

TIDINGS

Volume 88, Number 7, July, 2025

ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

*So much the more as you see the
day approaching*

Building faith in the
Christadelphian community.

TIDINGS

Volume 88, Number 7
2025 Special Issue



Encouraging One Another, Bill Link 2

Stirring Up the Waters, Jim Sullivan 7

Getting Our Priorities Straight, Joel Wilkinson 12

Focus On the Little Things, Peter Bilello..... 17

Encouraged by God’s Word, Tej Chippada 21

Be Encouraged: Yahweh Has a Plan, Jared Keyes..... 26

Think Globally, Gideon Hewitson 32

A Synopsis: How to Exhort, John Bilello..... 36

The Power of the Tongue, Chris Sales 41

Encouraging the Fainthearted, Rob Webb..... 46

Encouraging One Another Through Music, Chantel Fulmer 50

Sharing the Good News, Nigel Small 55

Just Do It, Chris Clark..... 60

Summary, Peter Bilello 64



ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER

HEBREWS 10:19-39

By Bill Link

PERFECTION in Hebrews. The letter to the Hebrews marvelously expounds Christ's supremacy over the angels and the new covenant's superiority to Moses'. It describes our Lord as a great high priest, sympathetic to our challenges because he had our nature and experienced the same. Jesus learned obedience and was perfected (5:9), and Hebrews calls on us to similarly "go on to perfection" (6:1).¹

Under the old covenant, the high priest entered the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle once yearly, bearing the sacrificial blood of bulls and goats. Those offerings could never make people perfect (9:9). By contrast, our high priest Jesus is now in the very presence of God, abiding there forever. He entered the Most Holy Place bearing his own blood, which cleanses our consciences from dead works to serve the living God. His offering "has perfected forever those who are being sanctified." (10:14).

He is seated at God's right hand (1:3, 8:1, 10:12, 12:2) where he continually intercedes for the salvation of those who draw near; he can save us "to the uttermost" (7:25)—the word has the same root as "perfect" that occurs with such frequency in Hebrews.² Our God does nothing by halves! We are urged, therefore, to "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (4:16).

Our reasonable service. These are heady thoughts, exhilarating and inspiring. But they are not simply to inspire our minds: the writer to the Hebrews says they must inspire action.

*Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, **let us draw near** with a true heart in full assurance of faith...**Let us hold fast** the confession of our hope...And **let us consider one another** in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting [encouraging, ESV] one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.* (Hebrews 10:19–25).

"Let us!" Three exhortations follow as logical consequences of the boldness our faith inspires.

One is reminded of Romans 12, where after eleven chapters expounding the workings of God's grace, His dealings with Israel and the grafting in of Gentiles, Paul says "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." (Romans 12:1). Our convictions have logical consequences. The love of Christ constrains us.

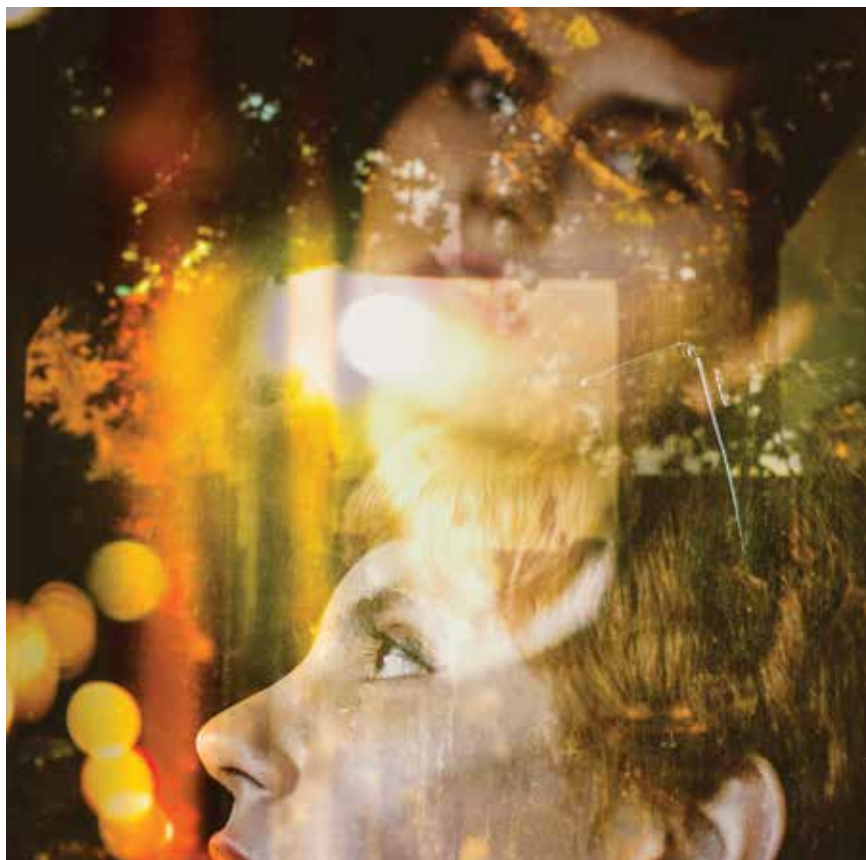
Special Issue. The three exhortations of Hebrews 10:19-25 are about faith, hope, and love: "full assurance of faith... the confession of our hope...stir up love and good works." This year, our special issue of *The Tidings* takes its theme from the third of these. The topic seems particularly appropriate given the urgency implied by the last part of verse 25, "and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."³

For the original readers of Hebrews, a day was approaching when many would lose their lives for their faith. Hebrews 12:4 ominously says, *“In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.”* (ESV). Many would, under the persecutions of the madman Nero. For many of us in the Western world today, the threat we face is quite different, and best described by Jesus in Matthew 24:12: *“Because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.”* In an increasingly godless society, one which celebrates tolerance as the chiefest virtue, it is possible that we might lose our first love, our first enthusiasm. It is

possible for us to be like Demas, and to love the present age (2 Timothy 4:10). No man can serve two masters.

Paul describes *“perilous times”*⁴ in the last days, with perils arising from people being

Lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. (2 Timothy 3:2-5).



We don't want to have a form (the outward appearance) of godliness while denying its power—the power to change lives, to perfect us, to pattern us after our Master.

With the Day approaching, it is time for us to work together, to encourage one another, and to recognize the incredible privilege of our high calling in Christ. It is a time of need, and we should come boldly to the throne of grace, knowing it is our Father's will to perfect us. In His wisdom, He has put us together in ecclesias, so we can strengthen one another.

So, how can we do it?

In this issue, we have advice from a dozen brothers and sisters on encouraging one another through music and exhortations, and lessons learned through challenging experiences. We hope these articles will encourage you and inspire you to encourage others, so that our Lord will find us ready and waiting for him at his return. *"Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes."* (Luke 12:43).

Assembling ourselves together. One key to encouraging one another to love and good works is so simple and obvious as to almost go without saying: *"Let us... stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together."*

The time we spend together is crucial. Most of us take attendance at the Memorial Service and Sunday School for granted. It's what we do. We would no sooner skip these than forget to eat or sleep. Sunday worship is part of our regular rhythm, and frames our weekly schedule, refreshing us and refocusing

us on the *"things which are above."* (Colossians 3:1-2).

Sunday afternoon lectures were at one time a consistent part of our schedule, but the practice seems to be less common. *"They all with one accord began to make excuses."* We might say: "But we get no visitors," or "Nobody learns from lectures anymore." Or "It makes Sunday too long...and after all, we have little children to care for." Long Sundays can indeed be difficult, especially with small children. But, these kinds of Sundays can also present opportunities for us to teach our children—we can talk to them about why we have lectures, or preach the gospel.

Maybe we're not trying hard enough to get visitors! A regular lecture series is a great resource if we actively seek to share our faith with the folks we contact daily. Besides, we all benefit from reviewing the foundations of our faith, especially our young people, even if there are no visitors.

And if our lectures are dry as toast—well, perhaps we need to revamp our system. Brothers' weekends and workshops provide an opportunity for innovation and encouragement; let's work together across ecclesias to achieve service excellence. And let the brothers not forget to seek the wise counsel of sisters about what works.

Midweek Bible class can be a huge benefit. If our only contact with the Word of God is through the Memorial Service or perfunctory daily readings, we will most likely struggle to grow in the gracious knowledge of the Scriptures. Our mindset should be *"I am*

Your servant, give me understanding that I may know Your testimonies." (Psalm 119:125); our prayer should be *"Open my eyes that I may see wondrous things from Your law."* (Psalm 119:18).

The challenge we face may be that we're just too busy. For some, attending midweek Bible class may be impossible because of circumstances beyond our control. For others, it might just be a matter of priority. There is a saying that "No one on his or her deathbed ever said, 'I wish I'd spent more time at the office.'" Meditating on what it means to be *"bought with a price"* and what it means to press on toward perfection (Hebrews 6:1 RV) may help us to sort out what is of greatest importance.

Most ecclesias acknowledge that the COVID experience diminished the *"assembling of ourselves together."* Zoom was a timely blessing, allowing us to gather virtually when we couldn't meet face to face. It still is a blessing, especially for those who, through the infirmities of the flesh, aren't able to attend in person. But if we use Zoom simply to save the time of traveling, or the time we spend visiting before and after our service, we need to evaluate whether we're giving God and the Lord Jesus scant measure.

In addition to our formal worship and study services, it is worthwhile to

spend time together socially, ensuring we keep the Truth at the center; doing the readings, building one another up, and reinforcing our commitment to the Lord. And we should remember the words of our Lord, that when we give a feast, we should invite *"the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed; because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."* (Luke 14:12-14). The same thinking should prompt us in all our assemblies to take time with the less popular or more needy members of our body. Remember, *"inasmuch..."* (Matthew 25:31-45)!

We cannot overstate the importance of time spent together in fellowship. If we ever find ourselves saying **we didn't get much out** of this or that service, we must change our thinking! **What did we contribute** to making the service beneficial for others? Let us encourage one another to go on toward perfection, and so much the more because we see the Day is approaching.

We hope this special issue of *The Tidings* will encourage you and your ecclesia through you!

Bill Link,
Special Issue Editor,
Baltimore Ecclesia, MD

1 Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from the NKJV.

2 Hebrews 2:10; 5:9, 14; 6:1; 7:19, 28; 9:9, 11; 10:1, 14; 11:40; 12:2, 23 use four forms of the word "perfect." And perfect means perfect—the same word is used in Matthew 5:48: *"Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."*

3 *"Even more so because you see the day drawing near"* (NET). The mood of the verb is indicative, meaning they could already see the day was drawing near. The Inspirer of the New Testament clearly intended for readers of all eras to have a sense of the imminence of the great Day.

4 If your translation of 2 Timothy 3:1 softens *"perilous"* to *"difficult"* or something similar, check how it describes Legion in Matthew 8:28, where the same word occurs. The NET uses *"difficult"* in 2 Timothy 3:1, but has the grace to include a textual note saying, "Or perhaps, 'dangerous,' 'fierce.'" In Matthew 8:28, it says, *"extremely violent."*

A black and white photograph of a lighthouse on a rocky island. The lighthouse is a small, white, cylindrical structure with a dark top. It sits on a concrete or stone base. The ocean is turbulent, with large, white-capped waves crashing against the shore and the base of the lighthouse. The sky is overcast and grey.

STIRRING UP THE WATERS

JOHN 5

By Jim Sullivan

HAVE you ever wondered why we're not told the names of specific key individuals in the gospels? I believe it's because they represent particular characteristics we should relate to. We should see ourselves in those people. Their names are withheld so that we might insert ourselves into the narrative. For example, in Luke 24, we're told about two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They had identical experiences, yet we're told the name of

one but not the other. Why? Consider what they had been through. Their faith was shaken, and they were now walking away, back to the life they knew before, but Jesus met them and explained to them from the Scriptures the way of truth concerning himself. After he left, they responded, "*Did not our hearts burn within us as he spoke?*" And with joy they turned back to Jerusalem, back to hope, back to Christ. If you've ever experienced

that same feeling of doubt, only to have Jesus bring you back through the word of truth, then you are that other disciple.

Consider the woman of Samaria. A large section of John 4 is devoted to her, but we never find out her name. Yet, if you've ever been so moved by Jesus that you think "It's like he's speaking about everything I ever thought or did," then you are the woman of Samaria.

There are many more examples, but in this article, I'd like to consider the story of the impotent man in John 5. This is another person whose name we're never told but who has an interaction with Jesus that changes him forever. I believe we should see ourselves in him.

The chapter starts by saying that at that time, there was a "*feast of the Jews.*" The Bible does not say what feast it was, but the fact that John, the author, calls it "*a feast of the Jews*" tells us that whatever feast it was, the religious rulers would celebrate it their way and not the LORD's way. But he also tells us that Jesus "*went up to the feast,*" which means, we can be sure, that Jesus would celebrate it properly. We should be able to figure out what feast it is by considering what he does at the feast. The only event described at this feast is the healing of the impotent man, so that healing must reflect the proper practice of one of the feasts, and so it does. In Deuteronomy 16, it says this about the Feast of Weeks: "*Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the*

Have you ever felt totally helpless? Have you ever felt so defeated that all you can express is your despair? That was the impotent man. Jesus came to him by the pool and asked him a simple question, "Do you want to be healed?"

Have you ever felt totally helpless? Have you ever felt so defeated that all you can express is your despair? That was the impotent man. Jesus came to him by the pool and asked him a simple question, "*Do you want to be healed?*" He responded, "*Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.*" (John 5:6-7).¹

He couldn't even answer the question. Defeat so consumed him that all he could express was his helplessness. How did he get this way? The text, as always, offers us clues to help us understand.

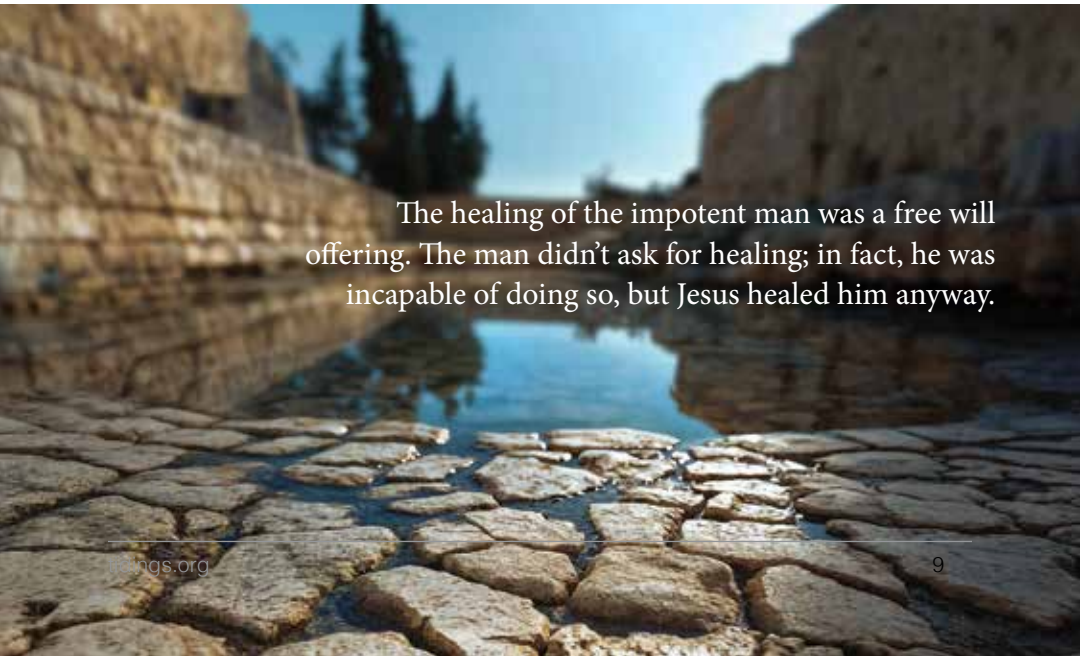
LORD your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the LORD your God blesses you." (Deuteronomy 16:10).

What Jesus did in the healing of the impotent man fits perfectly with these instructions. The healing of the impotent man was a free will offering. The man didn't ask for healing; in fact, he was incapable of doing so, but Jesus healed him anyway. And in doing so, Jesus made the man whole using his blessing, the power of the Holy Spirit. Without looking at the rest of the provision of the Feast of

Weeks or those of the other feasts, which don't fit what happens at the pool, we can be very confident, based upon the Lord's actions, that this was the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost. It also fits when you consider that John 5 was the Lord's first public preaching effort in the Gospel of John and, as we know, Pentecost is about preaching the gospel. But what else does that tell us? It tells us that preaching the gospel and the power to do so is a free will offering to the LORD.

We're told the impotent man had been there for 38 years. Why? It seems to be both an exceedingly specific and random number! But, with a bit of digging we find this number is in only one other place in Scripture, and that's in Deuteronomy 2:14. *"And the time from our leaving Kadesh-barnea until we crossed the brook Zered was thirty-eight years, until the entire generation, that is, the men of war, had perished from the camp, as the LORD had sworn to them."*

So, 38 years represent the time the children of Israel wandered and died in the wilderness after having rejected God. The impotent man represents those lost souls in the wilderness; the wilderness of despair, where they died, each one bearing the same defeated character as the impotent man. Have you ever noticed that in those 38 years, knowing they would perish in the wilderness, they never prepared their children to enter the Promised Land? They never even circumcised their sons. Joshua 5:7 tells us, *"So it was their children, whom he raised up in their place, that Joshua circumcised. For they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way."* This passage tells us not only did they not circumcise their children, they weren't even parents to their kids; it was Joshua or Moses or the LORD, whoever the word "he" represents, but it wasn't their parents. This thought might seem inconceivable until you consider the impotent man. We have no idea if this



The healing of the impotent man was a free will offering. The man didn't ask for healing; in fact, he was incapable of doing so, but Jesus healed him anyway.

man had kids, but if he did, he certainly wasn't raising them while he wallowed for 38 years by the pool.

Which raises the question, why were the children of Israel so defeated after Kadesh-Barnea? Why couldn't they just repent of their sins and receive the LORD's ever-present forgiveness? Because they had not forsaken the Father by their actions; they had rejected Him. In those first two years, both coming out of Egypt and passing through Sinai, there was no doubt the LORD was with them. They had seen the miracles in Egypt: the parting of the Red Sea, the fire and voice on Mount Sinai, the pillar of fire by day and smoke by night, yet at Kadesh Barnea, they rejected him anyway. Why? Because they didn't trust Him. They didn't believe their sins could be fully forgiven, and they refused to let

go of the idea that at some point the other shoe would fall, and they would be punished for their sins. And when they saw and heard about the "giants" in the land, they knew, "that's where the LORD was going to take out His vengeance upon us." They hadn't learned the lesson in Egypt when the angel of death passed over them despite their sins, solely because of the blood of the lamb. They didn't learn it at the Red Sea, when they were helpless and Moses said, "*Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD,*" the waters parted and they were once again saved. Again and again, they refused to learn the lesson that salvation is the free will offering of the LORD and not a test of obedience. Consequently, when they rejected Him at Kadesh, they rejected that truth, because that's the way the flesh is. It believes and trusts only in



itself. Yet, for those few who embrace it, it is the power of God unto salvation. So, what about the impotent man?

John 5:4 tells us something that doesn't appear to make sense on the surface. It reads, *"For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had."* (KJV). Many manuscripts take out this verse because it suggests superstition, but superstition comes not from what it says, but from people's response. Consider the "fiery serpent" on the pole that Moses made in Numbers 21. At the time, those who looked upon it obtained healing, yet later, Hezekiah destroyed it because it had become an idol. The children of Israel had come to think there was some power in the pole. The situation at the pool was much the same. The impotent man, like all those who lay by the pool, was only considering what happened when the water was stirred and not who stirred it, or why.

The truth is that at a particular season in the life of every person of faith, the LORD does stir the waters. We are tested by "fiery" trials, just like the children of Israel, to determine whether we will trust the Father or reject Him. One such trial happened to me in the fall of 2023. At that time, I noticed a lump on my neck, which turned out to be tongue cancer. I never felt so hopeless or forgotten or judged for my sins as I did when I heard the diagnosis. Yet, as I went through chemo and radiation treatments, and

my body grew weaker and weaker to the point where I couldn't eat and could barely walk, my faith grew stronger and stronger because of the love shown me from everyone in my life—natural brothers and sisters, spiritual brothers and sisters, co-workers, old friends, people I didn't even know. So much unexpected and undeserved love was shown to me that I couldn't explain it, except to recognize it as the love of God. It was as if He was saying, "How much love do I have to show you before you realize it all comes from me?"

Well, I learned the lesson, at least I hope I did, but what about the impotent man? After he was healed, Jesus found him and said, *"See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you."* (John 5:14). What could be worse than being in the state he was in for almost 40 years? I believe the man answers when he departs and tells the rulers that Jesus made him whole. The only thing worse than helplessness is hopelessness.

So, whatever your trial may be, however it is that the LORD comes along and stirs up the waters in your life; however helpless you feel, remember, you are the impotent man, and Jesus has indeed come along and made you whole. So never give up the hope he has placed in your heart and never doubt God's love, but instead, take that very moment to *"stand still and see the salvation of the LORD."* (KJV).

*Jim Sullivan,
Stoughton Ecclesia, MA*

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from the ESV.



GETTING OUR PRIORITIES STRAIGHT

By Joel Wilkinson

HOW often do we hear someone say the words, “He needs to get his priorities straight!” Indeed, the people around us seem to have an endless supply of advice regarding getting our lives in order. Our boss thinks more work is the answer. Our teacher thinks extra credit is the way we should go. Our friends, family and ecclesia make known their expectations for us. Often stretched to our limit, we can become resentful and even rebellious. Hurt by a lack of recognition and certain that we suffer from a lack of “me” time in our schedules, we resort to worldly activities to achieve satisfaction. Sometimes, our lives can feel like an unpleasant contest between burdensome obligations and guilty pleasures. What if there were a way to rebalance our lives so that we could feel contentment without resentment and guilt? Good news! There is a way, but it will involve humbling ourselves and following some advice.

As an honest man once said: “Feel free to take as much of my advice as you like...I’m not using any of it.” Sadly, this is often our approach to much of the advice we find in Scripture. We can recite the verses, but can we put them into practice? Sometimes we think all we have to do is read and study. We can be like career college students who take class after class but never graduate! We need to step out of our comfort zone and get a job! We will never **think** our way into better acting; we must **act** our way into better thinking. “*Faith without works is dead.*” (James 2:20). Let’s go to work.

Our plan to “get our priorities straight” will require only three simple steps: seek God, clean house, and serve others.

Step 1: Seek God. “*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you*” promises us that if we get to work on spiritual goals, our physical needs will take care of themselves (Matthew 6:33). If we simply do the next right thing today, we will not have to carry the heavy burdens of worry and regret. Jesus said, “*Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*” (v. 34). To seek God, we must live in the present. We cannot pine for a sugar-coated past or a hypothetical future where we “finally get what we want.” Yesterday is history, tomorrow a mystery; but today is a gift, which is why we call it the present. Each morning is like a new life, and each night we experience symbolic death. “*This is the day which the LORD has made...we will rejoice and be glad in it.*” Once we apply ourselves to being present, we can become aware of God’s presence. If there is one thing our world hates to see, it is us spending time alone with God! Our hand-held idols offer a steady supply of images that speak, drawing our attention away from God’s presence. To seek God, we must **take back the present!** The only way to do this is through action.

We must form daily habits. Prayer and meditation must be a prominent part of today, if **today is all there is**. The Lord’s prayer says, “*Give us this day...*” Yesterday’s prayers to do God’s will do not help us do God’s will today. The day needs to start with a prayer. If you can’t remember to pray, try storing your purse or wallet under the couch or bed. When you get down on your knees tomorrow to retrieve it, say a quick

prayer. Simply say, "Please God, show me your will for me today...and give me the strength to do your will today." God will work with whatever we bring to the table, but we must show Him we are willing. **Willingness** is the key that opens the door a crack to let God into our day. Ironically, this morning prayer is a demonstration of your willpower used appropriately. In this respect, kneeling when we pray is a good idea since it shows God our intention. Kneeling also reinforces the adage of acting our way into better thinking. God moves mountains, but we must show up with a shovel in hand!

Today needs to end with an intentional demonstration of gratitude through prayer. Prayer must not be complicated, but it must happen daily. At night, just a quick, "Thank you for (a list of things you are grateful for)" will suffice. It is not the quantity or even the quality of our prayers that matters so much as our **willingness** to do the action. Sometimes a prayer might be: "Father, I give up! I can't do this anymore! You will have to take this burden!" If we humble ourselves like children who helplessly bring our parent a ball of

knots, our Father will respond. But we have to demonstrate the willingness to do it through action. Once again, kneeling at bedtime is recommended because it shows humility and increases our likelihood of succeeding at forming a habit.

Similar to prayer, meditation needs to become a routine. There is no use asking God what His will for us is if we do not set aside time to listen for spiritual intuition. Meditation need not be complicated. It might be as simple as getting up a few minutes early to drink coffee alone in silence. Or we can sit in our car in the parking lot before work. We could walk out to our backyard and listen. Once again, quality and quantity are not the goals. A beginning is all we are after. Face it: the world wants to own every minute of your life and be your god. Setting quiet times alone with God is critical to our spiritual survival. Many people will say, "I can't meditate (be alone with nothing but God)." If you can't be alone with Him for five minutes today, how will you manage sharing eternity with Him?

Meditation will include the daily Bible Readings. As it has been said, "Praying



is talking to God; meditation is paying attention to His answer.” Hearing God’s word is the best way to tune in to God! As time passes, prayers will become a constant, automatic tool for crucial times in our day. As we begin to realize meditation is the very definition of “me time” (spent with God), our days will slow down and become like miniature lifetimes because we are present for them! We will eventually realize the truth of Ecclesiastes 3:11, *“He has put eternity into man’s mind.”* (RSV)

Step 2: Clean House. Once we are willing to seek God, we need to take action. Our next step is to “clean house” or change our behavior. While some may think this happened on the day we left the old man in the baptism tub, we must realize our “walk” is a long journey. Here, we find a focus on humility is helpful. Humility means knowing our place as weak, mortal, sinful creatures with no hope apart from God. Conversely, it means realizing our potential to become something far greater than we are today. Calling our lives a spiritual “walk” implies

taking **small but intentional steps** in some definite direction. On a walk, we should be able to look behind us and see our progress. If we cannot, we should consider returning to the basics outlined in step one of this article.

Clearing up our past trespasses will go a long way in putting some distance between us and the old man of sin. We often focus our energy on hiding our sins rather than confessing them. We carry the ongoing weights of bitter resentment and justified indignation around us when we could simply dump them out. To clean house, we start with a list of things to rid ourselves of. With whom are we angry? Why? What are we ashamed of? Why? What are we afraid of? Why?

Once again, we are allowed to flex our will during this step. We must be willing to admit why we are the way we are. While it is undoubtedly true that self (ego), selfishness, self-seeking, and self-centeredness are the main obstacles to our spiritual walk, it is also true that we will not make progress without an **honest and consistent**



examination of ourselves. The help of a good friend, spouse, or counselor is invaluable during our confession and soul-searching. Admitting our faults and accepting criticism from others will be challenging but rewarding. A true friend may encourage you with the knowledge that you aren't as special as you thought. We are all suffering from the common afflictions of pride and fear. Pride prevents us from seeking God. Fear demonstrates our lack of trust in God. Once again, the answer to our dilemma is willingness and prayer. The bad news about cleaning house is that it is endless and may seem insurmountable. The good news is that God will do most of the work—if we ask Him!

Step 3: Serve Others. Once we are present, in two-way contact with God,

“get out of our heads” and concentrate on something else. It reminds us that others struggle as much as we do. It provides opportunities for fellowship as we work with others toward a common goal. As with the other steps, quantity and quality of service do not matter as much as just doing it! Today! We cannot use the excuse: “I wanted to do it perfectly (and couldn't), so I never did it at all.”

Sometimes, service can be so enjoyable that we use it as an excuse to dodge our family responsibilities. We must not forget to order our service according to our relationships: God, our spouse, our family, and then our ecclesial family. We should not rob from our family to give to the ecclesia. Overall, we must not allow “service” to be reduced to an outlet for our ego.

All the commandments in Scripture are there for our own good, and serving others is no exception. It allows us to “get out of our heads” and concentrate on something else.

It reminds us that others struggle as much as we do.

and making noticeable progress in cleaning up our faults, we must pass on this good news to others. There is a saying, “No one can save everyone, but everyone can save someone.” While serving others in small ways can begin today, we must resist the urge to immerse ourselves in this step without doing step 2. We cannot give away something we do not have. No one wants what we have to offer if our behavior displays pride, irritability or discontent.

All the commandments in Scripture are there for our own good, and serving others is no exception. It allows us to

Our 3-step plan to get our priorities straight is simple but never easy. The realization that we have very little power should lead us to seek God (who has all power), align our will with His and ask His help in cleaning up our act. This will involve intentional, routine acts such as prayer, meditation, confession, introspection and righting our wrongs. From there, we can share our experience by testifying about how He has worked in our lives.

*Joel Wilkinson,
Ann Arbor Ecclesia, MI*



FOCUS ON THE LITTLE THINGS

By Peter Bilello

WE have all fallen into the trap of repetitiveness. For many, it starts by getting up every morning at the same time, traveling to work the same way, sometimes not even remembering how we got there, or perhaps performing the same tasks at home every day and losing track of what we have done and what is left to do. LORD willing, Sunday is different—or is it? Perhaps it has also become repetitive—just another chore we do out of habit.

For many, our routines are what make us, and no doubt, many of us find comfort in the predictability they provide. But our routines can become meaningless, devoid of any spiritual or physical value. Each day merges into another in a repetitive cycle of work, chores, and fewer and fewer moments of meditation and focusing on what God wants of us. When this happens, we will undoubtedly feel a growing disconnect from God, that is from our real purpose of being.

As people of faith, we must turn to Scripture for guidance and inspiration. We know we should find solace in prayer, strength in the teachings of the Scriptures, and wisdom in the stories of those who have walked the path before us. But do those sources of spiritual inspiration seem distant? Are their messages silenced or drowned out by the noise of our busy lives? Unfortunately, for many of us, they often are.

So, do we long for a spiritual reawakening, a rekindling of our faith, as we should, or do we just go about our daily lives thinking things will change, and we will get back to God in due course? Or do we contemplate and take encouragement and strength from the divine creation that surrounds us every day? So, where should we look for such encouragement?

Have you ever heard a street performer who made you sit back, enjoy, and appreciate their God-given talent? Have you ever heard someone play the

violin in the subway or on a subway train, and remember the beautiful sound, given the acoustic properties of the surrounding surfaces? Or have you just gone past these people and thought how they were wasting their time?

Furthermore, have you ever heard someone playing your favorite hymn on a piano and wondered why it made you feel so good? Did you notice how it gave you a sense of peace, perhaps even a feeling of connection to something greater than yourself? Perhaps this experience has brought to mind Psalm 150:4: *"Praise him with the timbrel and dance, praise him with the strings and pipe!"* (RSV).

With its ability to transcend the ordinary and touch the heart and mind, music should remind us that beauty and inspiration are found even in the most unexpected places. It is a testament to the power of human expression of specific God-given talent and a reflection of the divine creativity infused in all creation.



Have you ever thought about taking some time out of your day to enjoy or appreciate the beauty of life and God's creation? When one does, there is so much more to see. If we pay more attention to the little things in life, we will notice all God does for us and all His incredibly complex creation surrounding us. Perhaps we will notice the warmth of the sun on our face, the gentle rustling of leaves in the wind, the smell of mown grass in the spring, the laughter of children playing, and the beauty of freshly cut flowers. We will savor the taste of food, the comfort of the home we have been blessed with, the companionship of friends and family, and the strength and encouragement we receive and give to our brothers and sisters. Perhaps by doing this, we will see the world with new eyes, appreciating the beauty and wonder surrounding us and the surety of Christ's return, as sure as the sun rises in the morning and sets in the evening.

Additionally, if we take a little time, we can find spiritual encouragement in everyday moments, small acts of kindness, and unexpected encounters that often bring a smile to our faces. A kind word given and/or received can go a long way to encourage better behavior, or just a more enjoyable day. So can a smile to a stranger. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the ecclesia in Philippi, *"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."*

(Philippians 4:8 NIV).

Ultimately, we don't need to wait for grand gestures or extraordinary events to experience encouragement and the spiritual growth that follows. It is there in the everyday moments, in the ordinary details of life, if only we take the time to notice and appreciate them. By incorporating mindfulness into our daily routine, we can grow spiritually and be more at peace, always assured that God is with us and will provide all that is needful.

Each morning, we can take a few moments to center ourselves, breathe deeply, focus on the present moment, and appreciate all God has provided for us. We should give thanks for the gifts of life, for our health, our family and friends. Additionally, we should seek to continually express gratitude for the simple things, for the sunshine, the rain, the food on our table, the roof over our head, the simple smile of a loved one or stranger. We have no reason to be anxious about anything. As we know, Christ said, *"Why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."* (Matthew 6:28-29).

As we cultivate a spiritual attitude of mindfulness and gratitude, we will find that our perspective will begin to shift, and we will appreciate more what God has done for us. We will take the time to appreciate all the little things. Doing so will make us feel more connected to God's creation and more aware of the divine presence that permeates

everything. If we do this, we will find joy and encouragement in everyday moments, in the simple, little things that once seemed insignificant.

When we do this, we will start to notice the kindness of strangers, the generosity of colleagues and the love of our family and friends. We will more clearly see the beauty in nature, the wonder in creation, and the healing power of God's word. We will also find encouragement in the words of Scripture, uplifting music, and the inspiring stories of others who have striven to put on the Fruit of the Spirit, as we must do.

As we do those things, we should realize that spiritual encouragement isn't something we have to seek in far-off places or extraordinary experiences. It is all around us, in the everyday moments, in the ordinary details of our lives, if only we open our hearts and minds to receive it.

Perhaps the next time we see someone in need, we will offer a helping hand. Not to receive something in return, but because we can. The positive feeling that comes with helping someone can be significant. Not only can it make that person's day, but it can also make ours. It might be a small act of kindness, a simple gesture, but it can make a difference in someone's life. And in that moment, we can feel a deeper connection to our faith, a reminder that even the smallest acts of service or kindness can be a source of spiritual encouragement, not just to the other person, but to us as well. Again, as we put on the Fruit of the Spirit, we aren't the only ones to benefit. The Apostle Paul states, "*Therefore, as God's chosen*

people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." (Colossians 3:12 NIV).

Living a spiritual life isn't just about attending ecclesial activities, reading the Bible, or praying. It is about embodying Scriptural teachings in our daily lives, treating others with kindness and compassion, being a source of light and hope to all we encounter, both in the ecclesia and outside.

As we continue our life journey, we will find that life is richer and more meaningful when we appreciate all the small things and receive encouragement from them. We will find joy and encouragement in the everyday moments, in the little things that had once seemed inconsequential.

Any Bible scholar will tell you that life isn't about achieving worldly goals or accumulating possessions. It is about connecting with others, making a difference in the world, and living a life of purpose and meaning—one that seeks to follow Scriptural instruction continuously, always striving to give more than we receive.

Ultimately, even amid life's challenges, we can always find spiritual encouragement in the little things, in the everyday moments that remind us of God's love and the beauty of His creation. For it is often in these little things that we find the greatest blessings, the deepest connections, and the most profound reminders of our faith.

*Peter Bilello,
Ann Arbor Ecclesia, MI*



ENCOURAGED BY GOD'S WORD

By Tej Chippada

SEASONS of Hardship. Life often brings times of sorrow, shame, and struggle that can feel overwhelming. In these moments, it is easy to feel alone, persecuted, trapped, depressed, or burdened by guilt—uncertain of the path ahead. Yet amid our trials, one unfailing source of strength and hope is the Word of God. This hope isn't just an abstract idea of comfort or a sentimental thought—it is a real and practical truth. Scripture offers countless examples of individuals whose lives were genuinely

strengthened by God's Word in their most difficult moments. We have one powerful example found in the life of David. And where better to understand David's relationship with God's Word than in Psalm 119¹—the longest psalm in the Bible?

Psalm 119 highlights the significance of God's Word in nearly every verse. Almost every line refers to the writer personally, using words like “me,” “my,” or “I” or indirectly through phrases like “your servant.” It is a

profoundly personal psalm, intended as a meditative prayer. Designed for memorization and self-reflection, it consists of 176 verses, divided into 22 sections corresponding to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each section contains eight verses, all beginning with the same Hebrew letter, structuring the Psalm to encourage meditation and internalization.

While this Psalm often refers to God's Word through terms like commandments, judgments, and ordinances, it also clearly references something more personal—a specific message from God to David. Let's take a closer look at how God's Word encouraged David to endure in his darkest times.

David's Wisdom from God's Word.

While David's brothers were given prominent roles in the king's court and on the battlefield, David was assigned the humble task of tending sheep. Yet he didn't waste that time. Instead, he used it to meditate on God's Word, committing it to memory and allowing it to shape his thoughts and character. 1 Samuel 18 clearly reflects this spiritual foundation, which follows David's victory over Goliath. The chapter emphasizes four times that David "*behaved wisely*"—with the men of war (v. 5), with Saul (v. 15), in all his actions (v. 14), and more wisely than all of Saul's servants (v. 30).

Where did this wisdom come from? Status or experience was not its base—David wasn't even taken seriously by his own brother Eliab. We find the answer in Psalm 119, where David writes, "*It imparts understanding to the simple*" (v. 130),² "*Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies*" (v. 98), "*I have more understanding than all my*

teachers." (v. 99). This wisdom did not emerge out of nowhere—it grew out of a deep, personal relationship with God's Word, developed during quiet, faithful years long before he entered the king's service.

Psalm 119 uses ten Hebrew terms to describe God's Word, each highlighting a different aspect. Among them, "*word*" stands out—not just referring to Scripture in general, but to God's personal message or promise to David that he would become king over Israel. This specific word became a source of strength and encouragement for David during the darkest moments of his life.

Persecuted but Strengthened. Psalm 119 doesn't just reflect the idea of persecution—it describes David's life in real terms. Consider the verses: "*Princes persecute me without cause, but my heart stands in awe of Your words.*" (v. 161). "*Many are my persecutors and my adversaries, but I do not swerve from your testimonies.*" (v. 157). "*The arrogant utterly deride me, but I do not turn aside from Your law.*" (v. 51 NRSV). These verses aren't abstract—they directly reflect what David endured. Though David had done no wrong, Saul relentlessly pursued him, driven by jealousy and fear. Saul tried to kill him, sent assassins to his home, and hunted him across the land. Even after Samuel delivered God's word that God would take the kingdom from Saul and give it to David (1 Samuel 15:27), Saul resisted, doing everything he could to prevent that word from being fulfilled.

In the face of all this, David's strength came from God's Word—not just the general teachings of Scripture, but the personal message from God that he would one day be king. That promise



was his anchor: *“Remember your word to your servant, in which you have made me hope. This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life.”* (vv. 49–50). David wasn’t just comforted by spiritual ideas; God’s specific promise sustained him, that one day, all this kingdom would be his.

Trapped but Trusting the Word. In Psalm 119, David speaks openly about the snares or traps set against him: *“The arrogant have dug pitfalls for me disobeying your instruction.”* (v. 85, ISV). And *“The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts.”* (v. 110). These are not just

poetic metaphors—they closely reflect the real dangers David faced. Saul's attempts to trap him were intentional and persistent. He offered David his daughter Michal in marriage, hoping by trying to earn the bride price of 100 Philistine lives, he would be killed (1 Samuel 18:25). David exceeded the challenge and killed 200. He was also betrayed by the Ziphites out of loyalty to Saul, nearly captured at Keilah, and relentlessly hunted from place to place. Despite these attempts, David held firmly to the promise he would one day be anointed as king. Though the reality often contradicted that promise, he trusted God's word would stand. That assurance gave him the strength and clarity to keep going, even when everything around him pushed him to give up.

Depressed but Revived by the Word.

Another theme we see in Psalm 119 is the psalmist giving voice to deep depression and weariness: *"My soul clings to the dust; give me life according to your word."* (v. 25). *"My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to your word!"* (v. 28). *"My soul faints with longing for your salvation, but I have put my hope in your word."* (v. 81, NIV).

These verses are more than poetic expressions—they reflect David's real emotional struggles. Hounded by Saul and constantly on the run, David often felt abandoned and insignificant. At one point, he cried out, *"Whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! After a flea!"* (1 Samuel 24:14). These aren't the words of a man full of confidence; they are the cries of someone barely holding on. Yet even in that low place, David anchored himself to God's word. The word of promise spoken to him—that

he would one day be king—became the hope that revived and sustained him through overwhelming weariness.

Ashamed but Assured by the Word.

As reflected in this Psalm, David often prayed for God to remove his shame and reproach: *"Remove from me reproach and contempt, for I have kept your testimonies."* (v. 22, NKJV). *"Turn away the disgrace I dread, for your laws are good."* (v. 39, NIV).

As the youngest, his family treated David as the least significant member. Even when Samuel came to anoint the next king, David was left out until specifically requested. These early experiences of being overlooked and treated as an outsider must have left a lasting impact. Yet despite that, David continued to hold to that promise. That assurance gave him the confidence to rise above the shame and reproach he faced.

The Inner Battle to Stay Anchored.

Perhaps one of the most personal aspects of Psalm 119 is its honest admission that even those who love and treasure God's Word deeply still struggle to remain faithful to it: *"Oh, that my ways were steadfast in keeping your statutes!"* (v. 5). *"I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant, for I do not forget your commandments."* (v. 176).

David knew this battle well. For example, in 1 Samuel 21, when he fled to Achish, king of Gath, he became afraid after hearing the Philistines say, *"And the servants of Achish said to him, 'Is not this David the king of the land?'"* (v. 11). Instead of trusting God's word, David *"took these words to heart and was much afraid of Achish"*

the king of Gath." (v. 12). And, out of fear, he pretended to be insane. In that moment, he treasured the wrong word—the word of men instead of the word of God.

This tension mirrors the struggle Paul describes in Romans 7:15: *"For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do."* (NKJV). David and Paul remind us that staying anchored to God's Word isn't effortless. It requires God's grace, forgiveness, renewal, and daily dependence on God rather than our own strength.

Conclusion: Encouragement for Our Journey. Psalm 119 is more than a poetic meditation; it's a personal testimony of how God's Word brings encouragement through every season of life. Like David, we have been anointed, not with oil by a prophet, but by the Spirit of Christ through His Word. After being anointed, David did not become king for nearly 20 years, unlike Saul, who became king shortly after his anointing. For us, being anointed doesn't mean the promise to us is fulfilled yet, but it means we are sealed for it. *"Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee."* (2 Corinthians 1:21–22

NKJV). We are called to a bright future in God's glorious Kingdom. Yet for now, we live in the "in-between," facing trials that test our faith and focus.

We may experience persecution, temptation, weariness, shame, and inner battles like David. While David treasured God's Word, he also acknowledged his struggles to remain faithful to it, sometimes swayed by fear or the words of others. We feel that same tension. Though we hold the hope of the Kingdom, the weight of daily concerns can cloud our perspective. Yet in those moments, God's Word speaks encouragement. It calls us back, reminding us of His promises and renewing our strength.

Like David, we wait. And in this journey, through joy and sorrow, we cling to the Word that gives us hope. May it encourage, sustain, revive, and guide us until the day that promise is fulfilled.

*Tej Chippada,
Ann Arbor Ecclesia, MI*

¹ Although Psalm 119 does not directly name its author, there is growing support in both Jewish and Christian tradition that David may have written it. The depth of devotion, the personal tone, and recurring themes of affliction and love for God's law align strongly with his known writings and life experience. Charles H. Spurgeon, in his classic commentary *The Treasury of David*, reflects this view: "There is an evident growth in the subject matter. The earlier verses are of such a character as to lend themselves to the hypothesis that the author was a young man. At the same time, many of the later passages could only have suggested themselves to age and wisdom. If David did not write it, there must have lived another believer of exactly the same order of mind as David." Spurgeon, Charles. *The Treasury of David. Psalm 119 Introduction*. <https://gracegems.org/Spurgeon/119.htm>.

² Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from the ESV.

BE ENCOURAGED: YAHWEH HAS A PLAN

By Jared Keyes



THE Promise of a Messiah. Adam lived 930 years. That's a long time after the fall in the garden. Adam and Eve were cursed but were also promised there would be two seeds, one whose heel would be bruised and another whose head would be bruised (Genesis 3:15). This promise offered redemption from the curse—particularly the redemption from death. With that in mind, imagine what was going through the minds of Adam and Eve when they had their first offspring. Perhaps they thought one of their two sons—Cain or Abel—would be this redeemer and thus fulfill the promise in such a short time. Imagine how they felt when Cain shed Abel's blood in the very first murder ever! To make matters worse, the culprit of this great tragedy was their other son! Perhaps that brought them to a point of reflection, remembering Yahweh's promise and wondering how it could ever be fulfilled. They must have known redemption would have to wait, but for how long? This question would have remained with Adam right to his death. Adam saw four generations come into the world before he died—Seth, Enoch, Methuselah, and Lamech. Unfortunately, none of these men fulfilled the promise of Genesis 3:15 either. It is nice to think Adam knew Yahweh would keep His promise even if it did not come to pass in his lifetime.

The Messiah Finally Comes. Almost 3,000 years passed before Christ appeared to fulfill Yahweh's promise in Genesis 3:15. The ultimate fulfillment of Genesis 3:15 will come when Christ returns to the earth to end death, set up his throne in Jerusalem, and make

all things new again. *“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). Similarly, *“And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him.”* (Revelation 22:3).

For this to happen, Yahweh has told us that there will be a sign pointing to the physical return of his son, Jesus, from heaven to the earth to redeem his people and establish the kingdom here on earth.

The Jews Return to the Land—A Sign of the Times. I remember prominent brothers speaking about Christ's return back in 1986. They spoke of it as if it could happen at any moment. They reminded believers that current events indicated Christ's imminent return to earth to establish the Kingdom. Jesus said the generation who witnessed these things would be alive to see his return: *“this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place.”* (Luke 21:32 NKJV).

Jesus said this when speaking the parable of the fig tree. The fig tree symbolized Israel, and its budding symbolized its national rebirth when Israel became a nation in 1948. As Ezekiel said, *“And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country.”* (Ezekiel 34:13).

We know the time is near, but we can become discouraged as we wait.

Being Prepared. We know Jesus said, “Of that day and hour no one knows.” (Matthew 24:36 NKJV), yet Christ still expects us to prepare for that special moment. As minutes, hours, days, and even years pass, it’s natural to get discouraged and even wonder if we somehow got it wrong. We might even begin to doubt Yahweh’s promise. Now is not the time to doubt. Jesus knew we might grow weary as time passed. He encouraged us to keep watching because it could happen at any moment. Yahweh also knew we would need encouragement to help us remain steadfast as the day approaches. The parable of the 10 virgins is one of these examples.

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came

also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh. (Matthew 25:1–13).

Five were wise and five were foolish. The five foolish ones did not have enough oil in their lamps. When the delayed bridegroom finally arrived, they were late looking for oil and missed entering through the door. However, the five wise virgins were prepared even though the bridegroom delayed and even though they also slept.

In the Gospel of Matthew, we read about those who will be working in the field when Christ comes, diligently watching for the return of Christ. The message for us is never to stop watching, no matter how tired we get. We must always be ready. “*Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.*” (Matthew 24:40–42).

The silver lining is that the longer time passes, the closer we are to our Lord’s return. So, we should rejoice in knowing we are coming nearer than ever. Therefore, we must encourage one another toward that day and ensure our lamps are filled with oil the same as those of the five wise virgins.

Have We Become Discouraged? It’s fair to say we can become discouraged occasionally when something that is supposed to happen does not. In Genesis 6, even our Creator was grieved that He had created people who

followed every imagination of their hearts. Having expectations and not seeing the promised outcome bear fruit in what we think is a timely manner can result in stress and discouragement. If Yahweh experiences discouragement where He has the power to control the outcome, when He allows man to get in the way of the planned outcome, how much more likely are we to experience discouragement because we have no control over the timing? One thing is certain—Yahweh keeps His promises.

Yahweh Keeps His Promises. It may seem counterintuitive to our fleshly mind that anything good can come out of waiting. Yet the prophet Isaiah tells us to use our spiritual mind and wait

apparent as in Joshua 1:9. Joshua tells the people, *“Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy Yahweh is with thee whithersoever thou goest.”* He thus encourages us in everything we do, including waiting on Yahweh to act.


How can we encourage one another in the Last Days? The Bible repeats many messages that help remind us that Yahweh is working toward an ultimate goal of setting up his Kingdom at that time of his choosing. Again, in Genesis 6, Yahweh sent Noah at the right time. He was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah was a type of Christ; therefore, the story of Noah

Friends of like precious faith can also inspire us to remain steadfast while we wait. That is why choosing the right people to be around is so important. We should choose friends who help us and encourage us to wait patiently for Christ's return.

on Yahweh to do His bidding. The Bible is very clear: the LORD is so great that those who wait upon Him will not get tired but rather be renewed in their strength. *“But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”* (Isaiah 40:31).

What a wonderful aspect of Yahweh's fortitude He has given to His believers. How much more should we trust in Yahweh to keep His promise so long ago in the Garden of Eden to Adam and Eve—to send a deliverer to establish His Kingdom forever? Scripture reinforces this theme in many places, but none so

brings the reader's mind back to that original promise made in the garden. It also points forward in Scripture to the Messiah, Christ Jesus, who came, died, and will return to set up his Kingdom and bring the earth “rest.” Stories like those of Noah, Moses, and David—all the types of Christ and many other righteous faithful servants in the Bible—encourage us to remember that Yahweh will keep his promise. In addition, friends of like precious faith can also inspire us to remain steadfast while we wait. That is why choosing the right people to be around is so important. We should choose friends who help us and encourage us to wait

A full-page background image showing two hikers with large backpacks. One hiker is on a rocky ledge, reaching down to help the other hiker pull them up. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a strong backlight and silhouetting the hikers against a sky filled with dramatic, dark clouds. The overall mood is one of perseverance and mutual support.

God wants us to work patiently and focus our whole being on where we want **nothing** else but to be redeemed and part of His plan.

patiently for Christ's return. Hebrews 10:25 tells us that we must come together regularly to "not forget" while waiting for his return. *"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."*

Perseverance and Dedication. The testing of our faith is something Yahweh does to perfect us and to refine us. *"Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."* (James 1:3–4).

He wants us to work patiently and focus our whole being on where we want nothing else but to be redeemed and part of His plan. To do that, Yahweh gives us time to *"work out our salvation with fear and trembling"* while we patiently wait for him. Galatians reinforces the idea that Yahweh sent His son to redeem those under the law at the right time. We can assume Yahweh will also do the same when His son returns. *"But when the fulness of the time was come, Yahweh sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption."* (Galatians 4:4–5).

When the *"fulness of time"* comes, Christ will return. We should be encouraged Yahweh has a plan and He knows when it's the right time.

Prayer, Supplication and Encouragement. As we wait for the return of Christ, we need to encourage one another so we do not become

disillusioned. We can accomplish this goal in many practical ways. Obviously, first and foremost, prayer is vital. The children of Israel cried out to Yahweh many times, asking for deliverance from various enemies, and Yahweh always responded to His righteous servants. Asking Yahweh to send His son soon should be an everyday occurrence. In addition, we can support one another by giving talks on current events and exhortations on what the Kingdom might be like to help encourage and reinforce the promise of Christ's return. Time is running out for our Lord to return, if that generation that was alive and youthful in 1948 is quickly coming to an end, as well as those who saw Jerusalem designated as Israel's capital. These events mean we must continue to read and reflect on the Scriptures daily, exhorting one another, praying constantly, meeting more often, and reminding each other of the return of Christ, as if today is the day the Lord will return. May he return soon.

Jared Keyes,
Ann Arbor Ecclesia, MI



THINK GLOBALLY

By Gideon Hewitson

TWO thousand years ago, in the year after the death of Jesus Christ, believers formed the first ecclesia. We read in Acts 2:44-47:

All those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house...And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.¹

Until recently, I imagined this first ecclesia as a small group of Jesus' disciples, men and women who had been with Jesus during most of his ministry—maybe 50 to 100 people—mostly Jews from Jerusalem and Galilee. I thought of them as a close-knit group who had already been following Jesus together and were now in Jerusalem, preaching and sharing the gospel with other Jews in the city.

But after revisiting Acts, I realized I had to change that mental image of what the first church looked like. When we zoom out to look at the start of Acts chapter 2, we see that this first

ecclesia was neither small nor made up of some uniform group of people. We read in Acts 2:41 that this group of believers was at least 3,000 people, and as the passage above notes, their number grew daily. This single ecclesia quickly grew in the matter of a day to a size at least ten times larger than most North American Bible Schools!

Additionally, these believers were not just Jews from Jerusalem. Acts 2:5 describes them as *“devout men from every nation under heaven.”* Further, Acts 2:8-11 continues:

And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.

This group of believers, baptized on Pentecost and making up the early ecclesia, was far larger and far more diverse than anything many of us have seen in the Christadelphian community! From the very beginning of the very first ecclesia, the good news of the Kingdom of God was something global, even when it began only in the small city of Jerusalem.

A Global Community, Then and Now.

Today, most of us are keenly aware of our global community. My home ecclesia in Baltimore has members from across North America, the UK, Bolivia, Australia, and the Congo. Many of us don't just attend our local

Bible School, but travel to Bible Schools across the country and worldwide. With the internet, we can join online events hosted by ecclesias thousands of miles away and get news from our brothers and sisters around the globe in an instant.

But what struck me recently is that this global perspective is not some new phenomenon technology has suddenly unlocked for the community of God's followers. God has always intended for His followers to think beyond their local communities. It has been part of the gospel message from the very beginning.

Paul emphasized this in his letters, reminding the churches they were a part of something bigger. He often sent greetings from other ecclesias and urged believers to care for one another, such as supporting the poor in Jerusalem during the famine there. We can also surmise that Paul encouraged others to travel, sending Timothy, Titus, Silas, and many others to help strengthen and encourage fellow believers around Greece and Asia Minor. Acts is full of examples of believers journeying between ecclesias, sharing letters, and offering encouragement. It was important to Paul that his readers understand they were not alone in their faith. Paul wanted these ecclesias to realize that their faith wasn't just believed by the followers in the church of Philippi, and it was bigger than just the ecclesia in Corinth. There were communities everywhere walking the same path. That message is equally as vital for us today as it was 2,000 years ago.

The Danger of a Limited View. One danger our faith faces, and the faith

of our young people, develops when we limit our perspective to just our home ecclesia. When issues inevitably arise, or we feel like we no longer fit in with that group, we can associate those struggles with the entire Christadelphian community. Rather than seeking strength and support from the many different brothers and sisters worldwide, I have seen friends walk away from their faith altogether because they didn't feel like they had a place in the ecclesia or community where they grew up.

Understanding our faith as part of a global community helps us see beyond the culture of one ecclesia or region. Paul spent much of the New Testament working with the new ecclesias to help them understand that the things that brought them together should have been stronger than the different cultures they had grown up with. It didn't matter if they had grown up in a Jewish or Greek community; they were united, one in Christ Jesus, because of their shared faith. Our shared beliefs that we have in common are incredible, and while the culture and practices may vary depending on where you go, the faith we hold in common has a way of cutting through those differences, bringing us together despite them.

My wife and I can see how meeting Christadelphians from around the country and the world has helped strengthen our faith. It has shown us that our beliefs are incredible, and they are not just traditions we inherited or cunningly devised fables, but something real, something that can connect people worldwide. This shared faith has turned people who live hundreds or thousands of miles away

from us into close friendships that we cherish dearly.

From the first ecclesia in Jerusalem, throughout the Book of Acts, and even today, a sense of global community has always been a defining pillar of our faith. The first 3,000 believers in Jerusalem were part of a worldwide body, just as we are today. My encouragement to each of us is to find a way to cultivate this mindset, both locally and around the world.

How to Prioritize a Global Perspective. Here are a few suggestions for how to practically foster this mindset in your life/ecclesia:

- Visit other ecclesias nearby. Attend a Bible class or Memorial Service at a neighboring ecclesia. Especially if you belong to a larger ecclesia with smaller ecclesias within driving distance, make it a goal to visit them a couple of times a year.
- Organize a speaker exchange. In Baltimore and Washington, we do a speaker exchange a few times a year. Both ecclesias send a brother to exhort at the other. If you are farther apart from the other "local" ecclesias, make a weekend of it.
- Host a study weekend or a fraternal gathering. Study weekends have always been a staple of our community. They are a great way to connect with brothers and sisters who live in our immediate area but attend other ecclesias.
- Support local refugees. Many of our ecclesias have grown due to refugee placements. Whether it is the Iranian believers in the UK or the Congolese believers in North America, being actively involved

with these newcomers can be a great way to build our appreciation for our global community, and can highlight for us just how amazing our faith is at bringing different and diverse groups of people together.

- Do overseas mission work. Support an ecclesia in another country by preaching or encouraging fellow believers. There are many opportunities out there. Shoshanna and I have found that God will always provide. Ask for support if needed; many in our community cannot go themselves but would gladly support you.
- Support others interested in mission work. If you do mission work, financially support or encourage those who might be interested. Make sure you help foster and encourage a can-do attitude in your ecclesia regarding preaching and mission work.
- Host a domestic missionary group. Host a group like Truth Corps, a P2P team, or another preaching campaign. Not only will you be able to meet with a team of people from around the country, but you may also help inspire the young people in your local area to do a trip like that in the future.
- Host others when they travel through your area. Open your home to visiting brothers and sisters, especially those you may not know yet. If you live in a city that doesn't get many travelers, send out an appeal for people to pay a visit!

- Send aid when needed. Just as the Greek ecclesias supported Jerusalem during the famine, find ways to help believers in crisis worldwide.
- Share news and schedules with other ecclesias. This is an excellent way we can foster a sense of global community. Knowing what else is happening in our area or around the globe helps us appreciate that our faith is strong and active worldwide.
- Share resources and tools. If you develop materials for your ecclesia: websites, Vacation Bible School programs, preaching materials—think about how to share that work with others. Not all ecclesias have the resources or skillsets needed for these projects, and by sharing them, we enable other ecclesias who may not have the workers needed.

We all recognize the importance of supporting our home ecclesia, but how many feel that same obligation to the global community? Make it your goal to find a project focusing on the larger community. Our faith is incredible, and as Christ testified in Acts 1:8, it is being shared “*unto the remotest parts of the earth.*” Find a way to get involved and think globally.

Gideon Hewitson,
Baltimore Ecclesia, MI

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from the NASB 95.

A SYNOPSIS: HOW TO EXHORT

By John Bilello



NOT everyone wants to, or should be, an exhorting brother, but circumstances can thrust a brother into that role. When I gave my first exhortation, some sixty-five years ago, I had only the vaguest idea how to do it. Over the years, thanks to a useful education and absorbing many critical comments, I have improved. Some suggestions were kind and helpful, and others were sometimes rude. Either way, I took in the valuable feedback from listeners to improve my presentations and have become comfortable (most times) with giving an exhortation. What follows is a brief outline of a series of insights I have learned on **how to exhort** over the years. This article is a compendium on exhorting, only a starting point for the reader to dig much deeper into the subject to fit their own interests, abilities and presentation style. It is not a definitive model that all should follow—I have learned, by observing many speakers in my lifetime, that **one size doesn't fit all**. Many approaches can end up satisfying an audience, making them feel they have received the benefits of a good exhortation. Thus, please keep this in mind as you read this article; it intends to be a starting point that leads to continued learning on the subject.

This article will focus on the following points for discussion:

- What does the word “exhortation” mean, and what is its purpose?
- How to pick a topic.
- How to research the topic.
- How to deliver the message—style and substance.
- How to conclude the exhortation.

Exhortation vs Sermon.¹ I assume almost all my readers know how to “Google” the definitions in the title of this section (see endnotes one and two). Christadelphians have always used the term “exhortation” because “sermon” can apply to almost any church talk, even including **the need to raise money to repair the furnace!**² By contrast, the term “exhortation” is what best describes what occurred in Acts 13:15 when Paul and Barnabas visited the synagogue in Pisidia: *“After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, ‘Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.’”* (ESV).

The bold-faced words in endnotes one and two succinctly epitomize the difference between an exhortation and a sermon. The keyword in the passage cited above from Acts is “encouragement.” All attending our Sunday meetings face a week of challenges, both past and future. Some will be concerned about their finances, or their job security, some about their health, others about how they are doing in school and tragically, there may be some bereaved who need comforting. These are just a few possible issues troubling our brothers and sisters. By understanding the meaning and purpose of giving an exhortation, we can appreciate why our pioneer brethren preferred that word rather than sermon. What follows will have obvious overlaps with advice for a good Bible class. Still, it is essential to realize that, while a good exhortation might make a good Bible class, the opposite is not necessarily true. Now let's move

forward and consider some ideas on how to develop a good exhortation.

How to pick a topic. Since a good exhortation could start by focusing on a topic derived from Scripture, I have frequently tapped an idea from the Daily Readings on the Sunday in question or from what we had read that week. With this approach, I am assured most, if not all, of my audience is familiar with the reading and its antecedents. But that doesn't always work for me. Sometimes, one just cannot develop good ideas for that juncture in the readings.

A second habit is to make a note from time to time of a particular passage that comes up when doing our readings. It could be recently or even years before—in other words, I keep a journal of passages that seem particularly interesting to me that would make a good subject to focus on for an exhortation. I try to keep these ideas in reserve and always use ones that predate (and not by much time) the readings scheduled for the Sunday when I am to exhort. This way, the idea will resonate with most of the congregation that has been doing the daily readings. I try to avoid ideas that come from readings after my scheduled date. Another way to focus on a theme is to use something in the news with spiritual significance. Again, the more current the idea that becomes the focus of the talk, the better chance that your audience will be familiar with the topic. Finally, someone in my family, or ecclesia (or elsewhere if I am a visiting speaker), might suggest something they would like to hear as an exhortation (I especially welcome

and often encourage this input since it guarantees at least someone wants to listen to a talk on that topic).

Researching the Topic. Many years ago, in a speech class I had in college, the instructor wanted to emphasize the importance of doing comprehensive research for a presentation. He did this by paraphrasing the Apostle Peter. He said, "Thorough research for a presentation covers a multitude of sins that one may make in delivery."³ Today, the Internet gives us abundant information that can flesh out almost any topic we choose. Concerning exhortations, the ultimate resource is the Scriptures. Hence, I always start by checking every reference associated with my chosen verse. One must be careful to avoid any bias that steers one to sectarian interpretations of a given verse. I don't think it is appropriate to endorse a particular product, but the two I particularly like are free and available for most computers.⁴ I also like the cross-references in my Oxford print Bible and rely on it as a good starting point.

Digital technology has made print Bibles somewhat of an anachronism; I am fully aware that all the younger members of my congregation use Bibles and study resources on their computers and cell phones! These technological tools make for good research, but one must carefully separate secular and clerical wisdom from Internet search results and Bible study programs. One of the best ways to use the Internet is to search Christadelphian sources to learn how to give a good exhortation and find material relevant to a talk one plans to present. One obvious



source is naturally to search the **tidings.org** website, and another is the *Christadelphian Magazine* website at **thechristadelphian.com**. The latter publishes a monthly feature, "Sunday Morning," a current exhortation. When I first started exhorting in the late 1950s, I went through my grandfather's stack of old Christadelphian magazines and studied the exhortation section intently. It helped me enormously to appreciate what comprises a good exhortation.

How to deliver the message—style and substance. We meet on Sunday morning to remember the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a "memorial" service, and thus, the object of the memorial is Jesus. An exhortation that fails to prepare us to memorialize Jesus when we partake

of the emblems has missed the point. I have often heard exhorters give talks that would better serve as Bible classes or even public lectures, which somehow missed the point of a memorial. An exposition on the design of Ezekiel's temple might make an excellent Bible class. Still, without spiritual encouragement and the linkage to our Lord Jesus Christ's sacrifice, it is not appropriate for an exhortation. Having done proper research, the question becomes how to use it in an exhortation so that one engages the audience, and they benefit from the message. I will outline several possible ways of delivering the message.

- First, many excellent speakers write outlines of their talks, noting key points and references. I personally use this approach because it allows

me to deliver the message with good eye contact with the congregation and note their reactions. Thus, if I sense a point needs more elaboration, I get instant feedback to add more to what I just said. Now that works for me because I spent my life as a teacher, and it was how I always approached lectures in the classroom. It can work for most with practice (I certainly was dreadful early in my career!).

- A second approach is to write the whole exhortation in detail, just like an essay. Then there are two ways to proceed: one can memorize the entire text and give it in a way that seems entirely extemporaneous. I have known some very fine speakers in our community who have followed this method.
- A third approach is to simply read the exhortation to the meeting. This approach can be effective by pausing to look up and engage the audience, before continuing to another section. Again, I have seen this done with good results.

What doesn't work is when a speaker hasn't done their homework. Practicing and having others listen to your presentation before giving it is always a good idea. My wife and sometimes others have been my practice partners over the years, and I am immensely thankful for their critiques.

How to conclude an exhortation. I am not a big fan of someone saying words like “in conclusion” to end a talk. The fact one is concluding should be obvious if the speaker points to the key takeaways he wants his listeners to remember. For a Memorial Service, that should be the connection between what the speaker has talked about and the significance of the life and sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, embodied in the emblems the congregation is about to share.

Epilogue. The great concert pianist Arthur Rubinstein was told by an admirer how impressed he was by how effortlessly he performed. The pianist replied it was 12 to 16 hours of practice, seven days a week, that was the secret of his performing without apparent effort. If you remember nothing else, after you have read this article, there are two key thoughts I hope you will not neglect: 1) always spend the time to do your research thoroughly and 2) practice—practice—practice. If you do these two things, you will appear to give exhortations effortlessly!

*John Bilello,
Ann Arbor Ecclesia, MI*

1 “Exhortation is the act of **urging or encouraging** someone to do something, especially in the context of growing in faith.” A sermon is “A part of a Christian church ceremony in which a minister **gives a talk** on a religious or moral subject, **often based on something written in the Bible.**”

2 Words I once heard in a sermon while attending a friend's church when I was in college—there wasn't a single allusion to the Bible.

3 “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.” (1 Peter 4:8 ESV).

4 If you are a Mac user, check the “App Store” for free Bible study software—similar free material is available for all other digital platforms.



THE POWER OF THE TONGUE

CHOOSING TO BUILD UP, NOT TEAR DOWN!

By Chris Sales

IN a world where words can either uplift or devastate, the profound effects of discouragement are felt all too often. The Bible reminds us of the immense power of our tongues, urging us to use them wisely. Proverbs 18:21 declares, *"Death and life are in the power of the tongue,"* emphasizing our responsibility in speaking to and about one another.¹ The Apostle Paul encourages believers to *"speak the truth in love"* and to *"build each other up."* (Ephesians 4:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:11). Despite these Biblical teachings, it's alarmingly easy to fall into patterns

of negativity, tearing others down with harsh words and criticism. As we reflect on these Scriptures, we must be mindful of our words, striving to create a culture of encouragement and support that reflects Christ's love and compassion.

We have all had the experience of being "deflated" by one sharp criticism regarding anything from our outward appearance, and our ideas or plans, to our exposition of Scripture. Remember that time you were in a committee meeting planning an ecclesial outreach project? You had an

exciting and innovative idea of how to attract people to the event, and most of the other members seemed keen. Then came that comment from one person—"It'll never work. I heard they tried that at an ecclesia out west—total failure. Why waste our time and money on something that won't accomplish our goal?" Of course, then they add, "I'm not trying to be negative or anything—just being realistic." As if that helps at all.

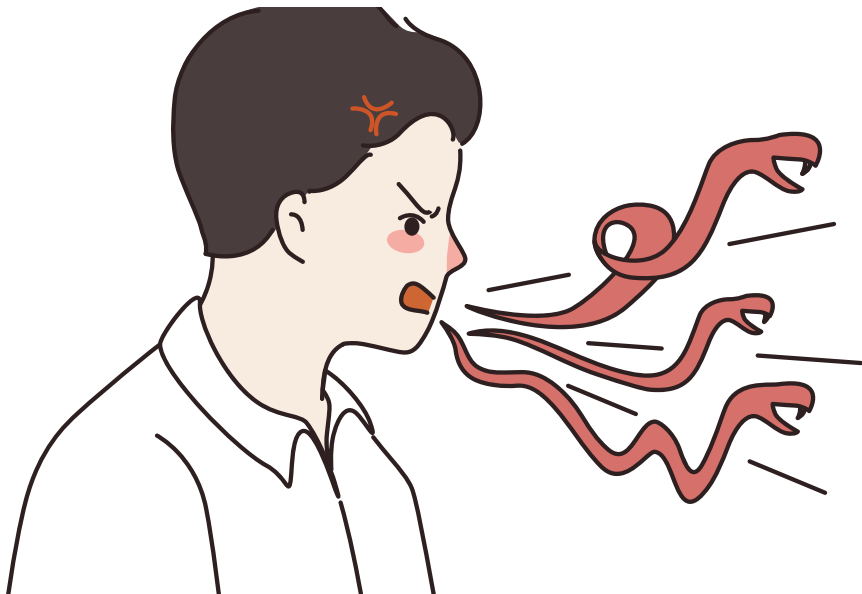
Or what about the Bible class that went really well, and you were excited and encouraged by the words the speaking brother? Then it was "opened up for discussion," and everything fell apart—someone suggested an alternative view, people got defensive, tones of voice hardened, and soon the discussion became an argument. You left wondering why you even came. It's sadly amazing that just a few harsh negative ones can destroy hundreds of positive and uplifting words.

There are at least two goals we hope to accomplish with this article. Firstly, how can we avoid being the one who says the negative comment? Secondly, how can we avoid the harmful effects when we receive critical or pessimistic words?

There are several examples in the Bible where people were deeply affected—emotionally, spiritually, or even physically—by the negative words of others. Here are a couple of notable ones:

Job (Job 19:2-3). *"How long will you torment my soul, and break me in pieces with words? These ten times you have reproached me; You are not ashamed that you have wronged me."*

Job's friends accused him of sin and blamed him for his suffering instead of offering comfort, which only deepened his despair. Initially they just sat with him in silence—"So they sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him,



for they saw that his grief was very great.” (Job 2:13). They would have been better off never opening their mouths.

The Israelites and the Ten Spies (Numbers 13:31-33). *“But the men who had gone up with him said, ‘We are not able to go up against the people, for they*

‘to build a home;’ to make a safe space for someone by comforting them with your words.

‘A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.’ (Proverbs 15:4). The Hebrew word translated “perverseness” means distortion, i.e., figuratively, viciousness.

Do our words bring healing and a cure to the situation, or do we distort the facts and twist words, resulting in a vicious cycle of negativity and distress? The choice is ours to make.

are stronger than we’...And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land.”

When Moses later recounted this event, he said, *“Our brethren have discouraged our hearts, saying, ‘The people are greater and taller than we.’”* The negative report from the ten spies caused widespread fear and discouragement, leading the Israelites to doubt God and refuse to enter the Promised Land. As a result, they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. Note that Caleb and Joshua’s positive report and encouragement to go up into the land, and that God would be with them, was swamped by the pessimism of the other spies.

How can we avoid being the one to say negative things? Certainly, the Scriptures are clear: *“Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.”* (Ephesians 4:29). The Greek word here translated “edification” literally means

In contrast, the word “wholesome” in Hebrew means curative, i.e., literally, a medicine—a tongue of healing. Do our words bring healing and a cure to the situation, or do we distort the facts and twist words, resulting in a vicious cycle of negativity and distress? The choice is ours to make. *“There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health.”* (Proverbs 12:18).

What can we do when the harsh words of others have crushed our spirit?

David was discouraged by the words of others, like his own son Absalom, and his trusted friend and counselor Ahithophel. He wrote about them: *“Who sharpen their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows—bitter words, that they may shoot in secret at the blameless.”* (Psalm 64:3-4). The only solution was to see the long view and trust in God. *“The righteous shall be glad in the LORD, and trust in Him. And all the upright in heart shall glory.”* (v.

10). God orchestrated a victory in David's life, just as He will in ours if we trust in His ways. When we allow Him to direct our paths, the voices of the naysayers won't sway us. His guidance and faithfulness will lead us through any challenge, just as He did for David. Let us anchor our hearts in His promises and move forward with unwavering faith, knowing His plans for us are always good.

Joseph is another one who the arrows of the wicked hit. His brothers mocked him and shot arrows at him when they called him the "dreamer" in Genesis 37:19. The Hebrew literally means "master of dreams." Jacob, their father, picked up on this idea while blessing Joseph. He said, *"The archers have bitterly grieved him, shot at him and hated him."* (Genesis 49:23). The Hebrew means "the masters of arrows." His brothers were experts in letting sharp and bitter words fly from their mouths. But Jacob also gave the key to Joseph's success: *"But his bow remained in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob."* (Genesis 49:24).

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. (Matthew 11:28–30).

Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him For the help of His countenance. (Psalm 42:5).

These verses acknowledge that discouragement is real and can happen to anyone, but also encourage perseverance and faith in God's strength.

When Barnabas wanted to include John Mark in the second missionary journey, *"Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work."*

These words of Paul may have been critical, but they were facts. However, *"the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another."* (Acts 15:38–39). We don't have a dialogue transcript, but there must have been some combative words. The word "contention" comes from a root that means to exasperate. Interesting that the same word is used in Hebrews 10:24, translated provoke. *"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works."* (KJV).

We also don't know what Barnabas said to John Mark, but he did take him to Cyprus and must have encouraged him. We know "Barnabas" was his nickname because he was known as the *"Son of Consolation or Encouragement"* (see Acts 4:36). Whatever the case, it worked! Paul later acknowledged that John Mark had been worth the second chance, and he wrote, *"Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry."* (2 Timothy 4:11).

Be the Barnabas to John Mark after the words of Paul. And be John Mark, not discouraged by Paul, but encouraged by Barnabas's loving and faithful words and ministrations. *"Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due*

season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.” (Galatians 6:9).

These examples demonstrate the necessity—at times—for constructive criticism. *“Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.” (Proverbs 27:6).* There was another time Paul had to use strong

more Christ-like in our actions and attitudes.

As we reflect on the profound impact of our words, let us strive to be instruments of encouragement rather than agents of discouragement. The Bible calls us to build each other up, speak words of life and hope, and

Let us strive to be instruments of encouragement rather than agents of discouragement. The Bible calls us to build each other up, speak words of life and hope, and embody Christ's love and compassion.

words, when the hypocrisy of the Judaizers swayed Peter. Paul had to publicly *“withstood him to his face,”* and strongly rebuke him (Galatians 2:11-16 NIV). Jesus also told Peter to *“Get thee behind me Satan!”* (Matthew 16:23). Yet these reprimands were essential for Peter's character development. While he may have been discouraged and hurt initially, he grew in faith because of the admonishment and felt no ill will towards his Lord or fellow disciples.

When delivered with love and care, constructive criticism is a powerful tool for growth and improvement. Proverbs 27:17 says, *“As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend,”* highlighting the value of constructive feedback in refining our character. Ephesians 4:15 encourages us to be *“speaking the truth in love,”* reminding us that positive, loving criticism can help us grow and become

embody Christ's love and compassion. In a world where negativity can so easily take root, let us choose to be voices of positivity and support. By lifting each other up, we honor God's teachings and create a community that thrives on mutual respect and kindness. Let us be mindful of the power of our words and commit to using them to inspire and edify those around us.

Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. (James 3:10).

Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one. (Colossians 4:6).

Chris Sales,
Collingwood Ecclesia, ON

1 Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from the NKJV.



ENCOURAGING THE FAINTHEARTED

A REFLECTION ON 1 THESSALONIANS 5:14

By Rob Webb

IN *Unger's Bible Handbook*, Merrill F. Unger makes the following comments: "Responsibilities include comforting the fainthearted or discouraged (*oligopsuchos*), literally 'little souled,' supporting or exercising zealous care for the weak, the infirm, and those deficient in mental, moral or spiritual strength." Interestingly, this word, fainthearted, is only used once in the New Testament—here by Paul. It speaks to a responsibility every

believer has to care for and comfort the underprivileged around us. Let us consider this.

In the hustle and bustle of our daily lives, it is easy to overlook those who are struggling. The fainthearted, those who are timid or discouraged, often suffer in silence. The noise of the world drowns out their voices. Yet the Bible calls us to a different standard. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 admonishes us to "*Encourage the fainthearted, help*

the weak, be patient with everyone." (NASB).¹ This profound verse reminds us that our compassion and support play a crucial role in lifting up those who are weary.

The Apostle Paul penned the letter to the Thessalonians to commend them for their faith and to provide guidance on living a life pleasing to God. Chapter 5 of this epistle deals with various aspects of Christian conduct, emphasizing the importance of community and mutual support. Verse 14, in particular, highlights the need to recognize and respond to the ecclesial body's varied emotional and spiritual needs.

The term "fainthearted" refers to individuals who are discouraged or demoralized. These people might be facing personal trials, health issues, or crises of faith. They might feel overwhelmed by life's challenges and desperately need encouragement. Understanding the fainthearted means recognizing their struggles and offering a compassionate response. Many are overcome with addictions and the consequences of life choices. Some are born with limited or reduced mental capacity. The circumstances leading to this condition are not ours to judge, but the apostle clearly assigns their care and encouragement (but maybe not our enablement) to those of us who are stronger.

Words and actions can hold immense power. A kind word or a gentle reassurance can make a significant difference in the life of someone who is struggling. Encouraging the fainthearted involves speaking

through their situations. We can give this help by:

- **Personal Conversations:** Taking the time to listen and respond with empathy and kindness.
- **Written Notes:** Sending a heartfelt message or letter that offers hope and encouragement.
- **Public Affirmation:** Recognizing their efforts and strengths in front of others, which can boost their confidence.

While words are powerful, actions often speak louder. Demonstrating love and support through tangible actions can profoundly uplift the fainthearted. Consider:

- **Offering Practical Help:** Assisting with daily tasks, running errands, or providing meals.
- **Spending Quality Time:** Being present and available to share their joys and sorrows.
- **Praying Together:** Joining in prayer can provide spiritual comfort and a sense of community.

Paul's exhortation to *"be patient with everyone"* is crucial when encouraging the fainthearted. Patience allows us to walk alongside others without judgment or frustration, which can easily fester within us as we see the same mistakes and actions repeated. It acknowledges that healing and recovery require time and gentle support. Demonstrating patience means:

- **Listening Without Interrupting:** Allowing them to express their feelings without rushing to provide solutions.
- **Respecting Their Pace:** Understanding that progress may

be slow and being okay with small steps forward.

- Remaining Consistent: Continuing to offer support even when it feels challenging or unrewarding.

Encouragement thrives in a community environment. This effect is why the Father has chosen this method for all of us. The strong, supporting ecclesial environment is designed for all community members. A supportive community creates a safe space where the fainthearted can find refuge and strength, and this is a fundamental concept for arranging boards to consider in planning and working to guide an ecclesia. Building such an ecclesial community involves:

- Creating a Culture of Encouragement: Promoting an atmosphere where positive reinforcement and support are commonplace.
- Fostering Open Communication: Encouraging open and honest dialogue about struggles and triumphs, and applying Scriptural principles and caring attitudes to build up rather than take down individuals.
- Modeling Encouragement: Leaders and members alike demonstrate encouraging behavior and attitudes.

Encouraging the fainthearted is not just a directive but a reflection of Christ's love. Jesus himself demonstrated compassion and encouragement throughout His ministry.

In Mark 5, Jesus healed a man with many demons. The fainthearted around us may be afflicted with many “demons,” addictions, or reduced abilities. Our compassion should be

like that of the Lord, who stopped what he was doing and took the time to assist, and because he could, restore man to a right mind. These are not easy solutions for us, especially if we do not have the training to deal with these situations.

There are other examples we can also learn from. John 5:2–9 records the healing at the pool of Bethesda. In verses 7–9, we read, *“The sick man answered Him, ‘Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk.’ And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked.”*

We do not possess the Lord's healing power, but we could assist. We could be the person to sit with the impotent man and help him into the waters for healing. The principle of caring comes out loud and clear. We can provide transportation, we can sit and listen and console. We can furnish the necessities of life and pass along encouragement to those who are falling by the wayside, regardless of what caused them to fall.

Following Christ's example, we embody Christian love and become instruments of God's grace. Reflecting on our own lives, we should ask ourselves:

- How can I better recognize those who are fainthearted around me?
- What steps can I take to offer meaningful encouragement?
- Am I patient and empathetic in my interactions with others?

Peter also gives us a powerful example: in Acts 3, as Peter and John approached the temple for prayer at the ninth hour (approximately 3 pm), they

Encouraging the fainthearted is a powerful act of love and service.
It requires us to be attentive, compassionate, and patient.

encountered the lame man. The man, seeing them, asked for alms. However, Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, directed his attention to the man and, rather than giving him money, offered something far greater. *"Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."* (Acts 3:6). This bold declaration underscored Peter's faith in the power of Jesus' name and his belief in the miraculous.

Peter took the man by the right hand and helped him up. Instantly, the man's feet and ankles were strengthened. He stood, walked, and entered the temple with Peter and John, leaping and praising God. This remarkable transformation astounded the onlookers and served as a powerful testimony to the divine authority of Jesus Christ working through His apostles. This miraculous healing is rich with lessons that are as relevant today as they were two millennia ago.

Peter's healing of the lame man is a profound example of faith in action. Peter believed wholeheartedly in the power of Jesus' name and did not hesitate to invoke that power. His example teaches us that faith is not passive; it requires us to act boldly and trust in the divine power at work within us. Though we cannot do miracles, we can provide comfort and

(more importantly) share the Truth and its saving power to those who are fainthearted.

While the lame man sought monetary help, Peter gave him something far more valuable—healing and wholeness. Today, many in unprivileged countries seek silver and gold from those who appear to have it. Giving particularly to brethren and sisters in far-off countries should always be done through the existing support organizations to avoid local issues and jealousy and meet actual needs. The example of Peter shows us that true generosity goes beyond material gifts. It calls us to give of ourselves in ways that can bring profound and lasting change to others' lives.

Encouraging the fainthearted is a powerful act of love and service. It requires us to be attentive, compassionate, and patient. Through words and actions, we can provide the support needed to lift up the struggling ones. By fostering a community of encouragement, we obey the Biblical commands and create an environment where everyone can thrive. Let us commit to being sources of encouragement, reflecting the love of Christ to all we encounter.

Rob Webb,
Austin-Leander Ecclesia, TX

1 Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from the NKJV.



ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER THROUGH MUSIC

By Chantel Fulmer

AS someone who has had the privilege of working on the choral program at the Eastern Christadelphian Bible School for a few years now, I've seen firsthand how music can touch hearts and encourage both singers and listeners alike.

Music has a unique ability to lift our spirits and bring people together in a way few other things can—maybe even more so than the spoken word. Throughout history, it has been a source of comfort and encouragement, providing strength in moments of despair as well as joy in times of celebration. Scripture is filled with examples of music being used to inspire, heal and edify.

From David's soothing harp to the angels singing about Christ in Revelation, throughout Scripture, music is not just a form of expression, but a gift meant to uplift and connect us with one another and with God. It is even something Christ participated in (Mark 14:26) and will do again after he returns to set up the Kingdom.

who write and produce such wonderful music designed to inspire and uplift us, no matter the situations in which we find ourselves. Not only will music and singing be involved in the coming Kingdom, we are told to do the same now!

In addition to providing a communal aspect to our services and fellowship, music helps our brains pay attention. Science suggests that we all learn differently (visually, kinesthetically, auditorily, etc.). Scripture states this as well. Romans 12 outlines that we are one body, but all have different functions. We absorb information differently, and music is how some people learn or feel more connected to God. Music has a way of helping our brains recall information in a way that rote memorization cannot match. I am still able to bring to mind songs I learned as a child and during CYC because they impacted me so much. Not everyone will feel the emotional impacts of music the same way, just like we don't all learn in the same way.

Music has a unique ability to lift our spirits and bring people together in a way few other things can—maybe even more so than the spoken word.

Romans 15:9 quotes the psalmist who writes that the Messiah will *"sing praises."* In Colossians 3:16, Paul encourages them (and us) to *"let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."* I am so thankful to those in our community

However, our Heavenly Father knows this and has provided an atmosphere that can include and encourage all of us. Interspersing music into our services and times of fellowship provides the opportunity to create an emotional and spiritual response within the people involved. It helps us connect with God on a deeper level and reinforces the message in a

memorable way. Without it, our times together would feel less engaging and less inspiring.

It makes me sad to think what our Memorial Services or Bible Schools would be like if we removed music/singing. I am reminded of the captives in Babylon who refused to sing the LORD's song in a strange land. The lack of music/singing shows how deep their sorrow was and how strongly the music related to their identity and worship (Psalm 137).

Music can soothe our spirits just as David's harp soothed Saul, and it can uplift and inspire us as well. I recall attending the Manitoulin Youth Conference as a teenager and singing around the campfire at night—it made me feel connected to those around me. We were there for the same unified purpose to sing praise and glorify our God. One of my favorite songs at that time was Revelation 4 from the *Recounting His Praise* album (by the Handsworth Christadelphians). It was easy to remember, quite fun to sing, and had a simple yet impactful message. As I looked around the campfire, I saw the largest smile on every person's face as they sang: "*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.*" (Revelation 4:8).

Music can create many different moods. We can use it to bring our minds to a place of reverence to prepare us for prayer, meditation or the Memorial Table. We use it to encourage others and express joy about the promise of hope we have been given. The hymns in our current Christadelphian Hymn Book (2002) even show us this. Many of them address issues we face on

our walk to the Kingdom—things we worry about, struggle with (lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh and the pride of life) and the need to remove them from our lives. We live in an imperfect world and experience sorrow, sadness, grief and many other unpleasant emotions. But without these, we would not know the extent of the joy we are in store for when Christ returns and sets up the Kingdom. Often, a beautiful dichotomy is present in our hymns' lyrics that present our struggles and hopes side by side. Take, for example, hymn 378, verse 2:

Dost thou weep, thy foes oppressing,
Are thine enemies too strong?
Hast thou doubts and fears distressing,
That thy Saviour waits so long?
Soon by Him from all set free,
Thou shalt sing of victory.

This hymn speaks of difficult things; however, the words also point us toward the hope and joy we have in the Truth right now and what we will have when our Lord returns!

Music has taken on a whole new meaning for me since being asked to lead the choral program at the Bible School my family attends each year. I'm sure many can attest to the fact that Bible School in and of itself is a reset for our busy lives. It is a refuge where we can unite with like-minded believers and set aside the things of this world (Hebrews 12:1). In an age where technology grabs our attention at every turn, we desperately need a reset. It is also interesting to note that music can be that reset. When I need to finish a task that I do not look forward to, I



try to make it fun by putting on some music with encouraging lyrics. When I'm feeling down and need to know I am not alone on this walk of faith and God is with me, I put on some music. The choral program helps to further this idea of a reset for me. I love that the final evening program of our Bible School is the choral performance because it bolsters my faith before embarking on another year ahead as we await our Lord's return.

The main goal when preparing a new choral program is to provide an evening of worship for everyone present. When choosing music, the words must always be the first consideration. The words are our message, and the music

either enhances or detracts from that message. The goal is always to select music that enhances the words.

Sometimes, there is a story behind a particular song. If so, I take the opportunity to share that story during our choral rehearsals. When singers better understand the message conveyed in the words, it allows them to sing with a greater depth of meaning. The whole choral program is a wonderfully collaborative process for which I am so grateful! It has sparked conversations with brothers and sisters I probably never would have had otherwise. Although I lead the program, we are all united in our efforts to praise our Heavenly

Father. We can come before Him with boldness (Hebrews 4:16), praise Him confidently, and feel enveloped in His mercy.

Not everyone believes they can sing, but everyone definitely has a voice worth sharing! When I ask for volunteers to join the choral program, I'm not looking for technical or accomplished singers/musicians. Some people are hesitant to join, but it's worth remembering that the choral program is about coming together to "*Make a joyful noise unto the LORD.*" (Psalm 100:1). Some people have told me that they would love to be involved but that they are not good singers. This indicates that they want to be involved but just need a boost of confidence that will help them out. It inspires me when they are timid yet still choose to join us for the practices and performance. I watch them blossom in their confidence throughout the week and their participation in singing praises to our God. The more of us who participate in a common goal, the easier that goal is to reach!

There have been performances in the past (and I'm sure there will be more in the future) where something went wrong. Sometimes microphones don't work, or they work too well in picking up the piano and thus drown out the singers' volume. Mistakes are not failures; they are stepping stones to improvement. Our efforts in our spiritual walk are far more important than perfect outcomes. God makes it clear to us in His Scripture time and again that a heart and mind in the right place is pleasing to Him.

On the final evening of Bible School, the performance is the culmination of the program selections and the many

practices that have occurred over the week. Every year, it amazes me how God always makes the performance feel like a small vision of the Kingdom. It is a privilege to lead a group of dedicated brothers and sisters who are using their voices to encourage those listening that we have a **hope** to look forward to. This junction is where all the preparation comes together.

For those who lead the children's program, your efforts are priceless. Every single person in the audience can't help but smile as they see the hope of our community in each of those little ones. They put **all** they have into that performance and are often still singing the songs to themselves months later.

At its core, a choral program is about encouragement—inviting people to use their voices to inspire, bring hope and praise our Heavenly Father. Through music, we have the unique ability to create a setting where both singers and listeners can experience a profound connection with God. Whether you are a seasoned musician or someone hesitant to sing, I encourage you to know that your voice matters. Use what God has given you to help touch hearts, share your faith and praise God. You never know how your voice, talent or leadership might be the encouragement someone else needs: "*O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.*" (Psalm 95:1).

*Chantel Fulmer,
Granite State Ecclesia, NH*



SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

By Nigel Small

THERE is no doubt; the world has lost its way. The many atrocities we see happening in every corner of God's green earth have become an overwhelming burden to the human mind, and humankind is desperately seeking a way of escape.

Using their wisdom and knowledge, people continue to explore the limits of their own minds to devise solutions to these desperate times, but sadly, all

measures implemented and realized have proved futile, resulting in a society that is moving further away from the principles of Biblical truth. Every thought and imagination of his heart grows more and more evil each day.

The writings of the prophet Jeremiah highlight that the state of our world today comes as no surprise because of our very nature inherited from the Adamic man whom God first created.

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9).

Adam was the very foundation of God’s creation, but he chose to follow his own path, rather than that which Yahweh, his heavenly Father, had designed for him.

Additionally, the writer of the Book of Proverbs wrote: *“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” (Proverbs 14:12).*

is translated as “inner man; or mind; or understanding.” In other words, Jeremiah is telling us that humans’ inner mind, better known as their **heart, conscience, or understanding**, is deceptive, disingenuous, and untruthful. It is self-centered and self-pleasing, seeking pleasure and engaging itself only in those things that satisfy its lusts.

This is the mindset of over 8 billion people on earth today, so is it difficult

He has provided to every person who seeks Him out in spirit and in truth, a blueprint in His Word of truth as the only guide through which reconciliation can be accomplished.

The way of death was chosen by Adam, the very first man God had created. All humans, therefore, born after Adam have projected similar thoughts of selfishness and self-centeredness. Every generation since has grown more and more wicked right up to this day.

In fact, it was only a few generations after the creation of man, the Scriptures tell us, that *“GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.” (Genesis 6:5-6).*

This passage tells us it was the **heart of man** that strayed; and subsequently, the many actions that followed, and all the evil things happening around us daily are a direct result of a heart estranged from God.

The Hebrew word for heart is **leb**, which

then to comprehend why our world has lost its way from God? Certainly not.

Therefore, a reconciliatory journey back to God, the creator and sustainer of our lives, and from whom we strayed at the very beginning of his creation, is the only pathway to a new day, a new dawn, a new life. We must not despair. Our heavenly Father, in His infinite wisdom and mercy, has offered mortals a way back. He has provided to every person who seeks Him out in spirit and in truth, a blueprint in His Word of truth as the only guide through which reconciliation can be accomplished. That blueprint is that reconciliation can only come through his only begotten son, Jesus Christ.

We, brothers and sisters, as those who have the privilege of sharing in this journey that leads to reconciliation in God’s kingdom, must strive to extend this gospel message to men and women everywhere because the power of this

message reshapes hearts, renews minds, and is an absolute necessity for human beings everywhere.

The Lord Jesus Christ gave this urgent message to the men and women of his day, and subsequently to us living in these very difficult times where the works of the flesh are so evident, and the Adamic man so present. Jesus said: *“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”* (Mark. 16:15–16).

Either salvation or damnation are direct consequences of belief, or disbelief in the gospel message (which are the things concerning the Kingdom of God, and of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ). These fates demonstrate an overwhelming truth, and as Christians and Christadelphians, we have a God-given responsibility to share this message. But how do we do

that? Surely by wise instruction, but more importantly, by our very actions. Our actions should reflect the purpose of our heavenly Father, whose will is that none should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9).

Life can be exhausting, arduous and stressful, even for believers. Like everyone else, we can be overcome by the brutal circumstances of daily events—events and trials that sometimes leave us beaten in our bodies and distressed in our spirits. There are times when we can hardly see one step ahead along the pathway that leads back to God’s divine Kingdom. **Our faith, conviction and trust in our God** must be the force we courageously embrace daily as we fight the good fight that enables us to overcome.

We cannot, and must not feel sufficient in ourselves, having the Truth, and thus be content to live out that truth only for



ourselves; but instead we must extend God's truth to others, in our thoughts, in our words and our actions, in the hope we might impact others in this lost and dying world—that they too might have an opportunity to be a part of God's divine Kingdom.

We must become ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20) of God's divine message. His saving truth must manifest itself in everything we do, so that His divine plan and purpose for which He created the world from the very foundations thereof, might be seen.

We cannot allow Adam's failure to overcome us and govern our actions and attitudes. Neither can we allow the wisdom of men to impact our behavior towards God, for this will surely jeopardize our own salvation, and that of the many others we meet (1 Timothy 1:18–19; 2 Timothy 2:18–19).

We are reminded by the Apostle Paul: *“For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. Therefore let no man glory in men.”* (1 Corinthians 3: 19–21).

God's intent for this world was clear from the very beginning of His creation. He wanted to establish His Kingdom on this earth.

Let us not, therefore, allow the adversary, the character of this world which is at enmity with God, to manifest itself in us, for we have been bought with a price much more precious than that of silver and gold.

We have been bought with the precious blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave his life for a ransom to this world, even while we were

undeserving of it, so we might have life, and more abundantly. By this, we, who have chosen to follow him, can come before God's presence with a sense of boldness (Hebrews 4:15–16) knowing we certainly have no righteousness of our own. Knowing that had it not been for Christ, all humanity would also be lost. We must count this opportunity to know God and Christ in a personal way, a true privilege.

The Apostle Paul wrote: *“For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”* (Romans 5:7–8).

Like those around us, we were once alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and were in bondage, slaves to sin and death; we were without God and Christ. We were unholy, unthankful, unworthy, but Christ laid down his life for us so now we can build a right and proper relationship with him and his father. Through him we can know the Almighty Creator, the only true God, who resides in the highest of heavens. Furthermore, we can share in the glorious hope of eternal life and enjoy the beauty the world was meant to have, from the very foundations thereof.

When the enemies of despair, apathy, depression, and doubt surround us, let us remember ours is a long-term investment in spiritual things, not the carnal and sensual things that are transitory and temporary. The writer to the Hebrews put it this way: *“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right*

hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” (Hebrews 12:2–3).

So, what about those who continue to live in this lost and dying world?

that couldn't be quenched. Social circles would become small, friends shallow, life would become frivolous and when we died, that would be our last conscious moment. We would return to the dust and eventually be forgotten as though we never existed.

[L]et us encourage those around us, that the living hope in Christ Jesus, which we have embraced, is being offered to them as well, because the Father's will is that none should perish, but that all should come to repentance...

Should we feel any better than them, and thereby be content to live our own lives in Christ, without any care for them?

What if Christ, or the person we met, and through whom we are privileged today to know God and His son, did not share God's saving truth with us? We would no doubt be in the same class as the many people of the world that the apostle Paul describes in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, *“others which have no hope.”* Paul described us as once this way:

At that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel; strangers from the covenant of promise; having no hope, and without God in the world. But now, in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. (Ephesians 2:12-13).

By the grace of God, we have come to know that there is no purpose without Christ in this life. Like the rest of the world, we would have daily cravings

That fate could have been ours were it not for the man Christ Jesus. As Peter writes: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”* (1 Peter 1:3).

Let us therefore come boldly before his throne of grace, with a true heart, and in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from evil consciences, and our bodies washed with pure water, let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering. And let us encourage those around us, that the living hope in Christ Jesus, which we have embraced, is being offered to them as well, because the Father's will is that none should perish, but that all should come to repentance. *“Fear not,”* Jesus tells all those who will listen, *“it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”* (Luke 12:32).

Nigel Small,
Marlton Ecclesia, NJ



JUST DO IT

By Chris Clark

I think we would all recognize the Nike ad slogan, “**Just do it.**” This slogan was first coined in 1988 and is the second-longest-running slogan in ad history, next only to that of De Beers jewelry, “Diamonds are forever.” The origin of this ad has a somewhat dark beginning. Dan Wieden, the founder of the Wieden Kennedy ad agency, came up with the idea for the slogan from the last words of the late Gary Gilmore, a convicted murderer. Gary Gilmore's last words in 1977, while facing a firing

squad, were “Let's do it.” Some ten years later, in 1988, these last words of Gary Gilmore inspired Dan to coin the slogan “**Just do it.**”

Interestingly enough, the Gospel of John offers us the same message time and time again—“**Just do it,**” and you will see and believe, “and believing, you will have life in his name.”

Consider the message “**just do it**” at the wedding in Cana in John 2. In the story, the wedding runs out of wine and Mary, the Lord's mother, turns to

him for help. John 2:3–5 reads, *“And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him ‘They have no wine’. Jesus saith unto her ‘Woman, what have I to do with thee mine hour is not yet come?’ His mother saith unto the servants, ‘Whatsoever he saith unto you do it.’”* In other words “Don’t worry about what he tells you, **‘Just do it.’**”

The Old Testament Jewish holiday of *Shavuot* marks the giving of the Torah upon Mount Sinai, commemorating God’s marriage of His word with His people. This Jewish holiday is celebrated on the sixth day of the third month, called *Sivan*. The New Testament Day of Pentecost falls on this same day, the sixth day, marking the giving of the Holy Spirit to the Lord’s disciples. Fifty days following the Passover brings us to Pentecost, so that *“The truth shall make you free.”* (John 8:32). The Gospel of John likewise takes us on a journey to transform us from the teaching of God’s Word (the Torah), given on the sixth day of the third month to the spirit of understanding: a seven-week journey. A journey from our slavery in Egypt (sin), to Mount Sinai and the giving of the Torah (*Shavuot*), to the liberty of understanding (Pentecost), a journey from servants to friends. Jesus tells them just before his crucifixion, *“Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.”* (John 15:14–15).

“Just do it,” Jesus is telling them. “If you will only do whatsoever I command you, you will come to understand that what I do, I do as a friend. You’ve just got to do it!”

The Gospel of John marries the old covenant cleansing waters of John the Baptist to the fruit of the vine of a new covenant in Jesus Christ, written upon the tablets of our hearts. It’s the transformation from *Shavuot* to Pentecost. If you will only just do whatsoever he saith unto you. Simple enough advice, but as we will see in the living example of Peter, it is not always easy advice to follow.

In Luke 5, Jesus tells Simon, by the Sea of Galilee, to launch into the deep and let down his nets. “Just do it,” Jesus is saying, “and you will see and believe.” After the miraculous catch, Jesus tells Peter and the others, in essence, “Now leave all these worldly gains behind you and follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Just as Elisha had to leave everything behind him to follow Elijah, Jesus is trying to take Peter and the apostles on a journey to follow him—from *Shavuot* to Pentecost to Jubilee, so they may understand him, follow him and reveal him to the world, as a friend.

By the time we get to the end of John 21, we find Peter’s conversion, like ours, his journey like our journey, LORD willing—from a servant to a friend who understands what his master is doing. From *Shavuot* (the teaching of the Word) to Pentecost (the Holy Spirit of understanding), to Jubilee (peace in Christ Jesus); so we, like him, might become a new creature, a true friend. He is calling us to leave the former world behind, and become part of the new creation, the new heavens, the new earth, both now and forever.

In John 21, Peter’s conversion is not without some pit stops and detours. Peter is again back by the Sea of Galilee

(called in John 21 the Sea of Tiberias), where it all began (Luke 5), where Peter, Andrew, John, and James first started their journey. It is here where Jesus first gave the Sermon on the Mount; here where he fed both the 5000 and the 4000, calmed the sea, walked on water, and brought them safely and instantaneously to shore when they willingly welcomed him into the boat (John 6:20-21). He did all these signs to declare the Father's name unto them—foreshadowing the transfer of his mantle of authority and responsibility, typifying this new creation they were to continue to advance in his name; and ushering in a new heaven and a new earth; which began with our Lord's resurrection and ascension.

But they understood none of these signs. During the Lord's ministry on earth, they refused to believe the Messiah would die, let alone think and understand the significance of their

Lord's physical resurrection. Even after these events, they still struggled with understanding and their role in the Lord's plan. We find Peter in John 21 dejected by his apparent inability to "just do it." Peter is confused and uncertain of his future. Embarrassed by his failures, he leaves all behind, returning to his former occupation, empty-handed, with nothing to show for having left all to follow Jesus. As we all know, dejection, confusion, and uncertainty are the enemy's tools, which sift us to weaken our resolve to continue the journey of transformation. Our Lord's appearance again by Lake Tiberius is a stark reminder for Peter and the rest of them of where this journey had begun.

"Children," the Lord said, *"do you have any fish?"* (v. 5 ESV).

"Have you caught anything?" Jesus is saying. Have your doubts and fears gotten you anywhere? No? Then once



again, just do it. “Cast your net upon the water once again and you will see and believe that it is I, and believing, you will have life in my name.”

As Jesus once again provides for them and feeds them by the sea, he then brings Peter back to his calling to follow him, appealing to the one thing Peter had not lost: his love for Jesus. After asking Peter three times, “*Lovest thou me?*” the Lord responded to Peter’s affirmations with a command: “*Feed my sheep*” (vv. 15–17)! In other words, **just do it!**

Perhaps Peter’s failures along this journey, like our failures along our journey, were purposely woven into his tapestry, as God’s way to prepare him to be a good fisher of men and a good, sympathetic shepherd as well. Peter, you must try again. **Just do it.** Go where I send you. Return to the place of your three denials, your three failures. Try again, return to Jerusalem, see my ascension, receive my mantle, the Holy Spirit. Go where I send you and you will see and understand me as friends understand one another. Abraham so understood God as a friend that he could offer up Isaac, his beloved son. Jonathan so understood David as a friend that he forsook all his earthly inheritance to support him. “Follow me, go where I send you, feed my sheep, complete your journey, and you will understand that I am not simply a hard, austere taskmaster, reaping where I have not first sown. I am a friend, seeking only your best and eternal interest.”

Perhaps, brothers and sisters, this is why a Biblical journey takes us from

the Passover offering to both *Shavuot* and Pentecost, to Jubilee. From the teachings of the words of the Master to the understanding of these teachings, as the words of a friend, written upon the tablets of our hearts, as the mediator of a new covenant.

Without doubt, there will be times along our journey when we face dejection, by our seeming inability to follow him to the cross. There will be times of confusion about why this is happening to you now. There will be times of uncertainty, asking how many times can I fail and yet keep trying? Peter, the sympathetic shepherd, would write to us of this, saying, “*Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.*” (1 Peter 4:12).

In these times, when perhaps all that remains of our understanding is our love for our Lord Jesus; when all we have to cling onto is this, we must “**just do it**,” or as Mary put it, just do “*whatsoever he saith unto you.*” Brothers and sisters, consider your ways, mark the beginning of every day with self-examination. Acknowledge your failures and receive healing for your sins and exoneration to take up your cross and try again. Do this as Jesus says, “*In remembrance of me.*” **Just do it.**

Chris Clark,
Stoughton Ecclesia, MA

A full-page background image of a dense forest. Sunlight filters through the green leaves of tall trees, creating a bright, dappled light effect. The forest floor is covered in green undergrowth and fallen logs.

S U M M A R Y

By Peter Bilello

UNDoubtedly, mutual and continuous encouragement of one another is essential to our spiritual health and well-being. Without encouraging words, deeds and actions, our spiritual life will be one of greater difficulty and challenge. Fortunately, such encouragement can be found all around us—helping us, strengthening us, supporting our spiritual growth, and allowing us to apply Biblical principles in our daily lives. As described by the articles in this special issue, encouragement emphasizes the importance of community (i.e., being with like-minded individuals), the power of words, the value of music, and the need for a global perspective on faith. Let us not forget the importance of faith, hope, and love in navigating the challenges of life and preparing for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As illustrated by the wide variety of articles, support can come from multiple sources, including music and exhortations. Music, for example, can touch hearts and hearten both the singers and listeners alike. As instructed by Scripture, exhortations are to deliver words of comfort. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we are to provide encouragement one to another, and focus our attention on the fainthearted—not just to those within our community, but to all God's children.

Here are three key themes addressed in this special issue:

- **Spiritual Encouragement and Mindfulness:** This should focus on the importance of being mindful, appreciating the little things in life, and finding spiritual stimulus

in everyday moments. We should remember when we struggle to turn to Scripture for guidance, find solace through prayer, and recognize God's presence in creation and everyday human interaction. Finally, we should be mindful and appreciate God's creation while taking time to notice the acts of kindness and beauty we see all around us daily. All of this can encourage, if we only take a moment to notice.

- **Encouraging One Another in the Community:** The ecclesia, the community of God, is a spiritual construct designed to provide support. It is a place where we should seek to give and receive encouragement. According to Scripture, we are to “*stir up love and good works, not forsaking assembling together, and exhorting one another.*” Within the community, music plays a major role; so does sharing experiences, and mutual support is provided to strengthen faith and the bonds of Truth.
- **Biblical Reflection and Application:** This special issue also provides insight into select Biblical passages and stories, drawing lessons and applying them to our contemporary life. Themes of faith, hope, perseverance, and the return of Christ are all explored. Numerous Biblical examples illustrate overcoming challenges, finding strength in God's word, and living a life aligned with Christian principles. For example, David's reliance on God's Word during times of persecution, and the promise of a Messiah and the

importance of being prepared for Christ's return. These can all foster our faith.

By diving in more deeply, one can break these themes into the following seven main topics:

- **Encouragement and Support:** The importance of encouraging one another cannot be overemphasized, especially to the fainthearted and those going through difficult times. As those who need help and those who provide that assistance, we all must remember that our words can either build up or tear down. We must practice patience, compassion, and provide practical help and scriptural guidance throughout the community. This is our duty, for Christ and our Heavenly Father do the same for us.
- **Spiritual Growth and Mindfulness:** Encouragement isn't just something we should receive, but also something we should actively seek. Prayer, meditation, and studying the Bible can all inspire us. Additionally, we should be mindful of God's presence in everyday moments—God's creation is all around us and it too should uplift us. We should appreciate the beauty of creation, and find spiritual inspiration in all the "little things" (e.g., the fact that the sun always rises in the morning and always sets in the evening) God continues to bless us with.
- **Applying Biblical Principles:** The application of Scripture is clear and stimulating. Scriptures guide all important aspects of life, including relationships, priority, and service to others. Scripture motivates us to align our actions with our faith and to live lives that reflect Christ's love and compassion; let us remember that putting on the Fruit of the Spirit is a continuous effort.
- **Community and Fellowship:** We should not forget that assembling together is instructed in Scripture. So is supporting one another, and recognizing the global nature of the believers of Christ. Let us not forget that the time we spend together is crucial for us; attending the Memorial Service and Sunday School should be done in a regular rhythm—one that refreshes and refocuses us on spiritual matters of importance. While, in many ways, meeting virtually has been a blessing, nothing replaces physical human interaction. Additionally, we can take heart by visiting ecclesias near and far, engaging in mission work and supporting refugees. These are just a few things we can do to build up and receive encouragement.
- **Exhortation and Preaching:** Exhortations play an important role in our spiritual life. Fundamentally, they are meant to encourage. As a result, it is important to select an appropriate topic—one that can stimulate hope and comfort, and has a deeper meaning beyond a simple Bible class. Exhortations are to be profitable to both the speaker and the audience, addressing the challenges we face, such as financial concerns, job security, health issues, school-related stress, and bereavement. The goal is to

uplift and support one another. Additionally, our exhortations must prepare the congregation to memorialize Jesus when partaking of the emblems during the Memorial Service.

- **Music and Worship:** Music should also play a major and energizing role in our life. Music uplifts spirits, brings people together, and enhances worship. Music is not just a form of entertainment but a vital element of worship, fellowship, and spiritual growth. Scripture discusses the role of music and music's ability to help people learn and connect with God on a deeper level. Music isn't just to lift up our voices to our Heavenly Father, but also a practice that should provide direct reassurance to those who are singing. Choral programs, for example, are about coming together to make a joyful noise unto the LORD, and everyone has a voice worth sharing.
- **The Return of Christ:** Finally, we are reminded throughout Scripture of the promise of the Messiah—the good news of the Kingdom of God. The signs of the times, for example, particularly the return of the Jews to the land of Israel, are a demonstration of Christ's imminent return. These facts should encourage us and reassure us that God's Will will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. These assurances can carry us through any difficulties we might encounter as we patiently wait for our Lord's return, for there is no doubt that he

will return.

In essence, this special issue offers a multifaceted perspective on Christian living, emphasizing the importance of faith, hope, love, and active engagement in personal spiritual growth and community support. We hope and pray this special issue motivates readers to live intentionally, guided by Biblical principles, to be a source of encouragement and support to those around them. Furthermore, they suggest spending time together socially, keeping the Truth at the center, building one another up, and reinforcing our commitment to following the Lord. The importance of spending time together in fellowship cannot be overstated. Of faith, hope and love, we are taught the greatest of these is love. What could be more loving than to support others as we walk together towards the Kingdom? Finally, let us remember that encouragement is a mutual obligation. We are all asked to bear one another's burdens. Let's take instruction from our LORD God daily, and let us provide encouragement to all those around us. This will not only strengthen us, but it will strengthen others as well.

*Peter Bilello,
Special Issue Editor,
Ann Arbor Ecclesia, MI*

THE CHRISTADELPHIAN TIDINGS

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

is published monthly, except bimonthly in July-August, by The **Christadelphian Tidings**.

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

Christadelphian Tidings Publishing Committee: Alan Markwith (Chairman), Peter Bilello, Linda Beckerson, Nancy Brinkerhoff, Tej Chippada, Steve Davis, Jeff Gelineau, Jason Hensley, William Link, Shawn Moynihan and Jim Sullivan.

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

Subscriptions: The Tidings Magazine is provided **FREE** for any who would like to read it. The Magazine is available in PDF Format online at tidings.org. If you would like to order a printed subscription to **The Tidings** you may do so simply by making a donation to cover the printing costs. The suggested donation for printing and shipping to the US is **\$70.00**; (we ask for a minimum donation of \$50.00.) Foreign countries are higher, see www.tidings.org.

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

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

©2025, **Tidings Publishing Committee**. In the spirit of Christ ask for permission before reproducing any material. Contact us at editor@tidings.org

Scripture quotations marked (KJV) are from *The Authorized (King James) Version*. Rights in the Authorized Version in the United Kingdom are vested in the Crown. Reproduced by permission of the Crown's patentee, Cambridge University Press.

Scripture quotations marked (NKJV) are taken from the *New King James Version*®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com. The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from the *ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®)*, copyright© 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (RSV) are from the *Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, copyright © 1946, 1952, and 1971 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked (NRSV) are from the *New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition*. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, copyright ©1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NASB) are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*®, Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved. lockman.org

Scripture quotations marked (CSB) have been taken from the *Christian Standard Bible*®, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.



Chichewa

is spoken in Malawi, Zambia,
Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Botswana.

With over 27,000 Christadelphians in more than
650 ecclesias, this region has one of the largest
populations of brothers and sisters. *The High Calling* is
now available in Chichewa as well as
EIGHT other languages.

www.thehighcalling.net

To make a donation or to subscribe, visit us at

WWW.TIDINGS.ORG

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

If you would like to order a printed subscription to *The Tidings*, you may do so simply by making a donation to help cover the printing and mailing costs. The suggested donation is US\$70.00, and minimum donation is US\$35.00. (Check online for rates in other countries.) If you can afford to donate more, please do so in order to help out those that cannot afford the cost.

The Christadelphian Tidings of the Kingdom of God

First Class Postage paid at Simi Valley, CA

Send address corrections to:

The Christadelphian Tidings

567 Astorian Drive

Simi Valley, CA 93065-5941

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

