying what the author of the gospel was trying to communicate has several benefits, not the least of which is that we will more effectively understand who Jesus is. I'll touch on this at the end of this review.

Wisdom or Word?

Smith openly admits that the word "wisdom" never appears in John's gospel, and you, therefore, might think he has a hard task ahead of him!

Even though the noun "wisdom" does not appear anywhere in the Gospel of John, the presentation of Jesus therein overwhelmingly indicates a christological portrayal in which the subject embodies the wise personification present within Jewish wisdom literature.

Is wisdom a theme that appears in John's gospel? Well, what is the most distinguishing literary feature of John's gospel? Have you ever read John 1:1? Indeed. "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" (John 1:1). Smith makes a compelling argument that the Word (Greek *logos*) of John's gospel is synonymous with wisdom. Here are just a few reasons why:

- The Word is "*with God*" in the beginning (John 1:1), in a way reminiscent of Wisdom in Proverbs 8:22-31.

- The Word brings life to those who receive it (John 1:4-5), just like Wisdom is a source of life (Proverbs 3:18, 8:35).

Chapter 3 (*Wisdom in the Prologue*) spends some time unraveling the connections between the idea of Wisdom and Word, concluding with a list of twenty separate parallels between the logos in John's prologue and Jewish wisdom literature. Smith acknowledges that not all of these parallels will be accepted by every reader, but it is hard not to assume there are very strong reasons to connect John's opening verses with personified Wisdom. As he points out:

The argument that the Johannine Prologue is dependent upon the portrayals of the wisdom of God in Jewish wisdom literature does not rest on accepting all twenty of these conclusion points. Discerning readers will likely find some of these points stronger and more well represented in the wisdom literature than others. I was careful to document the specific Jewish sources that could conceivably impact the various descriptions of the logos in the Prologue, while also citing scholars who have come to observe similar connections. The conclusion would still stand if only ten of the points were deemed as persuasively demonstrating the legitimacy of the wisdom parallels from Jewish literature. In other words, this argument rests on the weight of the entire argument taken generally, not by accepting all twenty of these connections.

But let's back up first of all and consider the overall approach of *Wisdom Christology*.

Wisdom Christology—An Overview

The book's opening chapters set the objectives (Chapter 1: *Introduction*) and then spend some very detailed and valuable time going through wisdom literature (Chapter 2: *Wisdom's Pilgrimage*) to identify the features of personification of Wisdom. This part comprises a walk through Proverbs, Job (specifically Job 28), certain Psalms and other parts of the Old Testament literature. However, Smith broadens the horizon and spends a lot of time on many intertestamental books to trace the same pattern of thought from the Hebrew Scriptures into the first century AD, when the works of Jewish philosopher Philo and later Rabbinical works are also consulted.

This body of literature is much more unfamiliar to me, and I suspect this is the case for many. It can, therefore, be both more difficult and feel unusual to read this section, but it is an important addition to Smith's argument. Bear with me a little longer, and I'll have more to say about these extra-canonical books later.

In some ways, *Wisdom Christology* has already achieved its objective after Chapter 2. If you're familiar with John's gospel, you will see exactly where he is going by following Smith's portrait of personified Wisdom using all these different texts. You will already be connecting to Jesus, who is hidden from his opponents; Jesus, who is the provider of life; Jesus, who is sent "from" heaven to perform a task. It was a revelation to me that several

other texts talk about the personified Wisdom as becoming “incarnate” in people from the Bible, such as Sarah. The literary personification of Lady Wisdom is employed to describe real people, like Sarah, to show their worth and connection to God and his wise attributes. It is valuable background knowledge to understand how this language was used in and around the same era as John’s gospel. When we get to John 1:14, “*and the Word was made flesh,*” for example, we already have context to help us work out what that really means.

Thematic Steps Through the Gospel of John

The remaining chapters in the book are very well structured thematically, which makes it straightforward to follow each thread of thought. The approach is to look at a particular aspect of personified Wisdom and trace those themes through John’s gospel to see how much they relate to Jesus.

The chapters consider:

- How Jesus is sent by God, loved by God and obedient to God, just like personified Wisdom in the Jewish scriptures (Chapter 4 “*Wisdom and God in the Narrative of John*”).
- The roles Jesus performs that have been particularly emphasized in John’s gospel compared with personified Wisdom’s actions (Chapter 5, “*Wisdom and the Mission of Jesus*”).
- The statements about who Jesus is, including the famous “I am” sayings, in relation to the declarations of Wisdom (Chapter 6, “*Wisdom and*

Christology”).

- The opposition Jesus received from the Pharisees and Jewish rulers (Chapter 7, “*Wisdom and Her Opponents*”).
- The disciples of Jesus and how they are portrayed in John in ways similar to the beloved family of Wisdom (Chapter 8 “*Wisdom and her Disciples*”).

Seeking and Finding

Here is one example of a wisdom theme in a bit more detail taken from Chapter 7.

In Proverbs, Lady Wisdom is portrayed as calling out to people to heed her instruction. Those who genuinely seek her will find her, but those who oppose her will never find her, even if they go looking. Humanity’s inability to locate wisdom is also a theme central to the wisdom poem of Job 28. This is how Smith describes it:

Proverbs 1 illustrates Lady Wisdom as a prophetess who urges the naïve, the simple, the scoffers, and the fools to repent at her words of reproof (1:20–23). However, instead of heeding her call, many reject her wise instructions. The nature of this rejection is detailed by the author: refusing Wisdom’s call and paying no attention to the counsel that she offers (1:24–25).

The rejection of God’s wisdom is, I think, reflected in the overwhelming rejection of God’s prophets who were sent to his people. Jesus accuses his opponents of being the “*sons of those who murdered the prophets.*” (Matthew

23:31-35). This generation ended up crucifying the Son of God sent to him, like the son in the parable of the vineyard. In John, Jesus is regularly portrayed as being rejected by the rulers and the elite. Yet, they also aren't able to find him whenever they go looking, just as the opponents of Lady Wisdom cannot find her. Here are some examples.

- *But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly but in private. The Jews were looking for him at the feast and saying, 'Where is he?'* (John 7:10-11).
- *Jesus then said, 'I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come.'* (John 7:33-34).
- *These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come. So he said to them again, 'I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.'* (John 8:20-21).

Smith summarizes as follows:

In addition to drawing on the imagery of God's personified word from Isaiah 55:11 to illustrate the motifs of descending and ascending, the Gospel of John is also indebted to the Jewish wisdom literature and its frequent depiction of personified wisdom's descent and ascent. Within the book of Proverbs, Lady Wisdom originated in heaven at God's side (Proverbs 8:22, 27, 30). At some

point, she descends from heaven to take upon the role of a prophet and teacher in the public arena (Proverbs 1:20–21; 8:1–3), only to uproot and leave when fools refuse her counsel (Proverbs 1:24–28). In fact, personified wisdom's warning in which "they will seek me but they will not find me" (Proverbs 1:28) sounds remarkably like Jesus' cautioning in John 7:34: "You will seek me and you will not find me."

In contrast to the opponents who reject Wisdom in the person of Jesus, we have examples of genuine and faithful disciples who seek and actually do find Jesus. For example:

- Jesus asks Andrew, "*What are you seeking?*" and his response is to abide with him (John 1:37-39). Andrew then finds his brother, Simon, saying, "*We have found the Messiah.*" (John 1:41).
- Philip calls Nathaneal, saying, "*We have found him.*" (John 1:45).
- The Samaritan woman at the well exclaims, "*Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?*" (John 4:27).
- Mary Magdalene is asked, "*Whom are you seeking?*" in the garden of the tomb, which results in her recognizing her teacher alive again from the dead (John 20:15-18).

The seeking and finding motif are part of the well-understood "Lady Wisdom meme" being reworked and applied to Jesus of Nazareth. John claims this man, Jesus, is the final and climactic embodiment of God's wisdom. Each chapter in *Wisdom Christology* systematically walks the reader through

different aspects of Lady Wisdom in the same way. From the bread of life coming down from heaven to the great love shown between Father, Son and the family of disciples, you are left with the impression that John's gospel is purposefully crafting the story of Jesus with personified Wisdom firmly in mind, wanting everyone to see the value and worth of grasping hold of Jesus as the giver of life.

Why So Much Intertestamental Literature?

I've promised to comment on Smith's use of extra-canonical texts a few times. This material could be an unfamiliar feature of the book if you are not used to consulting the literature outside the Bible. This is a valuable addition to the arguments in *Wisdom Christology* because we get a more complete and compelling picture of what words, phrases and themes meant to people living in the times of Jesus and the author of John's gospel. Reading and quoting from other texts is not a value judgment on their validity or otherwise. It doesn't implicitly agree with them. Smith's quotations from *Enoch* and *The Wisdom of Solomon* and *Sirach* are neither endorsements nor disapproval. This body of literature is simply being consulted to build up contextual background. In this quote, Smith points out that direct dependence on, for example, Philo's writings is unlikely, but he explains why it is still useful to consult these texts.

While it is extremely unlikely that the Gospel of John contains demonstrable influence from the

writings of Philo, it is apparent that the idea of interpreting the manna from heaven in terms of the wisdom of God was a viable reading in the first century CE. Both John and Philo regard heavenly wisdom as superior to perishable bread. Both authors draw upon the Israelite story from the book of Exodus in order to make their points. Both writers locate the wisdom of God in heaven prior to coming down to earth. This suggests that the Johannine Jesus' claim to have "come down from heaven" is looking backward to the personified wisdom of God that became flesh, not to a preexisting person in heaven. For Jesus is Wisdom's embodiment, and those who partake of Wisdom's bread of life will certainly live forever.

We have a rich vein of wisdom ideas in Proverbs, Job, Psalms, and parts of Isaiah. John's gospel deliberately echoes the pattern and presentation of Lady Wisdom, which is sufficient to identify wisdom christology. However, seeing these other books similarly adopt those themes and styles only strengthens the argument. In a Jewish contextual world where personified Wisdom was regularly talked about as coming down from heaven to achieve a specific task on behalf of God, as an empowered agent and representative of God, it's easy to see how John's big claims are that this man Jesus, from Nazareth, is indeed the one embodying God's word and wisdom. Where other books have speculated and meditated on these themes emerging from Proverbs, John's

gospel wants the reader to believe that Jesus is the final embodiment of Lady Wisdom, “*that Jesus is the Christ*” (John 20:30-31) and that “*to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God.*” (John 1:11-13). John’s claims about Jesus become all the more clarified and powerful when you understand the background and the context in which these claims are made.

Why is Identifying Wisdom Christology Important?

So, what’s the point of all this? Why does it matter?

This question is the content of the final chapter, where Smith leads the reader through some implications for this interpretation on pre-existence, the nature of God, and christology. After reading *Wisdom Christology*, I feel like I know the gospel of John in much more detail than I ever have before. I can’t wait to reread the whole gospel with this fresh understanding to help illuminate some of the more difficult passages.

Here are two reasons why this is a valuable topic from reading this very illuminating book.

Firstly, recognizing the themes of wisdom through John’s gospel helps us understand the phrases that suggest Jesus came down from heaven. These are unique to John and as a consequence, seem out of place. But they make sense when you know the wisdom meme. Jesus didn’t come down from heaven literally. His mission was described in terms that reminded Jewish readers of the mission of God’s

word and wisdom in times past. As the word that came from heaven to perform God’s work (Isaiah 55:10-11), Jesus recognized that he was living as an embodiment of God’s wisdom that came before him and was always with God. Wisdom had now metaphorically descended from heaven to perform God’s work (John 3:13, 6:50-51).

Secondly, there’s a challenge for the reader to become a disciple of Wisdom and a true part of Wisdom’s family. Proverbs and Jewish wisdom literature call on us to seek wisdom, find understanding, and become part of the family with those who enter Wisdom’s house, with a bond of love between us. If Jesus is the perfect embodiment of Proverb’s personified Wisdom, we are invited and called to attain to the same level of wisdom, and consequently have that strength of relationship with him and his other followers.

Understanding Jesus as an embodiment of wisdom to which we are called, rather than a pre-existent person of the trinity, makes it all much more real and practical. John’s gospel is not about the metaphysics of a God who became human, as if it were a show for us to watch and wonder at. John’s gospel is about a human—God’s human son—displaying God’s wisdom perfectly as a pattern and example for us to follow to enter into the same unity of mind and love with all of wisdom’s disciples. It’s a call to participate with Jesus and live by the same wisdom that governed his life.

*Dan Weatherall,
Bible Feed, UK*

¹ This book is available through Amazon as hardcover, paperback or Kindle.

BAPTISM IN PANAMA

By Ian Neblett



MARTA Dutton was baptized on October 6, 2024, at the Panama City Ecclesia. (Shown seated above with members of the Colon Ecclesia.) She is the daughter of the late Sis. Jean, and sister of Sis. Loretta, who currently attends the Colon Ecclesia. Marta had been faithfully attending our joint meeting (between Panama and Colon) since the COVID 19 outbreak in 2020. She lives about two hours from Panama City, so

she mainly attends our service via Zoom. After asking to be baptized, I personally gave her baptismal classes (online) and upon completion, she traveled to our house in Colon and successfully expressed her conviction and faith during a baptismal interview conducted by Bro. Luis Sobers.

*Ian Neblett,
CBMA Link for Panama*

CONGOLESE MEETING IN GREEN BAY, WI

By Dan Richard



This past Spring, our meeting (Lombard, Illinois) was contacted by a refugee brother who had arrived in Green Bay with his extended family. His name is Bro. Ali Kakozi and his family are from Congo. There are two extended families with fifteen people in total. We could visit and communicate (mostly in Swahili) since we have members from Congo who knew Bro. Ali from South Africa. Bro. Ramazani Emena and his wife Sis. Sangani visited there in April with

my wife, Sis. Beth Richard and myself. We brought plenty of food and Swahili first principle books since we

knew those would be needed for their development. We learned that Bro. Ali and his sister, Maombi Ali, had arrived in Green Bay separately by a couple of months and had lived in a motel for more than a month. Catholic Charities was their relocation service, and it eventually helped them find apartments and jobs (though not ideal in either case).

We discussed relocating them to the Chicago area, and they were unsure what to do. Eventually, they decided to stay in Green Bay and started their own Congolese meeting. They are very enthusiastic about preaching and sharing their faith, especially to other Congolese in their area. Recently, they had twenty-seven people in their apartment for Sunday service! We also sent them ten Swahili Christadelphian songbooks we found online and two Swahili language Bibles. The adult women mostly only speak Swahili, while the men and teens speak English. In the summer, Bro. Ali asked us to return to have baptisms. It took some time to return, but Bro. Ramazani and I returned on August 10 and participated in a long 90% Swahili confession of faith, which led to two baptisms. One was Bro. Ali's daughter and the other was a Congolese man they knew from their village in Congo

many years ago. Both had asked to be baptized over a month earlier and wanted experienced Christadelphians to participate. Bro. Ali baptized both in chilly Lake Michigan, and it was a joyous occasion for all to witness.

Their journey forward will be difficult, as winter will set in, and no one in this group can drive. On the second visit, we also learned that Bro. Ali's wife, Sis Mkyombwe Mariamu, at forty-three years old, is now pregnant with twins! They have much to learn about life in America, but they also have much to teach us about sharing our common faith with others. Feel free to reach out to me for more information. My contact information is danbethr@gmail.com, telephone 630-441-7993. And please pray for this new lightstand and their spiritual development.

*Dan Richard,
Lombard Ecclesia, IL*



SOUTH AFRICAN CHRISTADELPHIAN SUMMER BIBLE SCHOOL APPEAL

By Travis Sinclair



SINCE 1982, the Pinetown Ecclesia has organized a Summer Bible School in South Africa, held each year at the end of December. We have been fortunate to secure overseas speakers who have added tremendous value to those attending, enhancing the picture that we are a worldwide community. This help also ensures exposure to high-standard studies.

We have been fortunate to secure a venue for the school, nestled in a very picturesque part of KwaZulu-Natal. The venue is ideal for our purposes, with conference rooms, a dining hall, and accommodation. It also has all the sports facilities for energetic young people.

Over the past few years, we have enjoyed wonderful studies by Bre. Carl Pary, Roger Lewis, Ron Cowie, Stephen Palmer, Steve Hornhardt, and Kitson Reid. God Willing, Bro. Kitson will be with us this year. We also conduct various sessions in which brethren lead a discussion session on a particular subject.

During the years of running the Summer Bible School, the demographics of South Africa have changed with the abolishment of Apartheid. As a result, the Gospel can now be freely preached all over South Africa. With our Heavenly Father's blessing, the truth has seen much growth in previously disadvantaged areas.

Even the smallest donation, such as the cost of a coffee, helps in the greater scheme of things.

The Summer Bible School now attracts attendees from these previously disadvantaged areas, and we have witnessed a significant growth in attendance from our brothers and sisters in the greater Johannesburg area. We also have visitors from as far afield as Botswana and Zimbabwe. Attendance at the school came from fifteen ecclesias around Southern Africa.

This success has brought with it funding issues. The current unemployment rate in South Africa is at 33.5% (46.2% if you include discouraged work seekers), and this, unfortunately, impacts many of our brothers and sisters. Almost two-thirds of those attending the Bible School rely on funding, including the added cost of transport. Many would like to attend the school but are unable to attend due to financial constraints. We believe we have a responsibility to ensure that we can continue to run the school, and not turn any away who desire to be at the Bible School. It is always a humbling experience to witness the warmth of fellowship and the growth of friendships between brothers and sisters at the school. Real meaning is found where “in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

To meet the ongoing funding demands, we have implemented a sponsorship program, where for \$190 USD one person can be sponsored for a

week. We are now seeking involvement from brothers and sisters in other regions. On our website <http://christadelphian-bibleschoolsa.co.za> we have opened up a page where donations can be made in a very easy way via debit or credit card. <https://bibleschool.shop.netcash.co.za>. You can also make donations through the Tidings, earmarking the donation for the South African Summer Bible School. The entity is a registered non-profit company (Reg No 2024/389550/08) and non-profit organization/charity (registration no 310-873 NPO).

We prayerfully ask you to visit our website. Even the smallest donation, such as the cost of a coffee, helps in the greater scheme of things. Please feel free to contact the committee members whose details are on the website for further information or any questions you may have. We are praying for our Heavenly Father's blessing on the community these last days so that when our Lord returns, he may find a people ready and waiting to welcome him with joy and gladness.

Questions can be addressed to Bro Travis Sinclair: trenosinclair@gmail.com.

*Travis Sinclair,
South African Christadelphian
Summer Bible School Committee*

PURE RELIGION

By Nathan Giordano

SISTERS Beryl and Eunice live in a small, concrete house just down the road from the Broughton Ecclesial Hall in Jamaica. The yard is kept trimmed by the resident goats and bordered by a wrought-iron fence. My brother, Dave, and I had just come from a sweltering memorial service in the hall, and we stopped by to see how the sisters were doing, as it had been a while since we'd last visited Broughton.

After parking the car on the side of the dirt road and shouting some greetings through the fence to make sure someone was available, we made our way through the gate to meet Sis. Beryl on the porch. Another lady living in their home let us in and then disappeared into the back while we sat to wait for Beryl. It took a few minutes for Beryl to join us because she didn't feel well, and her feet were bothering her. She dearly wishes she could go

to meeting to see her brothers and sisters, and she was glad we were able to visit. We decided to do a reading from John and took turns reading around, leaning in close and talking loudly because it's hard for her to hear. We sang a few of her favorite hymns afterwards and briefly stopped in Sis. Eunice's room as well. Eunice is mostly confined to bed and nearly deaf. She gestured to her ears with some resignation when we greeted her, but we were able to squeeze her hands and smile, and the meaning carried through. It wasn't a long visit, but we decided to leave to allow everyone to rest.

On the drive back to Negril, we reflected on visiting. Sometimes, it feels inefficient or ineffective to travel thousands of miles with great effort to only spend an achingly small amount of time with someone. Why aren't we better at conversation? At singing? At being uplifting? At understanding? Why are we even asking these questions, doubting our purpose? James tells us that the purest form of religion is visiting those who have nothing to give back. Jesus reminds us that the amount of something matters far less than what we do with it. Peter encourages us to build on faith with virtue, then godliness, brotherly affection and finally love. It is love that keeps us from being ineffective. Love is key.

**It is love
that keeps us
from being
ineffective.
Love is key.**

Later in Negril, we had a chance to visit with Bro. Ray, to discuss the readings again, talk and laugh for hours. Ray hasn't been able to attend meeting for several months and struggles with the burden that age now puts on him. But he is always thoughtful, considering what he can learn from whatever situation he finds himself in. The lesson for him is the lesson for us: make use of what God gives you.

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. (James 1:27 ESV).

*Nathan Giordano,
CBMA Link for Jamaica*



Bro. Ray Arthurs

Thoughts on the Way

Foot Washing and a New Commandment

*Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of the world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them **unto the end.** (John 13:1 KJV).*

THE Son of Man was about to begin a great journey. In his own words, he was going to the Father. In fulfilling the Passover symbolism of his last mortal days, he was about to achieve his "*exodus*" (departure) at Jerusalem (Luke 9:31). He would depart out of the world of sin and death, in his obedient sacrifice as the "*Lamb of God*" to take away the sins of that world (John 1:29). Associated with this "journey" was the thought of love, a divine love, an *agape*. Jesus loved his brethren "*unto the end*" (KJV), or "*to the very end*" (NET); that is, he continued to love them right up to the last breath of his mortal life.

Jesus not only loved us until the last moment of his life; he loved us in the most complete way possible. The Greek word *telos* allows for both meanings. His love was a love that never faltered or failed (1 Corinthians 13:8). The washing of the disciples' feet showed

the same absolute love that would sustain him only hours later in his trial and crucifixion. The self-sacrifice, the disposition of a servant, the devotion to others in passionate concern—they can be seen in the simple task of foot washing, just as they would be seen only a little later in his last great work on the cross.

The KJV tells us this incident happened when supper had "*ended*" (v. 2), but the next dozen verses suggest that it may have happened at or near the beginning of the meal. The RSV says it took place "*during supper*," while the NIV says it happened while "*the evening meal was being served.*"

Jesus, to whom the Father would commit all power and authority, rose from the table, took off his outer garments, took a towel, a pitcher of water and a basin, and began to wash his disciples' feet (vv. 3-5).

Laying aside his garments was a preview of his coming crucifixion, when the Roman soldiers would strip his garments from him (John 19:23, 24). The earlier incident here shows his willingness to deny himself and give up all that he possessed, including his dignity and even his modesty, in a fullness of loving service to others.

What prompted this act of a servant? I think our Lord's actions arose from the silly contentions of the apostles as to which of them was the greatest. Perhaps the seating arrangements at this special meal brought to the surface once again their more-or-less hidden rivalries and jealousies. In total disregard of Jesus' parable about taking the higher or the lower seats (Luke 14:7-11), they jostled for position while their Master watched them sadly.

His immediate rebuke of their pretensions was so effective because at first no word was spoken. Jesus rose up from his position at the table and, taking up what he needed for the chore, began to wash the feet of each disciple in turn.

Why had this not been attended to already? Did Jesus make sure that no servant would provide this service simply to give the twelve a chance to show what they had learned from him? If so, then they failed completely since no one at all thought of performing this task.

In the parallel passage in Luke's Gospel, Jesus gives them an exhortation. At this very time, in the Upper Room, with the bread and wine on the table, we read this:

A dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves." (Luke 22:24-27).¹

How foolish they appear to us now! The more they maneuvered and schemed to win his attention, the more they lowered themselves in his eyes. The more successful they were in achieving a superficial priority over others, the less they impressed the one who could read their hearts. And the simplest task that would have won from him a real appreciation never entered their minds.

But if we stop and think for a bit, we may all think of times when we could have done some little thing that would have helped someone else, and we didn't bother.

They all sought honor from Jesus. Yet none of the men seems to have realized how great an honor it would have been for them to have washed **his** feet. It took a woman at another time to do that and to wipe his feet with her hair (Luke 7:37-50).

So, he went systematically from one to the next. And all the argument ceased, except for Peter, whose pride perhaps provoked him to ask: "*Lord, are you going to wash my feet?*" (John 13:6).

Jesus replied:

You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand. (v. 7).

Further along, it would all become plain to them, as would so many other things, when they saw the big picture. Still, Peter continued to protest, drawing a further rebuke from the Lord: *"Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."* (v. 8). **"Part"** is a word that means inheritance, or that which is shared. It was crucial that the disciples "share" this experience with Jesus.

So now Peter swung drastically to the other extreme. *"Then, Lord... not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"* (v. 9). But again, Jesus explains, *"A person who has been washed needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean."* (v. 10). Peter does not understand. In his baptism, he had been washed already, and now he only needed to have his feet washed.

Jesus refers to the custom of washing guests' feet who visit one's home. This was necessary because open sandals were common footwear, and even a short walk on unpaved roads or streets would leave the traveler's feet dusty and dirty. This, plus the fact that people often ate in a semi-reclining position, with their feet close to others gathered around the low table, meant that those who were otherwise quite clean would need to have their feet washed before settling down to a meal.

The disciples had been washed from their sins in baptism and had risen to newness of life. They wore robes of righteousness, having been cleansed

from their past sins. But their walk along the "way" would leave their feet dirty, figuratively speaking. They did not need to be re-baptized on that account, but they did need to have their feet washed. Christ could do this for them, and it was so necessary that if they omitted this cleansing, they could have no *"part,"* or sharing of fellowship, with him. Here, in this little scene, is our Lord's exhortation to humility, his rebuke to pride, and his serious emphasis on what characteristics are truly important for a disciple.

John understood the lesson since he wrote years later:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8, 9).

In our daily "walk," we will not be without sin, but if we confess our sins, Jesus will see they are forgiven. What could be more important than this fact?

A Commandment?

Jesus finished his chore and then returned to his place at the table:

"Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." (John 13:12-15).

Sometimes, these words are used to prove literal foot washing is a

commandment, just like the Breaking of Bread itself. But this is not true for several different reasons:

1. Concerning the Lord's supper, Jesus clearly commanded, "*Do this.*" But concerning the washing of feet, Jesus says, "*I have given you an example (i.e., a pattern), that you should do as I have done.*" In other words, **not exactly** what I did, but the **spirit** in which I did it.
2. As in Acts 2:42, 46, the Breaking of Bread was the very center and focus of all worship from the earliest days. On the other hand, the foot-washing ritual did not appear for more than 300 years later.
3. Peter seems to remember this incident when he writes, "*Be subject to one another, and be clothed with humility.*" (1 Peter 5:5 KJV). Probably, he is recalling this scene: Jesus putting off his special garments and wrapping a towel around his waist—like a servant (John 13:4). In other words, Peter emphasizes the servant aspect of humility and service, not the foot washing aspect.

Judas Too

Let us, for a moment, imagine another part of this scene: the picture of Jesus kneeling to wash Judas's feet. Here are the best and the worst together—the perfect love of the Lord and the hateful bitterness of the traitor **at the same table**. Shortly after this, Philip said to Jesus, "*Lord, show us the Father*" (John 14:8), only to receive the answer: "*He who has seen me has seen the Father.*" (v. 9).

In asking to see the Father, maybe the disciples thought Jesus would show them another vision of blinding lights and the majesty and glory of Almighty God, as some had seen at the Transfiguration. But instead, Jesus showed them the simplest, most ordinary thing: a man kneeling in their midst with a basin of water and a towel.

All the Father's love was manifested in him: His goodness, His patience, His kindness even to the sinner and the ungodly. We realize, then, how necessary it was for Jesus to perform this service for all, even Judas. Had Jesus passed him by or waited until he left, then all later disciples could have said: "You see, it's all right to restrict our acts of kindness just to our friends. And it's perfectly okay to judge others as unworthy of kindness."

But the love revealed by Jesus leaves us no such excuse. He who died for those who were **sinners** calls us to follow his example and to love those who are not loveable at all! We cannot pretend it is an easy choice; it isn't. But Jesus chose to love all of us, especially the most difficult to love.

We can say: "What a wonderful idea!" in principle, but then do nothing about it in practice. We talk idealistically about "love," but then we back away from it at the slightest provocation. Let me pose a mental exercise:

- First, think about an instance in your life when you hesitated to show kindness in some practical way toward someone else who needed it.

- Now, think about **why** you decided to turn away or walk around that person.
- Finally, ask yourself: Have **I** ever done anything that, if it were known, might cause others to turn away from me?
- And if the answer is “Yes,” then ask yourself one final question: “Did **Jesus** turn away from me?”

This incident teaches us something else too. As Jesus has done, so ought we to do. If he can forgive sins, how much more should we do the same? Our Lord Jesus Christ said, *“Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”* (John 13:17).

We may feel as reluctant to forgive a brother's sin as we would to wash his feet, especially if we consider him inferior to ourselves. But our Savior's example means that we must forgive, especially in the context of the Breaking of Bread, where “forgiveness” is the primary subject.

A New Commandment?

*A **new** command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.* (John 13:34, 35).

How was this a **new** commandment? Loving one another had in fact been a part of the Law of Moses. It had also been the most prominent theme of all of Christ's ministry. Both the greatest commandment and the second greatest, involved love—love for God and love for our neighbor.

This commandment was “*new*” only in the sense that it was now being given the

perfect interpretation in the life of Jesus. As John put it in John 13:1, *“He showed them **the full extent of his love.**”*

People ask, “Considering all the religions in the world, what is so special about Christianity?” I believe the answer is that of all possible religions, **true** Christianity is the only one that offers one particular thing. For the first time in human history, and the only time, a man stood before his fellowmen as the absolutely complete and total embodiment of the Divine ideal of *agape*—a self-sacrificing love:

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:12, 13).

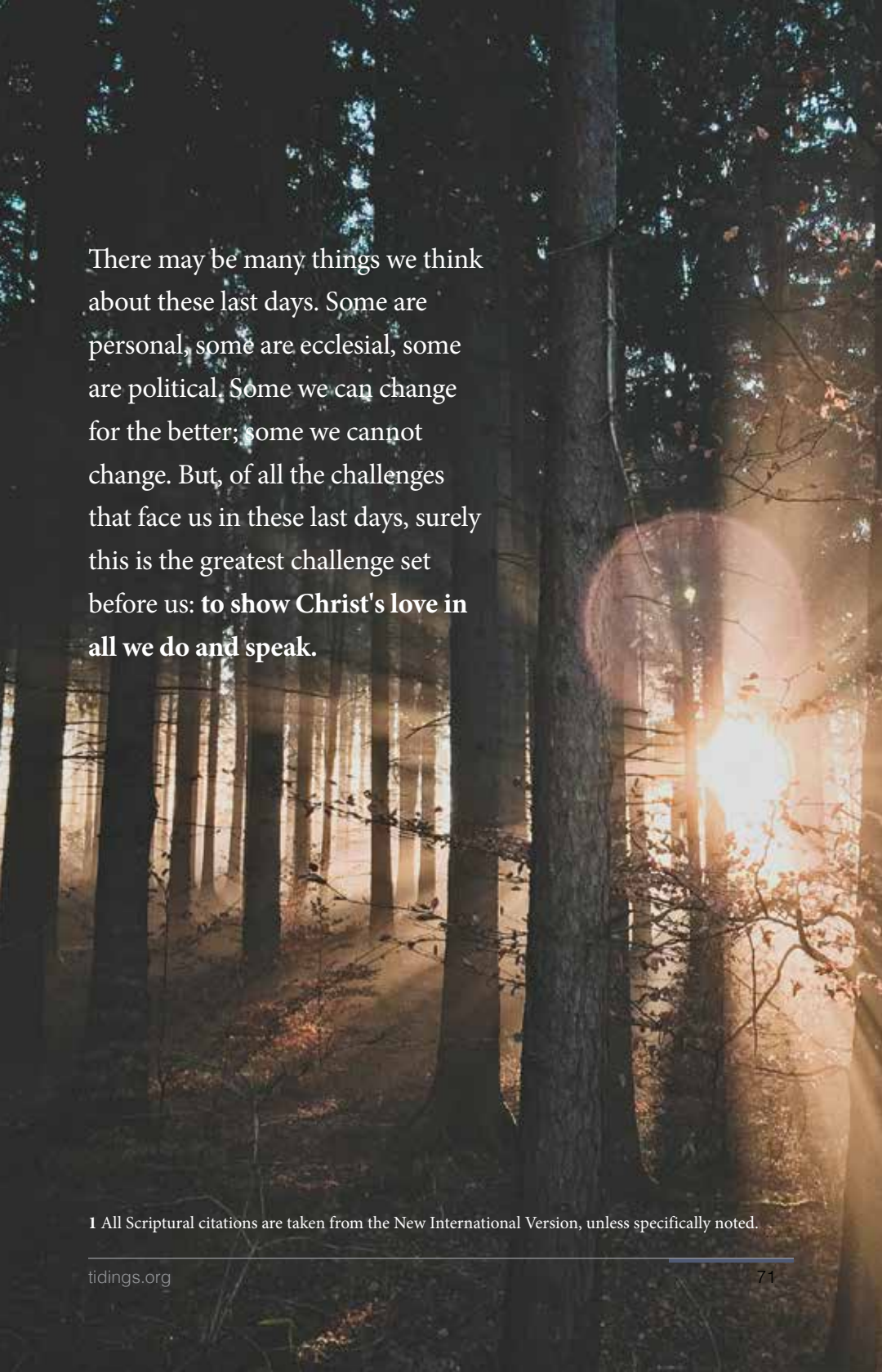
What is our greatest challenge these last days? What do you think?

Just before his death, Jesus, knowing he was about to die, gave his disciples one great commandment—simple but profound: *“Love each other as I have loved you.”*

There may be many things we think about these last days. Some are personal, some are ecclesial, some are political. Some we can change for the better; some we cannot change. But, of all the challenges that face us in these last days, surely this is the greatest challenge set before us: to show Christ's love in all we do and speak.

The bread and the wine on the table remind us of Christ's love for us. Let the same bread and wine also exhort us to love one another as our Savior has loved us. He has, in fact, shown us the full extent of his love.

*George Booker,
Austin Leander Ecclesia, TX*

A photograph of a forest with sunlight filtering through the trees, creating a warm, golden glow. The sun is positioned on the right side, casting long shadows and illuminating the scene. The trees are tall and thin, with some leaves visible in the foreground.

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¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the New International Version, unless specifically noted.

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