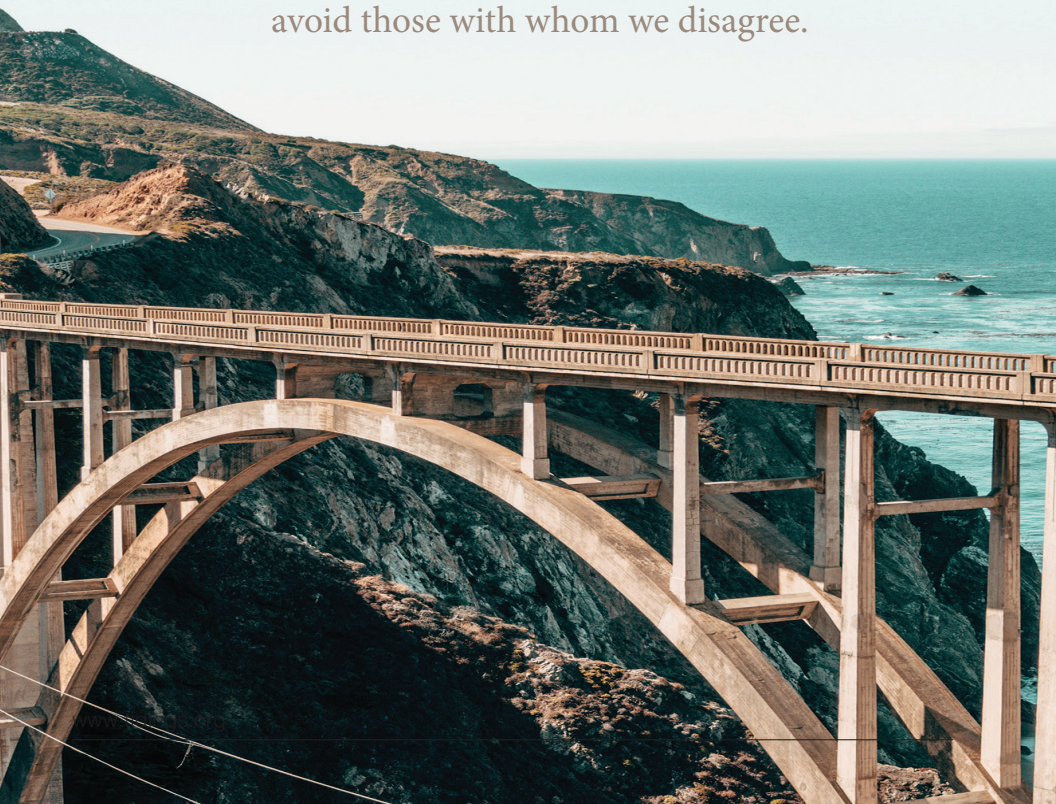


# TIDINGS

Volume 88, Number 8, September, 2025

## BUILDING BRIDGES

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avoid those with whom we disagree.



Building faith in the  
Christadelphian community.

# TIDINGS

Volume 88, Number 8 / September, 2025



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E D I T O R I A L

# BUILDING BRIDGES

**We must work to stay connected.**



A challenge we face in our increasingly polarized secular society is finding ways to build bridges that connect. Sir Isaac Newton wrote, “We build too many walls and not enough bridges.” It is extremely dangerous to erect walls against those we disagree with, rather than finding ways to merge for better understanding. Bridges were an essential development in history. When immovable obstacles separate two communities, both suffer, and the potential of sharing commerce and culture is not fully realized. Bridges facilitate larger communities, ones that are more robust and interdependent. Myths about those once separated are dispelled as trust and awareness are realized.

### Golden Gate Bridge Project

There was a perceived need for bridges to link the San Francisco Bay communities as far back as the 19th Century. The lack of a bridge impeded travel for San Franciscans. Communities like Oakland, San Jose, Marin, and Sonoma Counties suffered from the lack of safe and convenient passage. Traveling into and out of the city relied on ferry boats that shuttled workers, often in an angry seas. Tragic collisions occurred when boats collided in the dense fog. A bridge would eliminate over ninety miles round-trip for a Marin County resident. The need was clear.

In the 1920s, the San Francisco City Civil Engineer, M. M. O’Shaughnessy, decided to do something about the need. He designated a 420,000-acre watershed area that could be explicitly districted for constructing such a bridge. He contacted an experienced

bridge builder, Joseph B. Strauss, to design a bridge connecting San Francisco with Marin County. Mr. Strauss experienced significant political and environmental objections over the bridge’s design. Some in the affected communities thought it would be too expensive. Others felt the deep waters would make the bridge too risky and unsafe. Finally, a few communities argued that the changes likely resulting from the bridge might bring unwanted and detrimental consequences to their community and culture.

Mr. Strauss weathered these objections, collaborating with a team to design a proposed suspension bridge, with an estimated cost of \$27.1M. The final proposal wasn’t officially presented until 1930, at the peak of the Great Depression. The bridge that the US Army Corps of Engineers wouldn’t support, the bridge that had to rely on local funding during a time of great uncertainty, the bridge that “could not and should not be built,” was approved. Construction began three years later, and the bridge was completed in just over four years. Today, it stands as a monument to these men. A beautiful orange bridge that is the longest suspension bridge in the world. It transformed these communities and continues to serve motorists to this day. Marin and Sonoma Counties have since developed and become important to the Bay Area economy and tourism.

### Lessons for Our Community

The Golden Gate Bridge project is an interesting case study for our faith community. We must appreciate that disconnected communities can never reach their full potential. The change



required to build bridges is difficult, and we should never anticipate that bridge building will be a stress-free and easy pursuit. There will always be objections to change. Communities will have deep concerns about what connecting to other communities might bring. To undertake bridge building, we must, like Joseph Strauss, wholly focus on how this work will ultimately serve the greater good of our communities. It is not only about one community and one community's concerns. The vision must be compelling and one that we are willing to sacrifice for.

There is a tendency for the flesh to want to avoid those with whom we disagree. We can build thick walls to separate ourselves. It can lead to grossly inaccurate assessments about the other community because we don't really know them and don't feel we can trust them. We don't have vital dialogue to help us understand another opinion. Solomon wrote, *"Fools have no interest in understanding; they only want to air their own opinions."* (Proverbs 18:2 NLT).

### First Century Lessons

However, such stubbornness is not the lesson of the first-century believers. They were divided on several key doctrinal issues, though they all accepted the work of the Lord and his resurrection. Some argued that Gentile converts must keep the Law of Moses to be saved, including circumcision. The conference in Jerusalem only asked for Gentiles to jettison pagan practices. There were separations over who their teacher was and who baptized them. There were informal, yet powerful, segregations based on their nationality

and culture. These differences resulted in significant difficulties in emerging ecclesias. Paul often found that after he left an ecclesia, those with differing perspectives would infiltrate it, leading some to have their faith "shipwrecked."

It seems reasonable to assume that when Paul prayed three times for the *"thorn in the flesh"* to be removed, it was about those who were the source of much of the conflict, likely the party of the circumcision. The message was, *"My grace is sufficient for thee."* (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). Paul wanted to spare the ecclesias from the grief and disruption of those who taught differently on such matters. Wouldn't the ecclesia be better off without these annoying and destructive views?

### The Sufficiency of Grace

But with all of the variations of understanding in the first century, it was all clearly under the control of the Lord, and Paul would learn this. The Lord's grace and power would overcome the confusion and disagreements, even the destructive behavior of some. In less than ten years, the powerful Jewish influence was eliminated when Rome sacked Jerusalem. The need at the present was not to build walls, but to save as many as possible, even if they were not fully like-minded.

It is fascinating how Paul would realize the sufficiency of God's grace at a time of personal vulnerability. Alone in Rome, only two brothers ministered to him. In Colossians 4:10-11, we read that John Mark and Justus were the helpers. How ironic! It was because of John Mark's desertion in Pamphylia that Paul and Barnabas split, as recorded in Acts 15. Now John Mark

is present, assisting the Apostle when he is most in need. Who then is Justus? It turns out he is from the party of the circumcision! These men, whom many might have discarded years before, became Paul's "*fellowworkers*." Even when you don't think you need a bridge, it may be the Lord's will to bring help and encouragement from that unlikely direction.

What would have happened if Paul had burned the bridges between those men who had previously let him down, or had a different view of ecclesial requirements? These men were essential for Paul at a time of great need. Truly, the Lord's grace was sufficient. He was in control.

### **Our Need for More Bridges**

Why do we resist building and maintaining bridges? It is usually fear-based. We fear rejection. We fear criticism. We may have had past negative experiences and anticipate that things won't change. These

attitudes lead to isolation. Isolation leads to declining trust. Declining trust erects impenetrable walls. We gather "evidence" and concoct stories that reinforce our slanted perception of those on the other side of the bridge. A clear view of what God told Paul is missing in all of this: "*My grace is sufficient for thee*." Our Lord wants us to connect with other believers, despite differences. He is the one with all power and authority, not us. If we trust him, we will inevitably learn to trust one another.

Unity is not some abstract theological concept. It requires dogged determination by bridge builders and those who maintain the bridge. Unity is a Divine construct, not of human origin. All the metaphors used in Psalm 133 about unity are top to bottom. It is the oil that runs down Aaron's beard. It is the dew that descends on the mountains of Zion. God has designed unity for us. It is, as the psalmist wrote, "*good and pleasant*." (Psalm 133:1)



Differences do exist between communities. They have always existed. But conceding these obstacles as insurmountable and retreating inwardly is inconsistent with our Lord's intentions for the body. We must work to stay connected. It is critical to maintain the highways that lead to the bridges. This means that all communities must value the greater good of what the bridge can bring.

### **The Bridge Completed**

Returning to the Golden Gate Bridge story, it is relevant that the decision to proceed with the bridge was made at the beginning of the Great Depression. The bridge cost exceeded much of San Francisco's total property value. Surely, other investments were needed. Men were increasingly out of work, and families were at risk. Maybe they needed a bridge, but wouldn't it be better if they took care of the community?

Because of their foresight, the investment made in connecting communities has benefited citizens of the region for almost one hundred years. The cost of building was much lower in 1937 than it would ever be later on. Waiting also comes at a price. For us, it may be at the risk of our young people.


On May 28, 1937, men, women, and children could pay a quarter to walk across the new 1.7-mile bridge. The estimate is that more than 200,000 made the journey. It would change their lives, opening up new opportunities for them and their families. What a joyous occasion this must have been. Today, it serves as a landmark, a symbol of

beauty. But ultimately, what it did was bring people together. That's real beauty.

May we all, brothers and sisters, join hands as we walk across new bridges that connect our community. It requires a fundamental trust that the Lord is in control and that trust and love will ultimately overcome our differences. Our Lord will ensure that the body is cared for and nourished. Unity will improve our witness in this age of darkness. Most of all, it will glorify our God. What we will find is that we have always needed one another. The bridge helped to make this evident. It will stand as a landmark for years to come.

One way to realize the benefits of joining communities is for the two communities in North America to resolve that the longstanding separation is not serving either. It is now time to get on with forming a lasting bridge, and each community needs to show the love of Christ by taking initiative to make this happen. I dare say, some are already pursuing unity and are forming local bridges. May we now seize this opportunity to build a robust and lasting bridge, by the Lord's grace, to usher us into a better tomorrow. His grace is sufficient.

*Dave Jennings*



*One way to realize the benefits of joining communities is for the two communities in North America to resolve that the longstanding separation is not serving either.*

*It is now time to get on with forming a lasting bridge...*



# PSALMS FOR THE NIGHT SEASONS

By Nathan Badger

## GUILT AND SHAME

**G**UILT and shame are powerful emotions that can derail our sleep. They are profound forces that affect our mental and emotional well-being and our relationship with God and others. Have you ever lain awake and wrestled with intense shame or a sense of guilt from something you've said, thought, done, or left undone?

You are not alone! The Psalms show that these feelings were often at the core of David's troubled night seasons (Psalm 22:2; 16:7). David's experiences can help us: his turmoil can validate our own experiences, and he frequently offers healthy "night lights" (i.e. solutions) to work through these

challenges and restore sleep (Psalm 4:8).<sup>1</sup>

### David's Guilt and Shame

Psalm 69 identifies the guilt and shame that gnawed at David. Here he states, "*My sins are not hidden from You*" (v. 5) and "*I have borne reproach, shame has covered my face*" (v. 7).<sup>2</sup> The plight of his Psalm is a mix of personal guilt and shame.

David also uses the word "reproach." In Hebrew, this word describes similar feelings: disgrace, shame, rebuke, scorn, and defamation. He feels reproach and scorn from others (v. 9), reproach for his own weeping and

fasting (v. 10), and reproach, shame, and dishonor from his enemies (v. 19). David reveals that all this reproach has “*broken my heart*” and left him full of “*despair*” and void of “*comforters*” (v. 20 ESV). He felt like “*a stranger to my brothers, and an alien to my mother’s children.*” (v. 8). Beyond his close associates, he laments: “*Those who sit in the gate speak against me,*” and “*I am the song of drunkards.*” (vv. 11-12). How would we feel if we were the subject of drinking songs and being disowned by friends and family?

David’s battle with shame and guilt follows into Psalms 70 and 71. He wishes that the shame he feels could be shifted to those who hurt and shamed him (Psalm 70:2-3) so they are likewise “*confounded,*” “*reproached,*” and “*dishonoured*” (Psalm 71:13)—

words that express shame. He also prays that God would “*never let me be put to shame.*” (Psalm 71:1).

Together, these three psalms highlight the guilt David felt from his personal sins, and the shame he felt for his mistakes, from his enemies and their false accusations. These emotions created an urgency and despondency which is vividly captured in his pleas to God: “*I am in trouble; Hear me speedily!*” (Psalm 69:17, see also 70:5, 71:12).

**What are Guilt and Shame?**

Are guilt and shame the same thing? They are connected, but distinct emotions we feel in our brain and body. The following chart shows how they are used in God’s Word and how these meanings are congruent with our modern English:

GUILT		SHAME	
Bible Meaning: (Greek an Hebrew)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Faulty, guilty</li><li>• Morally wrong, did wrong</li><li>• To be indebted</li><li>• Under sentence, condemned for</li><li>• To be liable for</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Scorned, defamed, disgraced</li><li>• Confused, hurt, dishonored</li><li>• A subject of whispering, infamy</li><li>• To wound, insult, taunt, blush</li><li>• A reproach, ashamed</li><li>• Base, filthy</li></ul>	
English Meaning:			
I <b>have done</b> something bad.		I <b>am</b> a bad person (in the eyes of self or others.)	

Dr. Brene Brown is a researcher on shame and guilt and provides a helpful summary: “**Guilt** is holding something we’ve done or failed to do, up against our values [i.e., God’s values] and feeling discomfort. Whereas **shame**

is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and even unworthy of love, belonging, and connection, because of something we’ve experienced, done, or failed to do.”<sup>3</sup>

Both emotions are painful, but they have been given to us by God. Like any emotion, if we respond to them in a healthy way, they can be helpful. Can you think of instances when you have felt guilt or shame in your own life? How did you respond? Was your reaction healthy or unhealthy?

### Shame and The Shame Spiral

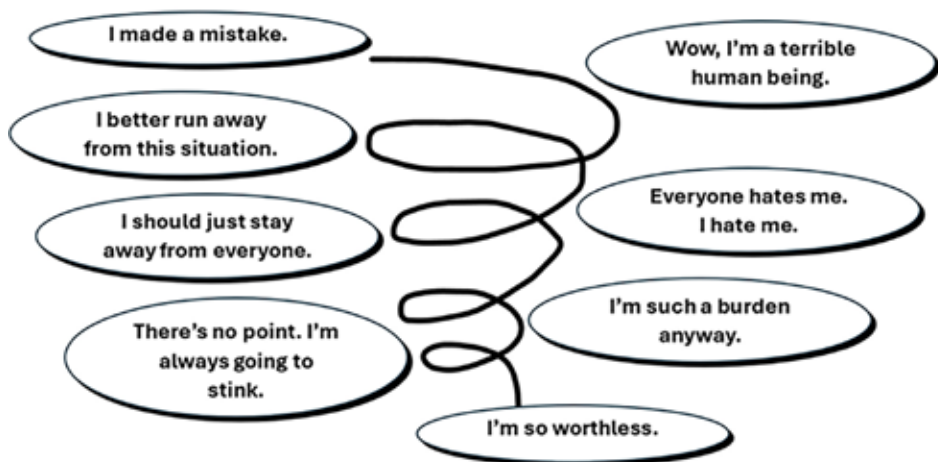
It is easy to let guilt and shame go too far. They need to be “checked” in a healthy way. If left unchecked, research suggests that shame is the more devastating of the two emotions and can result in more damaging consequences.<sup>4</sup>

It is helpful to understand the different forms of shame. **Appropriate shame** is when we have legitimately done something shameful and God deems it

shameful (e.g., Romans 1:27; Ephesians 5:12; Colossians 3:8 RV). David felt this shame after his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah (Psalm 51:1-4). Conversely, **inappropriate shame** is when we have not done anything wrong but feel personal shame or are shamed by others. David experienced this shame when he was falsely accused by his enemies (Psalm 69:4).

Chronic guilt can lead to shame, and unchecked shame can lead to a “**Shame Spiral**.” The diagram below shows how this downward vortex works through a series of unhealthy thought processes.<sup>5</sup> Notice how David verges into this spiral when he exclaims, “*The waters have come up to my neck,*” and “*I sink in deep mire... I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me.*” (Psalm 69:1-2 ESV).

## The Shame Spiral



If caught in a **Shame Spiral**, we can experience **Toxic Shame**. Ordinary shame usually dissipates in a few days, but Toxic Shame is a chronic feeling of worthlessness deep inside

of us. It might not be felt constantly, but the moment we are triggered, intense shame can come flooding back repeatedly. The Shame Spiral and Toxic Shame can manifest physically and

psychologically, as shown in the chart below. If prolonged, these symptoms can be very damaging to our physical,

spiritual, and mental health. Perhaps we have witnessed these in ourselves or a loved one?

Symptoms of Toxic Shame	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Secrete stress hormones.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Substance use disorders (drugs, alcohol, medications).</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Low self-esteem.</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Depression, anxiety.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Codependency (an imbalanced relationship where one person enables another person's self-destructive behavior).</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Oversleeping, inability to sleep.</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stomach pain.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inability to have feelings for others.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eating disorders, overeating or loss of appetite.</li></ul>	

Mental Health challenges are also closely tied to shame. It can act as the cause and effect of personal addictions (e.g., alcohol, pornography, stealing). In other words, the shame, unworthiness, and self-loathing we feel from trying an unhealthy behavior can cause us to repeat the behavior, lead to deeper shame, and fuel the spiral. For this reason, shaming someone in this spiral does not help them. Shame also lies at the root of certain disorders, such as Borderline and Narcissistic Personality Disorder, where personal shame drives self-destructive patterns of behavior towards self and others and often inhibits insight into one's condition and recovery.

Shame can also negatively impact our mental health and spiritual life when it leads us to cover things up, obscures insight into our own condition, inhibits healthy relations, and causes us not to seek or continue help. It can also lead to "projection" (blaming others for negative things we are doing), shaming others inappropriately, abusing self or

others, and even turning to suicide or self-harm as a way out (e.g., Judas in Matthew 27:3-5).

Whether it is our own shame and guilt, or shame and guilt we may heap on others, God did not intend anyone to drown in shame and guilt. In this state, it is difficult for God to work with us and for us to work on ourselves.

Night Lights for Guilt and Shame

How did David work through his "night seasons" of guilt and shame in a healthy way? When we are surrounded by the darkness and seriousness of these emotions, they should compel us to open the Psalms and allow David's "night lights" to illuminate a path forward. I believe David offers at least these "Four 'Cs'" in Psalms 69-71.

Courage

The word "courage" originally meant "to speak one's mind by telling all of one's heart."<sup>6</sup> It spoke of being vulnerable, honest, open, and willing to put ourselves on a limb and expose



our fears and mistakes. This meaning is almost the opposite of the “heroism” this word reflects today.

David illustrates his courage many times in the Psalms by open admissions that he is a sinful man and that he can’t hide anything from God: “*You know my foolishness; And my sins are not hidden from you.*” (Psalm 69:5). He also shares his emotions, human weakness, and fears: “*I am weary with my crying; My throat is dry; My eyes fail.*” (Psalm 69:3); “*I am in trouble.*” (Psalm 69:17). Rather than hide his humanity, or enter a spiral of toxic shame, David places it in full view for God and others to see.

It takes a lot to own and tell our story, to share our plight and admit our weaknesses with God and others. Yet, this lays the groundwork for moving out of the spiral and progressing forward, as David did. When we are courageous and open ourselves to God and others, we can healthily address guilt and shame. It stops us from drowning. Courage erodes the very foundation on which these emotions are built. Vulnerability is a type of courage. “Vulnerability is uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure. But vulnerability is not weakness; it’s our most accurate measure of courage”<sup>7</sup>

Do we practice being vulnerable with our struggles (James 5:16)? And do we embrace confidentiality to help others with this challenge? Lack of confidentiality is a courage-killer.

If someone has made themselves vulnerable to us, it is not our job to break that trust and share it with others. How much less vulnerable would our relations, ecclesias and community be if we respected confidentiality and practiced a culture of courage?

### Connections

David appeals to God with expressions such as: “*My prayer is to You, O LORD... Hear me in the truth of Your salvation,*” (Psalm 69:13) and “*Turn to me... Do not hide Your face from Your servant... Draw near to my soul.*” (Psalm 69:16-18).

What lies at the root of these appeals? David longs for an intimate connection with God, one he had developed “*from my youth.*” (Psalm 71:5). Years later, as he churned with guilt and shame, he knew this connection was a lifeline and humbly appeals that God “*not cast me off in the time of old age.*” (Psalm 71:9).

Connection is the energy that exists between people, or people and God, when they feel seen, heard, and valued. Connection exists when we can freely give and receive energy and strength from a relationship. It is the opposite of “going it alone” or “I’ve got it.” Connections are a key antidote to shame and unchecked guilt. By connecting, we counter the feelings of being alone and free-falling into

When we are courageous and open ourselves to God and others, we can healthily address guilt and shame. It stops us from drowning.

toxic shame. Connections provide us with people and outlets to share our troubles, understand that we are not alone, correct our perspective, find trusting ears and advice, and seek unwavering support and unconditional love.

But connections take work and do not occur in a void. Especially if our actions have damaged the connection. Connection requires “a path of conscious choice—the willingness to tell our stories, feel the pain of others, and stay genuinely connected in this disconnected world. This action is not something we can do half-heartedly!”<sup>8</sup>

David spent many hours proactively connecting with God through prayer, song, and meditation, as evidenced throughout the Psalms. While he evaded Saul as a fugitive, he connected with 400 men and his family in the Cave of Adullam to form a motley crew, all struggling with shame, guilt, and other distresses (1 Samuel 22:1-2). These cave connections answered David’s prayers but took great effort to nurture. Ultimately, they helped raise David and other “cavers” out of the spiral they were facing, just as they can elevate us from our own darkness. Are we actively seeking and practicing meaningful and healthy connections with God and others?

### Compassion (and Self-Compassion)

While David and his men resided in the Cave of Adullam, we are told he “*became a captain over them.*” (1 Samuel 22:2). This word means a keeper, governor, or steward. This act of care and leadership

is totally unexpected from a man mired in distress. Why not fan the flames of a pity party, protect oneself, and revel in spite, sadness, and sedition? Instead, David offers a large dose of compassion to these fellow cavers. Compassion means “to suffer with.” It is a social feeling that motivates us to go out of our way to relieve the physical, mental, or emotional pains of others or ourselves. David demonstrates this in the cave when he generously shares his care, thoughtfulness, empathy, and love for others who were struggling, so that they could all emerge from the gloom of the cave. The strength of this compassion is evident later when we learn the group expands to 600 and the miserable cave is renamed a “stronghold.” (1 Samuel 23:13; 1 Samuel 22:5). A glimpse of David’s compassion is also seen when he appeals “*Let not those who hope in you be put to shame through me,*” and “*Let not those who seek you be brought to dishonour through me.*” (Psalm 69:5-6 ESV). In other words, David didn’t want others to be ashamed because of his misdeeds. By focusing his energy and care on others, David moved up and out of the toxic shame spiral, rather than sinking further.

Self-compassion is also a healthy tool to work through guilt and shame. Dr. Kristin Neff says,

Self-compassion is the process of turning compassion inward. We are kind and understanding to ourselves rather than harshly self-critical when we fail, suffer, make mistakes, or feel inadequate.<sup>9</sup>

This idea does not mean we ignore our failures, but it means we love and treat

ourselves the way we would treat a friend who is having a hard time, even if our friend really blew it, is feeling inadequate, or is just facing a tough life challenge. David's self-compassion is evidenced in the Psalms by the absence of self-denigration, as we are prone to do when filled with guilt and shame. At no time do we see David (or God) saying, "You stupid idiot, you are so worthless and can't do anything right."

One of God's "checks" to guilt and shame is a powerful form of compassion called "forgiveness." If we are legitimately guilty or ashamed, we must remember that God loves us and can forgive us if we involve Him in the matter. David recognized and leaned on this in his life: "*There is forgiveness with You that You may be feared.*" (Psalm 130:4). When we face our night seasons, do we dig deep and practice compassion with self and others, just as God has offered compassion to us?

### Course Correction

I love kayaking. Over the past few years, I have paddled over 1,800 km around Canada and the US. But I have never navigated any of my routes in a perfectly straight line! Kayaking requires constant course correction, adjusting your paddling and direction

to counter wind, waves, obstacles, and wrong turns. Without it, you won't reach your destination.

If guilt and shame are causing us pain, it is critical to self-reflect and evaluate their source. They may signal that we need to correct our course. We need to be honest with ourselves. Is our life aligned with the route God wants us to take? Is the root of our turmoil from choices that have disconnected us from God or others? Are guilt and shame spinning our boat around because our behavior is misaligned

with God's values? Perhaps it's time to paddle in a slightly different direction, recalibrate our compass, or learn and practice new spiritual paddling skills. Or maybe we must courageously admit we took a wrong turn and take corrective action.

David directs us to this when he speaks of "*Your righteousness,*" "*the book of the living,*" "*the righteous,*" (Psalm 69:27-28), and "*thy salvation*" (Psalm 70:4 KJV). He recognizes that God is righteous and to

be included in the book of the living, one must **be** righteous! It implies that if we have made mistakes or done shameful things, we need to correct our course and paddle towards being righteous. If we don't, we won't reach our desired haven, which is salvation. If we experience guilt and shame, we can't just keep paddling the same way, or we will continue to spiral off course. Obedience to God can be a key part of resolving our guilt and shame and is far more critical than just relying on

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His compassion. What direction is our boat headed?

### Despising the Shame

As shared in the Psalms, David's battles with guilt and shame remind us of another man confronted with guilt and shame. Take a closer look at some of the phrases David uses in Psalm 69: "For my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink," (v. 21) and "my reproach, my shame, and my dishonour." (v. 19). These verses (and the Psalm) are Messianic and were fulfilled as Jesus hung shamefully on the cross, thirsted, and was given sour wine (John 19:28-29).

Jesus had no personal reasons for guilt or shame. Yet, both were heaped on him in his final hours by false accusations, a multitude of abuses, and being hanged publicly while naked, bleeding, and beaten between two legitimate criminals. Shame stripped away every earthly support Jesus had, including his friends, reputation, decency, and comfort.

Did you notice the connection between Psalm 69:20-21 and Hebrews 12:1-2? These verses encourage us to "lay aside

every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us." (Hebrews 12:1). These weights include anything that may bring guilt and shame into our lives. He then inspires us to "fix our eyes on Jesus" (v. 2 NIV), who was the perfect example of this imperative, and thereby able to "endure the cross and despise its shame."

These verses are motivating! Despite all the guilt and shame heaped on him, Jesus could put these aside and rise above them through his Father's help. Like David, he practiced Courage, Connection, Compassion, and Course Correction to navigate these challenges. Although he was not worthy of guilt and shame, he can still sympathize with the night seasons we endure because of his experiences in life and on the cross. Through this act, we hope to deal with the shame and guilt that we endure or bring on ourselves. By recalling the shame that Jesus endured, and the joy set before us, we will "not grow weary and lose heart." (v. 3 NIV).

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<sup>1</sup> This is the fourth article on 'Psalms for the Night Seasons', with the previous being published in March and August of 2023, and October of 2024.

<sup>2</sup> All Scriptural citations are taken from the New King James Version, unless specifically noted.

<sup>3</sup> Brown, Brene. *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*. New York: Avery, 2012. Chapter 3.

<sup>4</sup> Brown, Brene. "Shame vs. Guilt." *BreneBrown.com*. Published January 15, 2013. brenebrown.com/articles/2013/01/15/shame-v-guilt/

<sup>5</sup> Rufus, S. "Causes of Shame." *The Mind Journal*. Published June 7, 2022. themindsjournal.com/causes-of-shame/

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# WATCH!

## A CALL TO SPIRITUAL VIGILANCE

Like the angels who are described as “watchers” in Daniel 4:17,  
we are called to vigilant observation of the signs of  
Christ’s approaching kingdom.

*By David Fraser*



## The Sacred Duty of the Night Watch

*Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.*

(Mark 13:35-37 KJV)

**T**HESE words echo across nearly two millennia as among the last instructions our Lord Jesus gave to all his disciples before his arrest. They form part of a wonderful trilogy of divine commands: “*Take heed, watch, and pray.*” These concepts define the Christian’s posture in this present evil world. Of these three, perhaps none carries more weight or demands deeper understanding than the command to “*watch.*”

### The Roots of Watchfulness

To understand the profound implications of Christ’s command, we must first explore the rich heritage of this word “*watch.*” The English term derives from the Old English *wæccan*, meaning “keep watch, be awake.” The progression of meaning is fascinating: by AD 1200 it carried the sense “be vigilant,” and by the late 14th century it meant “to guard someone or some place, stand guard.” The meaning “to observe, keep under observance” didn’t emerge until the mid-15th century.

Interestingly, our modern concept of a timepiece also springs from this root. Originally meaning “a clock to wake up sleepers” in the mid-15th century, it became the “small timepiece” we know today. Even in its mechanical form, the watch marks time and awakens us to our responsibilities.

### The Hebrew Foundation: Three Dimensions of Watching

The Hebrew language reveals the multifaceted nature of Biblical watching through several key words, each adding depth to our understanding.

#### 1. Passover Watching: The Sleepless Vigil

The first and perhaps most significant Hebrew concept emerges from the Passover narrative. Exodus 12:26-29 records the climactic night when God’s judgment fell upon Egypt:

*And it shall come to pass, when your children ask you, “What do you mean by this service?” that you shall say, “It is the Passover sacrifice of the Lord, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.” So the people bowed their heads and worshipped. And the children of Israel went away and did as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they. And it came to pass at midnight that the Lord struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock.<sup>1</sup>*

But it's Exodus 12:42 that reveals the profound nature of this watching:

- *It is a night to be much observed unto the Lord for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that night of the Lord to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations.* (KJV).
- *A night of watchings it [is] to Jehovah, to bring them out from the land of Egypt; it [is] this night to Jehovah of watchings to all the sons of Israel to their generations.* (YLT)
- *This was a night when Adonai kept vigil to bring them out of the land of Egypt, and this same night continues to be a night when Adonai keeps vigil for all the people of Israel through all their generations.* (CJB).
- *It was a night of watching unto the Lord and to be much observed for bringing them out of Egypt; this [same] night of watching unto the Lord is to be observed by all the Israelites throughout their generations.* (AMP).

This remarkable passage reveals that the Passover was a night of mutual watching—God watching over His people, and His people watching in expectation of deliverance. The Hebrew root *shamar* means “to hedge about (as with thorns), guard; generally, to protect, attend to.” It encompasses being “circumspect, taking heed, keeping, marking, looking narrowly, observing, preserving, regarding, reserving, saving, watching.”

## 2. The Open Eye: Alertness in Vigilance

Psalm 127:1 introduces another dimension: “*Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.*”

The Hebrew word *shaqad* means “to be alert, sleepless; hence to be on the lookout (whether for good or ill).” Fascinatingly, the related word *shaqed* means “to be almond-shaped,” referring to the shape of an open eye. The almond blossom symbolized watchfulness in Hebrew thought with its wide-open form.

## 3. The Sentinel's Gaze: Peering into the Distance

Habakkuk provides our third perspective on watching:

*I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me, and what I will answer when I am corrected. Then the Lord answered me and said: “Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it.”* (Habakkuk 2:1-2).

Here, we encounter *tsaphah*, meaning “to lean forward, to peer into the distance; by implication, to observe, await.” This describes the watchman on the tower, scanning the horizon for approaching messengers or dangers, taking responsibility not just for himself but for the entire community below.

## The Divine Division of Night and Day

To understand the spiritual significance of watching, we must grasp the Biblical concept of night and day. Genesis 1:3-5 establishes the divine order:

*Then God said, "Let there be light;" and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.*

Night represents more than the absence of light. It embodies the natural state of a world separated from God. It brings the greatest spiritual threats: terrors from without (dangers from others) and from within (our own minds), the tendency toward sleep and lack of watchfulness, and the propensity for unbecoming behavior and loss of control.

### **The Ancient Watch Systems: A Framework for History**

Understanding how ancient peoples organized their night watches illuminates Scripture and our present moment in prophetic history.

#### **The Jewish Three-Watch System**

The Jews divided the night into three watches, designed to accommodate our natural drowsiness in the darkness:

- **First Watch**—"Beginning of the night watches." (Lamentations 2:19 KJV). Sunset to 10:00 PM: "Arise, cry out in the night: in the beginning of the watches pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord."
- **Middle Watch** (Judges 7:19): 10:00 PM to 2:00 AM. "So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outpost of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just as they had posted the watch."

- **Morning Watch** (Exodus 14:24): 2:00 AM to sunrise. "Now it came to pass, in the morning watch, that the Lord looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians."

Psalms 90:1, 4 captures the spiritual significance: "LORD, You have been our dwelling place in all generations... For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night."

#### **The Roman Four-Watch System**

With Roman occupation came a military approach to timekeeping, dividing the night into four watches named after their ending times:

- **"Evening"**: Sundown to 9:00 PM
- **"Midnight"**: 9:00 PM to 12:00 AM
- **"Cockcrowning"**: 12:00 AM to 3:00 AM
- **"Morning"**: 3:00 AM to dawn

Jesus referenced this system in Mark 13:32-37:

*But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all. Watch!*



## The Levitical Watch: A Model of Spiritual Vigilance

The most detailed Biblical example of organized watching comes from the temple service. The Levites maintained constant vigil at the temple gates to prevent any unclean person from entering. In New Testament times, an official known as “*the captain of the Temple*” (Acts 4:1) supervised this system.

Each guard consisted of ten men. So, across all gates and through all watches, 240 Levites were on duty every night. During the night, the captain made his rounds. Guards had to rise and salute him in a particular manner. If they did arise, he would say “Peace be unto you!” If no answer came, the Levite was assumed to be sleeping and faced severe punishment, beating or having his garments set on fire.

This system explains Jesus’ warning in Revelation 16:15: “*Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.*”

The temple routine also illuminates Jesus’ words to Peter about washing feet. Preparations for morning service required priests to rise early. An early morning bath was required, as it was a principle that no one should enter the court to serve unless clean. After this complete immersion, they needed only to wash their hands and feet before each subsequent service. As Jesus told Peter: “*He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean.*” (John 13:10).

Alfred Edersheim (*The Temple*) notes that the Rabbis used almost the exact words Scripture employs to describe the unexpected coming of the Master:

Sometimes he came at the cockcrowing, sometimes a little earlier, sometimes a little later. He came and knocked, and they opened to him. Then said he unto them, All ye who have washed, come and cast lots.

## The Prophetic Significance: Where We Stand Today

These historical watch periods correspond remarkably to the great epochs of church history:

- **First Watch (“Evening”):** The Apostolic Times—the afterglow of Christ’s earthly ministry
- **Second Watch (“Midnight”):** The Dark Ages—the darkest spiritual period
- **Third Watch (“Cock Crowing”):** The Reformation period—dawn’s light beginning
- **Fourth Watch (“Morning”):** Our present era—the final hours before Christ’s return

We live in the morning watch! The sun is about to break through completely, and the daystar is arising in our hearts. This recognition should fill us with both urgency and hope.

## Watching from the Walls: Our Present Responsibility

Isaiah 62:6-7 defines our current role:

*I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the Lord, do not keep silent, and give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.*

Like the angels who are described as “watchers” in Daniel 4:17, we are called to vigilant observation of the signs of Christ’s approaching Kingdom. As those shepherds in Migdal-Eder, the Tower of the Flock, were keeping watch over their flocks by night when the angels appeared to announce Christ’s birth (Luke 2:8-14), so we maintain our vigil for His return.

The Gospel account is pregnant with meaning:

*Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"*

Those who faithfully watch are the ones to whom divine revelation comes.

## The Heart of a Watchman

Psalm 130:5-6 captures the spirit of true watching:

*I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in His word I do hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning—yes, more than those who watch for the morning.*

This watching is not anxious worry or fearful scanning of world events. True watching combines patient waiting with active hope, grounded in God’s promises. It’s the eager anticipation of a bride awaiting her beloved’s return, the focused attention of a servant ready for his master’s commands, the alert vigilance of a soldier on duty.

Trust in God’s character and confidence in His word are the foundations of all Biblical watching. We watch not because we’re uncertain of the outcome but because we’re certain of it. Christ will return, the Kingdom will come, and justice will roll down like waters. Until then, we maintain our faithful vigil, encouraging one another as we see the Day approaching.

(To be continued.)

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<sup>1</sup> Unless specifically noted, all Scriptural citations are taken from the New King James Version.

# JEROBOAM: WHEN FEAR GOVERNS THE HEART

Jeroboam is more than a historical figure. He is a mirror. In our daily lives, we also face decisions that reveal whether we trust God or act out of fear.

*By René Castillo*

**W**HEN we read the Bible, we must remember that what was evident to early readers requires scrutiny. They knew each story's cultural context, political tensions, and spiritual implications. Today, we approach the figure of Jeroboam, a character often reduced to a single phrase: "Jeroboam, the one who made Israel sin." But was it always like this? What happened in his heart that caused him to go from being chosen by God to becoming an eternal warning? This is the story of a man whose history has been forgotten and has become only a bad memory; it is the story of a man who, despite earning merit, disobeyed by allowing fear to rule his heart and dictate his decisions.

### **Before Jeroboam: A Corrupted Throne**

The story of Jeroboam begins with the decline during Solomon's reign. Although he had received divine wisdom, Solomon openly disobeyed the principles established by God for kings in Deuteronomy 17:14-20.

- He accumulated excessive wealth not through blessings, but through taxes (1 Kings 10:14-29).
- He imposed forced labor on his people (1 Kings 5:13).
- He introduced idolatry into Israel through foreign influence (1 Kings 11:1-8).
- He despised the law of Jehovah, the foundation of the covenant (1 Kings 11:6).

It is in this context of oppression and disobedience that Jeroboam emerged. A man who represented everything Solomon had rejected. Let's see why.

### **Jeroboam: A Leader Approved By God**

The Scriptures tell us little, but enough to understand Jeroboam's beginnings:

- He was a forced laborer under Solomon's orders, and so competent that Solomon made him overseer of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, who were also working under forced labor (1 Kings 11:28).
- He later rebelled against oppression and fled to Egypt.
- Upon Solomon's death, the people proclaimed him king of the north (1 Kings 12:20).

It's surprising. Why would a person who suffered under forced labor elect a king who oversaw that same oppression? And here's the key: Jeroboam, even in a position of authority, showed empathy, served with humility, and identified with the people's pain. His very name—"the one who fights for the people" suggests a call to service, not domination. He was the one who literally put into practice the advice of the elders of Israel, *"If you serve them, they will serve you."* (1 Kings 12:7) and the words Jesus later spoke, *"Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave."* (Matthew 20:27(CSB)).

These merits led him to an unexpected turn: before the people chose him, God Himself had chosen him. In 1 Kings 11:37-38, the Lord promises him a lasting dynasty like David's if he remains faithful. No other king, except David, received such a promise. Jeroboam, even though he knew God had already chosen him and the people loved him as King, never claimed the throne. He did not proclaim himself king; he relied on the promise of being King: it was God who called him, and



the people who acclaimed him. Until that moment, everything indicated that Jeroboam was a man after God's own heart at a time when Israel was crying out for deliverance from oppression, idolatry, and Solomon's folly.

### **When Fear Replaces Faith**

But everything changed. Jeroboam started well but ended badly. Why? He was afraid. Instead of trusting in God's promise, he feared the people would return to Jerusalem and turn against him (1 Kings 12:27). That fear led him to make decisions that unleashed a chain of errors:

- He set up golden calves and presented them as the gods who had led the people out of Egypt (1 Kings 12:28).
- He established an alternative cult, fabricated for political convenience (1 Kings 12:31-33).
- Instead of repenting, as David did, he persisted in his error, trying to correct it with further disobedience.

Thus, the man who once pleased God became a symbol of rebellion. Jeroboam did not lose the kingdom out of weakness, but out of fear and disobedience.

### **Application: When We Are Jeroboam**

Jeroboam is more than a historical figure. He is a mirror. In our daily lives, we also face decisions that reveal whether we trust God or act out of fear:

- Job changes, family crises, social pressures, and financial decisions.
- Fear of rejection, failure, isolation, or the fear of losing what we have achieved can push us to disobey God.

But let us remember: true strength lies

not in avoiding risks, but in obeying God when everything seems uncertain. One step of faith in integrity is worth more than a thousand confident steps in disobedience.

Let us honestly ask ourselves:

- What principles are we sacrificing to fit into this world?
- What decisions are we making out of fear rather than spiritual conviction?
- What right actions are we neglecting to avoid upsetting those who do wrong?
- What mistakes are we justifying so we don't face repentance?

### **Let History Not Repeat Itself In Us**

The story of Jeroboam warns us: fear can destroy what God wants to build in us. God fights for His people if the people remain in Him. Instead of being guided by fear, let us be moved by faithfulness. We are Jeroboam, but it depends on which stage of his life we want to identify with. Let our story not end with a label like "the one who made others sin," "the one who started building and couldn't finish," or "he was a good person." Let us live as witnesses where it is possible to live with courage, integrity, and faith in a world full of uncertainty.

Did you know that the other possible meaning of Jeroboam is "God fights for His people"? Let Jeroboam's name not be just a tragic memory, but an urgent call: let us not allow fear and shame to rule our hearts and lead us to disobey. Let us trust in the God who fights for each of us and tells us, "Do not fear, I am with you." Let faith guide us to live by God's will, not fear or shame.

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# A DISCIPLE'S LIFE

Why do people get baptized?

*By Ted Sleeper*

**I**N Acts 2:37-47, those who heard the Apostle Peter were baptized because they **believed** the Gospel of salvation preached by the apostles and **obeyed** their call to repentance. A true Christian's life begins at baptism and involves changes in how we think and live.

We will explore a helpful summary of a disciple's new life found in this

passage in Acts. Here we find four activities set forth that characterize the new life of these disciples:

- Continuing in the apostles' doctrine
- Fellowship
- Breaking of Bread, and,
- Prayers.

## Apostles' Doctrine

“Doctrine” refers to what the apostles taught.

“Continued steadfastly” means they kept and practiced what they heard. This was as Jesus had commanded: “Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:20).

Note the importance God’s Word plays in helping us to keep the teaching of Jesus in our New Lives:

*But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned [them], and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture [is] given by inspiration of God, and [is] profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. (2 Timothy 3:14-16).<sup>1</sup>*

As we have seen, “teaching” concerns information about God and His way. “Reproof” means this information confronts and challenges us as disciples. “Correction” means to set us right again, to get us going in the right direction. “Instruction” concerns training in righteousness, that is, training in our new life in Christ.

This teaching reveals to us the true foundation for our new life in Christ:

*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the*

*likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5-8 ESV).*

Our new life in Christ is like a garment we put on:

*But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:20-24).*

*But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave [nor] free, but Christ is all and in all. Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. (Colossians 3:8-14).*

So, the apostles' teaching is not just about faith or believing; it is also about the behavior driven by what we believe. This behavior is not only personal, but also communal, as we can see in the above passages.

## Fellowship

What does “fellowship” mean? You may have heard someone describe fellowship as “fellows-in-the-same-ship.” In its way, this captures the Biblical idea of fellowship as a sharing in everyday life, our common life in Jesus.

*Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” Therefore, “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty.” (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).*

Why not share with those who don't believe? What's the problem? To what kind of situations might this apply today? And what would this mean to us today, “*Touch not the unclean thing*”?

*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age. (Titus 2:11-12).*

So, with whom are we to share our lives? And why?

Fellowship is based on the idea of one body. Paul has a wonderful explanation of this in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. Read this through and see if you can find the two very human problems Paul addresses.

We are called from entirely different backgrounds, making the one body full of very different people all called to live together as one. **How is this possible?**

Paul's answer is found in that famous chapter in 1 Corinthians 13, and Jesus' answer sets the stage for Paul's exposition of the one quality that is needed:

*Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:33-35).*

Here is the Third Great Commandment, but why a **new** commandment? Jesus knew that his disciples would face a massive challenge of living as a family.

Now you know why Paul wrote what he did to the brethren in Colosse, because living in a family is hard work:

*Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things **put on love**, which is the bond of perfection. (Colossians 3:12-14; cf. Philippians 2:3-4).*

Love is **the** defining characteristic of all those who are born into God's family through faith and baptism:

*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.... If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also. (1 John 4:7-11, 20-21).*

## The Breaking Of Bread

*For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same manner he also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood." This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).*

Why is this memorial meal so important? Jesus, the one we are called to follow, is very clear: "Remember me." He wanted us to do this on a regular basis.

But how often should we do this? And why?

*Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. (Acts 20:7).*

Both the New Testament (as above) and the documented practice of first-century believers tell us that the disciples met on the first day of each week to "remember" their Lord and to be encouraged to hold fast to the life in Christ to which they had been called. This pattern is one disciples have wisely followed to this very day.

This invitation from the Lord Jesus is an invitation to sit down with him



at this meal. How we respond to this invitation tells him everything about what we genuinely believe to be important.

The Breaking of Bread is called the agape or “love feast” in the New Testament. Here is an important reminder of God’s love for us while we were still sinners and Christ’s love for us in yielding to the will of his Father for our salvation. It is to this love for one another that Jesus commanded us that God’s love might also be seen in us.

## Prayers

This is the last of the activities set forth by the apostles that we should engage in. But what would be the content of these prayers?

In the Psalms, we find prayers of praise and thanksgiving. There are also petitions for strength, deliverance, and forgiveness. Paul and James encourage us similarly:

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.* (Philippians 4:6-7).

Most especially, pray for one another!

*Is anyone among you suffering? Let*

*him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six*

*months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.* (James 5:13-18).

Examples abound of Paul’s prayers for his brothers and sisters (e.g., Philippians 1:4, 9, 19; Colossians 1:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:11).

Why should we pray especially for one another? Because when we pray for one another, it is very difficult to harbor anger and malice towards our brother or sister. Such is the wisdom of God reflected in this counsel.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless specifically noted, all Scriptural citations are taken from the New King James Version.

# THE ANXIOUS GENERATION

We all need help from God and each other  
in the enormous task of raising children.

*By Nancy Brinkerhoff*



**H**AVE adults always been suspicious of the next generation and its choices? Today's parents can likely remember their parents fretting about their video games or popular music. For an even older generation, the culprits may have been their comic books or TV sitcoms that now seem laughably tame. Even in the Bible, the inspired narrator makes a point of blaming Rehoboam's bad choices on the "young men" (1 Kings 12:8) that the 41-year-old king had grown up with. There is something about each new generation—and perhaps especially its forms of entertainment—that inspires moral panic in its elders.

The issue of kids' entertainment, and particularly that involving technology, came up frequently in the *Tidings* Moms Survey that we conducted in early 2024. Many families, it seems, are wrestling with how to set reasonable limits in this area.

Is this our generation's version of the battle over comic books and video games? Or have the new developments of the 21st century created a qualitatively more dangerous problem for today's parents? One American social psychology professor and author made a compelling case for the latter position in a best-selling 2024 book. Although the author is not a Christadelphian—or even a Christian—parents of faith might still find his work extremely helpful. The *Tidings* offers the following review of Jonathan Haidt's *The Anxious Generation*<sup>1</sup> as one way to start addressing today's parents' questions about technology and social media.

As the title suggests, however, Haidt does not begin his analysis with a critique of technology. Instead, his starting point is worrying trends he sees in adolescent mental health. He opens with a series of rather frightening statistics related to depression, anxiety, mental illness, self-harm, and suicide rates among teens and adolescents in Western nations. These rates increased sharply between 2010 and 2015, as "smart" phones and devices became increasingly common. Although some researchers propose other possible causes, Haidt makes the case that nothing can explain the data as thoroughly as "the great rewiring of childhood." As he states at the end of chapter one, "Children born in the late 1990s were the first generation in history who went through puberty in the virtual world," a development he calls "the largest uncontrolled experiment humanity has ever performed on its own children." (p. 44).

But Haidt does not blame the mental health crisis solely on this "experiment." He also identifies a second, equally important trend in the years before the introduction of smartphones. He calls this "safetyism," an excessive priority on protecting children from even minor risks in real life. This phenomenon has led to a decline in free play in childhood, a sharp increase in adult-led, rule-bound children's activities, and time spent indoors on screens. Haidt lays out his thesis in the introduction: "My central claim in this book is that these two trends—overprotection in the real world and under protection in the virtual world—are the major reasons

why children born after 1995 become the anxious generation.” (p. 9).

Haidt shares several significant findings about the dangers of what he calls a “phone-based childhood,” which he contrasts with “play-based childhood.” Anyone who works with kids or teens will likely relate to what he identifies as the “four foundational harms” of technology: social deprivation, sleep deprivation, attention fragmentation, and the potential for addiction. (pp. 139-140). Parents of girls might be especially interested in the chapter on “Why Social Media Harms Girls More Than Boys” (Chapter 6, pp. 143-172). Haidt faces the uncomfortable issue of Internet pornography head-on, along with the potential harms of video games and the social trends harming first-world young men, in the next chapter, “What is Happening to Boys?” (Chapter 7, pp. 172-197).

But, for most parents, the most helpful portion of Haidt’s book will be the final section. Here, he shares specific suggestions for solving the problems we all suspected, which he pointedly identified in the previous 200 pages. Haidt calls the challenges around technology and social media “collective action problems,” which he defines as “traps where each individual does what she thinks is best for herself, even though, when everyone makes the same choice, it leads to a bad outcome for all.” (p. 222). It is tempting for each individual family to take the easy way out with early smartphone access and unfettered screen time. But, working together, groups and communities can support each other to make better choices.

The chapter on “What Governments and Tech Companies Can Do” is less applicable to most of us. Still, though, many parents would cheer his suggestions to “Facilitate age verification” on phones and apps (p. 236) and “Stop punishing parents for giving children real-world freedom.” (p. 240).

Haidt’s suggestions about “What Schools Can Do Now” might give helpful pointers both to school administrators and to parents choosing the best educational options for their children. He strongly encourages schools to ban phones during class time and “go phone free for the entire school day. When students arrive, they should put their phones into a dedicated phone locker or a lockable phone pouch.” (p. 265). Haidt also encourages schools to provide more free play in the real world: recess. Schools can “improve recess in three ways: Give more of it, on better playgrounds, with fewer rules.” (p. 265).

In his final chapter, Haidt addresses “What Parents Can Do Now.” Here, he gives research-backed suggestions to improve real-world experiences and limit screen time at each age. The summary included here is likely worth the book’s price, even if busy parents only have time to read this chapter.

Video calls with friends and family are the only recommended screen time for children younger than 18 months. Parents can allow limited technology-based entertainment as kids grow, though Haidt offers significant caveats. “Turn off all screens during family meals and outings” is one crucial

suggestion, along with “Avoid using screens as pacifiers, babysitters, or to stop tantrums.” (p. 271).

For school-aged children, Haidt’s recommendations first focus on “More [and better] experience in the real world.” (pp. 272-274). This advice includes offering kids increasing levels of independence and experiences such as technology-free summer camps and family vacations. (Note that Christadelphian camps have mostly been ahead of the curve in enforcing this!) Although he offers specific daily limits on technology, perhaps even more helpful are his other suggestions, such as learning to use parental controls, looking for signs of

addiction, and maximizing in-person activity and sleep rather than simply limiting screen hours. (pp. 276-279).

These twin themes, more and better real-world experiences and less screen time, are also the basis of Haidt’s suggestions for teens. Parents are encouraged to allow more independence through nature, travel, or part-time jobs (pp. 281-284). In addition, Haidt suggests questions parents can ask to initiate conversations with their teenagers about technology and social media. Like the rest of us, teens often realize they need support in their self-discipline around technology.

The “collective action problems” for





individual kids not wanting to be the only ones without devices are real. However, groups of families can work together to support each other in enforcing new norms, such as no smartphones until high school and no social media until age sixteen. “In sum,” Haidt writes, “Being a parent is always a challenge, and it has become far more challenging in our era of rapid social and technological change. However, there is a lot parents can do.” (p. 286).

Haidt’s book provides valuable suggestions for parents on a key issue. However, readers should note that he does come from a secular, agnostic point of view. Some will find his regular references to how children’s brains evolved jarring or off-putting. However, readers who push through the disagreement will likely be glad they did. The main point—that we were made for real community, not

virtual—is that we who understand God’s creation of our minds and bodies will appreciate it even more. The author is not unfriendly to faith and recognizes that a religious upbringing brings real advantages. He also includes a rather beautiful chapter about choosing spiritual elevation over the degradation of screen-based culture. This common ground can provide good talking points with other parents interested in this issue, whether they are religious or not.

We all need help from God and each other in the enormous task of raising children. We hope that in sharing resources such as *The Anxious Generation*, we can each better navigate parenting challenges, new and old.

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1 Haidt, Jonathan. *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*. New York: Penguin Press, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2024.



# AFTER AD 70

Our approach to the Biblical text matters.

*By Jason Hensley*

**A**S discussed in the last article, the Romans tore apart the Temple and burned it to the ground. Their attack culminated in the conquest of Masada and crushed the spirit of the Jewish people. But then what happened after that? Oftentimes, when our community considers AD 70, we discuss the scattering of the Jews after the destruction of the Temple, and we often don't pick up the story again until the formation of the State of Israel in 1948. Nevertheless, the impact of AD 70 on Judaism in the first and second centuries and the experience of Judaism in the land in those centuries

sheds further light on how God was working and what He was doing with His people. This article will thus follow Judaism's story after Jerusalem's fall in AD 70, looking primarily at the development of Rabbinic Judaism and what that means today for believers.

## **Rabbinic Judaism**

If you've ever spent time in an active synagogue today or discussed religion with a religious Jew, you've likely had an experience with Rabbinic Judaism. For the most part, Rabbinic Judaism is the Judaism that exists in today's world. But where did it come from?

First, “Rabbi” simply means “teacher.” Thus, throughout the gospels, many referred to Jesus as “Rabbi” (Matthew 26:25; Mark 9:5; John 1:38). Rabbinic Judaism centers around these rabbis, but it developed later than the title itself.

To understand its origins, consider the distinctions between the Pharisees and Sadducees. For years, the Pharisees sought the principles behind the Torah, and thus, their understanding of the commandments was more flexible than that of the Sadducees. For the Pharisees, the loss of the Temple was a major hit, but it didn’t entirely ruin their system of worship. On the other hand, the Sadducees, as the priestly class, were wholly bound up in the Temple. When the Romans burned the Temple, the Sadducees no longer had a way to worship or even a role in worship. What do priests do without a Temple?

The Essenes, as the third major Jewish group, appear to have simply died out—in many cases, they practiced celibacy. They, therefore, couldn’t increase their numbers through children, so this result isn’t all that surprising.

Essentially, of the three major Jewish groups in the first century, the Pharisees were the only ones that survived long past the Roman-Jewish war. Over time, the Pharisaic movement became Rabbinic Judaism. But how did this happen? Even with their flexible approach to the Torah, how did the Pharisees survive such cataclysmic destruction as the Romans brought on Jerusalem?

The Talmud, a sacred Jewish text that dates to the first few centuries after Christ, records the story in a somewhat dramatic fashion. Pharisaic Judaism centered in Jerusalem, and so when the Roman siege began, the well-known Pharisaic minds found themselves captured. One of those leaders was Yohanan ben Zakkai. Intending to preserve Judaism, Rabbi Zakkai devised a plan for his escape out of the city—not just to pass through the Roman battle line, but also to pass through the warring Jewish factions. Eventually, he and his followers decided he would feign death, wrap himself in rotting materials so that it would appear as though he were decaying, and then travel through the various checkpoints out of the city with the rest of the dead. The Talmud reports:

When they arrived at the entrance of the city on the inside, the guards, who were of the faction of the zealots [one of the Jewish factions], wanted to pierce him with their swords in order to ascertain that he was actually dead, as was the common

practice. Abba Sikkara [one of Rabbi Zakkai’s followers] said to them: The Romans will say that they pierce even their teacher. The guards then wanted at least to push him to see whether he was still alive, in which case he would cry out on account of the pushing. Abba Sikkara said to them: They will say that they push even their

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teacher. The guards then opened the gate and he was taken out.<sup>1</sup>

When Rabbi Zakkai arrived at the Roman camp, he approached Vespasian, the Roman general in charge of the siege. Jewish tradition claims that Rabbi Zakkai prophesied that Vespasian would become the next Roman emperor. (While Vespasian did eventually become Roman emperor, he was not the next.) Nevertheless, Vespasian was pleased with this “prophecy” and offered Rabbi Zakkai his choice of a reward. Rabbi Zakkai responded: “Give me Yavneh and its sages.” In other words, he requested that Vespasian give him the town of Yavneh (in the north of Israel) and allow him to set up a seminary there. This seminary was the beginning of Rabbinic Judaism.

The fall of Jerusalem and the Temple forced a significant change within Judaism. Along with some of its major

movements, it could have perished. Nevertheless, with Rabbi Zakkai’s escape, Judaism continued—and that meant that the specific branch of Judaism that continued to exist was strongly connected to Pharisaic Judaism.

### **The Implications**

You may recall that Pharisaic Judaism followed the “Oral Torah,” a collection of ideas and traditions that Pharisees claimed had come from God. This belief was one of the major issues Jesus held with the Pharisees—that they focused so heavily on their traditions, essentially raising them to a status higher than the words of God (Matthew 15:1-6). As time passed after Jerusalem’s fall, these traditions took an even higher place within Rabbinic Judaism. Eventually, though they had been oral for centuries, one rabbi, Yehudah HaNasi, wrote them down in the mid-second century AD. This



compilation of the oral traditions is known as the Mishnah. Essentially, the Mishnah took the commands of the Torah and elaborated on them. For instance, the Torah commanded that a rebellious son be stoned (Deuteronomy 21:18-21). The command, along with the associated ceremony, was relatively straightforward. Nevertheless, the Mishnah sought to probe deeper into the law, ostensibly attempting to understand the commandment's principle, but largely focusing on the missing details. Thus, the Mishnah records the following about this specific command:

From when does a stubborn and rebellious son become liable to receive the death penalty imposed upon a stubborn and rebellious son? From when he grows two pubic hairs, which are a sign of puberty and from which time he is considered an adult, until he has grown a beard around. The reference here is to the lower beard surrounding his genitals, and not the upper beard, i.e., his facial hair, but the Sages spoke in euphemistic terms. As it is stated: "If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son" (Deuteronomy 21:18), which indicates that the penalty for rebelliousness is imposed upon a son, but not upon a daughter; and upon a son, but not upon a fully grown man. A minor under the age of thirteen is exempt from the penalty imposed upon a stubborn and rebellious son, because he has not yet reached the age of inclusion in mitzvot [the commands].<sup>2</sup>

The Mishnah continues drilling deeper into this commandment,

working through many details. (The discussion continues for another few paragraphs.) In this way, the Mishnah takes a command and attempts to work through its angles to determine the different cases when the command applies. It's an incredibly legal text, and considers detail after detail.

As the centuries passed, however, rabbis realized that the Mishnah didn't mention all possible situations. Thus, the rabbis continued to debate the Torah's application in certain situations—sometimes getting so specific that these hypotheticals seem absolutely impossible. That debate is called the Gemara, essentially a further commentary on the Mishnah. By the 500s, the Gemara was combined with the Mishnah into one text, which is known as the Talmud. Commenting on the rebellious son, the Talmud adds:

The Mishnah teaches that the boy does not become a stubborn and rebellious son unless he actually eats meat and drinks wine. The Sages taught in a baraita [an early tradition]: If he ate any other food but did not eat meat, or if he drank any other beverage but did not drink wine, he does not become a stubborn and rebellious son unless he actually eats meat and drinks wine, as it is stated: "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voices; he is a glutton and a drunkard."<sup>3</sup>

The Mishnah and Talmud erect numerous boundaries around the commands. Whereas Deuteronomy 21 is relatively straightforward, the Mishnah qualifies the commandment to mean that it can only apply to sons,



not daughters, and that the son must have already entered puberty. The Talmud then makes the transgression very specific: the son must be rebellious over meat and wine. It goes on to explain that the food isn't just any food, but food that belongs to his parents that he eats on someone else's property (Talmud Sanhedrin 71a:7). For the most part, this command has now become so narrow that it wouldn't apply to anyone.

This minutia is just an example with one commandment, yet the Mishnah and *Talmud* consider all of the commands, which they count at 613. All of this commentary on the Torah is a serious amount of text; thus, copies of the Talmud range from 42 to 73 volumes.

Rabbinic Judaism considers both the Mishnah and Talmud authoritative. While that doesn't mean it unequivocally sees them as wholly inspired, it does view them as a continuation of the Torah, and therefore, largely binding. Though many religious Jews today have moved from this view, Orthodox Judaism, a subset of Rabbinic Judaism, continues to understand the Mishnah and Talmud in this way. Put another

way, the Mishnah and the Talmud continue Pharisaic Judaism in many practices today.

### Conclusion

Though our focus often turns from Judaism after the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, learning more about Judaism's development over the centuries illustrates the essential nature of Biblical interpretation. Our approach to the Biblical text matters. If we look for principles and then applications, we can focus on the purpose of God's commands, His prophecies, and of the Biblical narratives. Without that understanding of the principles, however, our time around the Bible can shift—we can emphasize the commands and their details to the detriment of the purpose behind those commands. Though we could write volumes about those commands and spend our time debating and meditating over the Word of God, we could simply negate the commandment itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Talmud Gittin 56a:15–17.

<sup>2</sup> Mishnah Sanhedrin 8:1.

<sup>3</sup> Talmud Sanhedrin 71a:2.



P A R T 2

# TITUS: TRANSFORMED BY GRACE

*Setting Things in Order—Why Ecclesial Leadership Matters*

*By Andrew Weller*



**C**RETE was a mess. That's not a commentary on the island's geography or cuisine—it's a blunt reality about the spiritual condition of its ecclesias. Paul had left Titus there, not for a holiday, not to enjoy the scenery, but to do the hard work of cleaning up what was unfinished. That work began with one particular task:

*This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order and appoint elders in every town as I directed you. (Titus 1:5 ESV).*

There it is. “Put what remained into order.” Paul uses a word that speaks of straightening out what is crooked,

bringing structure to what is still bent. And it's no small job. There were ecclesias in many towns on the island, and they were without proper leadership. The work of the gospel had begun, but it hadn't yet been grounded. What was unfinished wasn't just doctrinal clarity or outreach but a lack of godly, accountable leadership.

### **Tidying Up What's Left Unfinished**

Sometimes we can be tempted to rush the start of a work, start new ecclesias, open new mission fields, launch new efforts, or even set up new youth group programs, leaving the follow-up work unfinished. Paul doesn't have that luxury. The apostolic model is not one of flash-in-the-pan evangelism but of long-term investment. And that means helping ecclesias grow into maturity, not just in numbers but also in health, stability, and structure.

Titus's job is to bring that structure. To put things in order. And he's to do it not by taking over himself, but by appointing elders (plural) in every town. That word matters. Paul isn't creating an ecclesial monarchy where one man holds the reins. He's directing the establishment of shared leadership, a team of spiritually mature men who together will shepherd the flock.

We often consider leadership an optional extra, something that matters in theory but not in practice. It is common to establish new ecclesias without specific leadership. Paul disagrees. Without godly elders, the ecclesia is unfinished. And without structure, even the most vibrant spiritual community is vulnerable.

Crete had believers. Crete had ecclesias. But Paul says the work was incomplete because those ecclesias lacked shepherds.

If the work was incomplete, then it could be undone now. What one generation establishes, another can forget. If leadership isn't refreshed, if oversight isn't exercised, the spiritual vitality of an ecclesia can quietly fade.

### **The Need for Order**

It's worth pausing to ask why Paul cares so much about order. Isn't the gospel about freedom? Isn't structure potentially stifling? Isn't "order" sometimes used as a code word for controlling or quenching the Spirit?

Yes, those abuses exist. But Paul's vision of order is not about control; it's about care. It's not about hierarchy, it's about health. When Paul speaks of "putting things in order," he's thinking like a gardener pruning a vine, not a bureaucrat building a flowchart. The order he has in mind is organic, pastoral, and aimed at fruitfulness.

That's why appointing elders is the first step. Elders are not administrators. They're not just decision-makers or committee members. They are shepherds of God's people. Their spiritual task is to guard, guide, feed, and protect. If that work is left undone, the ecclesia is unfinished. Vulnerable. Prone to drift or division.

When there is no clear leadership in a community, responsibility becomes diffuse. No one knows who cares for whom, and no one feels responsible for intervening when someone wanders. Sometimes, that can look like

humility, but in truth, it's abdication. God's people need shepherds who will take up the burden of care, notice when someone is missing, weep with the grieving, and stand firm against spiritual danger.

In that sense, every generation of believers faces the same task that Titus faced. We are always one generation away from disorder, from unfinished business. We must constantly return to this question: Have we gathered people or put things in order? Are our ecclesias shaped by the gospel, tradition, and convenience?

Order also allows for peace. When roles are clear, leadership is trusted, and godliness is evident, the ecclesia can rest and grow. It's when those things are missing that conflict rises. When people step into the vacuum, tensions escalate. The peace of the community gets frayed. Paul's instructions to Titus aren't about rigidity. They're about helping the ecclesia become a place where faith can flourish.

### Leadership Without Popularity Contests

One of the tensions in this process is how elders are recognized and appointed. In our community, we often use a ballot—a vote by the ecclesia members. But Paul's instructions here remind us that this isn't about popularity. The elders Titus is to appoint are not simply the most liked or longest serving. They are brethren who meet very specific spiritual qualifications (which we'll examine in the next article).

That distinction matters because if our method of recognizing leaders turns into a popularity contest, or if it

rewards those with the loudest voices or the most influence or the closest friends, we miss the point entirely. Paul didn't send Titus to find the flashiest speaker or the most active organizer. He was sent to recognize and appoint men of proven character.

A ballot can be a wise and fair way to involve the whole ecclesia. But we must remember that the purpose of the process is not to anoint favorites, but to discern who is genuinely fit to shepherd the flock. That selection requires spiritual discernment, careful reflection, and a shared commitment to godliness over charisma.

Sometimes, we need to recognize that those most qualified to lead are not the ones putting themselves forward. They're not campaigning. They're not promoting themselves. In fact, they're usually serving quietly, faithfully, humbly, already doing the work of a shepherd, even without the title. Titus's job was to see what God was already doing with these men and formally appoint them to the role.

### What's at Stake

There's a warning embedded in all this. When ecclesias are left without functional leadership, when no one takes responsibility for teaching, pastoring, guarding the truth, and caring for the weak, someone else always steps into the gap. Very often, it's not someone qualified. It's the loudest voice, the most confident speaker, the most controlling individual, the person with the strongest opinions and the least accountability.

That's what was happening in Crete. We'll see in the next passage that there were *"many rebellious people, full of*

*meaningless talk and deception.*” (Titus 1:10 NIV). They weren’t just outsiders. They were part of the ecclesias. In the absence of real leadership, they were gaining influence.

The lesson is simple and sobering. If we don’t appoint godly elders, we will end up with ungodly influencers. If we don’t create a healthy structure, unhealthy dynamics will take over. That’s why Paul doesn’t tell Titus to wait. He doesn’t say, “Let things settle for a few years.” He says, “*Put what remains into order. Appoint elders,*” because time alone doesn’t solve ecclesial problems. Leadership does.

If we avoid appointing elders because it might cause tension or discomfort, we are, in effect, allowing disorder to fester. The task is too important to delay. Appointing elders is not a risk-free activity, but the risk of inaction is far greater.

### **Conclusion: Taking the Work Seriously**

Titus had been entrusted with an urgent task. We are, too. The work of the ecclesia is unfinished wherever godly leadership is lacking. We may have regular meetings, engaging teaching, and strong attendance, but we remain vulnerable if we lack shepherds who care, lead, teach, and model the gospel.

This exercise isn’t just about who plays what roles in the ecclesia. It’s about appointing those with spiritual maturity to protect the flock and ensure that every ecclesia is grounded in truth, shaped by grace, and led by those whose lives match the gospel

they proclaim.

Let’s not treat leadership as a formality. Let’s treat it as the vital calling it is. Let’s work, like Titus, to put things in order, not for our control or comfort, but for the flourishing of the body of Christ and the care of every member.

The good news is that God provides. He raises leaders. When we do the hard, prayerful work of discernment and appointment, we aren’t inventing leadership, we’re recognizing what God has already begun. We are responding to God’s work that has changed hearts and created men who model godliness. The overflow of their hearts evidences the work of God with the fruit of the Spirit we discern. We do our part by encouraging and supporting their appointment and work. Conversely, when the fruit of the Spirit is not evident, we should recognize hearts that the gospel has not changed.

In the next article, we’ll examine Paul’s specific qualities for elders. What does godly leadership look like in real life? What kind of men are qualified to guide the ecclesia? And what happens when their private lives don’t match their public roles?

Let’s keep asking: Are we building ecclesias that reflect Christ? Or are we leaving things unfinished?

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P A R T 4

# HIDDEN TREASURES IN THE TITLES OF THE PSALMS

*By Leen Ritmeyer*

## THE LORD'S PRAYER AND THE PSALMS



**T**HIS prayer is beautiful and powerful. Jesus gave it to the disciples to pray, but we need to be careful how we use it.

Many people know this prayer by heart. Not only Christadelphians, but most church-attending Christians know this prayer by heart. The danger is that we may not always think about what we are saying to God because we know it so well. A Dutch family once invited me to stay for a meal. The father said Thanks for the meal by using the Lord's Prayer. But he said it so fast it was over before I realized it. He never stopped to think if the way he said it would be acceptable to God. It shows that even the best prayer can become "vain repetitions."

In all Jewish synagogues, there is a saying written over the front of the hall: *Da lifney mi she ata omed* ("Know before whom you stand"). This is good advice, for if we realize that when we pray, we present ourselves before the Almighty God, before whom nations are counted as a drop in a bucket, then we would be more careful how we address the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth.

The Scriptures instruct us how to approach God:

*Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.* (Ecclesiastes 5:1).

The Lord's Prayer is beautiful if we meditate on its words and mean it with all our hearts. But still, in light of our studies, it raises the question of why Jesus didn't point the disciples to the Psalms for their prayer book. It has been said that this prayer is a template on which we can form our own prayers.

This thought is perhaps indicated by Jesus's words when he introduced this prayer to his disciples: "*After this manner therefore pray ye.*"

This instruction brings us to consider what we are saying to God when we pray this prayer:

*Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*" (Matthew 6:9-13).

The prayer starts with giving God the honor He deserves, followed by three petitions, which put God at the center as a Father, and not ourselves:

- *Hallowed be thy name.*
- *Thy Kingdom come.*
- *Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*

Only then do we turn to our own present, past and future needs:

- *Give us this day our daily bread* [our present needs].
- *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors* [our past sins].
- *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil* [our future welfare]. Emphasis: us, us, us.

We ask for the food we need now, pray for the forgiveness of past sins, and ask for help in the future. We lay all our lives before God. Finally, we pray for the Kingdom to come. This prayer puts the glorious future of the saints and the world before us.

Let us examine, then, the ingredients of this prayer and see how the Psalms introduce these thoughts:

First of all, we address God as *Our Father*. The phrase “*Our Father*” is rarely used for God in the Old Testament, although God was, of course, a Father to Israel, and He often refers to Israel as His sons: *Ye are the children of Yahweh your Elohim*, which implies that God was a father to Israel (Deuteronomy 14:1). God plainly said He was Israel’s Father:

*I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.* (Jeremiah 31:9).

Here is a beautiful picture of God as a father to Israel.

*When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.* (Hosea 11:1).

*I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms.* (Hosea 11:3).

God wanted to be a Father to Israel, but they were rebellious. Perhaps that is why Israel never addressed God as their Father. The Prophet Isaiah paints a beautiful picture of God as the Father of Israel:

*For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour. In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.* (Isaiah 63:8-10).

Isaiah indicates in the following verses that the Gentiles will call God their father:

*Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies toward me? are they restrained? Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O LORD, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting.* (Isaiah 63:15-16).

In the next chapter, we see Israel pleading for God to be their Father again:

*But now, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand. Be not wroth very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people.* (Isaiah 64:8-9).

It was David who, for the first time, addressed God as “*Our Father*” in his lifetime:

*Wherefore David blessed LORD before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever.* (1 Chronicles 29:10).

To vary the Lord’s Prayer, instead of saying “*Our Father who art in heaven*” we could say: “*Our Father, our God, and the Rock of our salvation*”.

Using the Psalms, we get a beautiful picture of God as a father:

*A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation. God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains.* (Psalm 68:5-6).

But it was Jesus who called his father Abba for the first time:

*And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.* (Mark 14:36).

When we lived in Israel, our children called me Abba, and my wife Kathleen, Ima. Abba simply means Daddy. I love it when my children call me Abba or Daddy!

They want to call me Daddy because they know I love them and will respond and help them where necessary. So it is with God. He wants to be our Daddy and wants us to treat him like that.

Another thing to consider is that the Prayer of the Lord does not begin with "My Father," but "Our Father!" We are not lonely children; we have brethren and sisters, and it is good to pray together. Starting our prayer with "Our Father" makes us think about our relationship with God and our brothers and sisters.

It shows that only through Jesus can we address God as our Father, which

is why Jesus introduced this prayer. It does not brush aside the use of the psalms but allows us to deepen our understanding of the Spirit of Christ in the "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." The disciples didn't fully understand the psalms at that time, as Jesus hadn't yet overcome sin and

death. Jesus first had to fulfil all that was written in the Psalms. Only after his resurrection were the minds of those two disciples on the way to Emmaus opened to the Psalms:

*And he said unto them, "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in*

*the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me." Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high."* (Luke 24:44-49).

**Another thing to consider is that the Prayer of the Lord does not begin with "My Father," but "Our Father!" We are not lonely children; we have brethren and sisters, and it is good to pray together.**

Acts 2 shows us how freely the disciples started to use the psalms when Peter preached the Gospel using the Psalms (2 and 16).

### **Our Father, Which Art in Heaven**

This phrase “*which art in heaven*” focuses our minds on the dwelling place of God, who lives in heaven. It should regulate our behavior and what we can pray to God:

*Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.* (Ecclesiastes 5:2).

There are many beautiful expressions about God in heaven in the Psalms:

*The Lord is in his holy temple, the LORD's throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men. The Lord trieth the*

*righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth.* (Psalm 11:4-5).

*The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God.* (Psalm 14:2).

*I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from LORD, which made heaven and earth.* (Psalm 121:1-2).

From heaven, God observes us and tests us, but He is also our Helper:

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.* (Psalm 46:1). [Again, this gives deeper meaning to the Lord's Prayer.]

### **Hallowed Be Thy Name**

What does “*hallow*” mean? It means to revere, to sanctify, to make holy. Does





that mean that if we don't pray the Lord's Prayer, God's name won't be holy? Of course not. God's name doesn't change. What does it mean then? In Biblical times, names did have a meaning: Melchizedek = king of righteousness; David = beloved; Solomon = peace, etc. Names were once used to express the character of a person. It is the same with God. When He proclaimed His name before Moses, He said:

*And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. (Exodus 34:5-6).*

What is God's name? "God" comes from "good," but it isn't His name. We call Him sometimes "LORD," but that isn't his name either. In London, there is a whole House full of Lords, so that is not helpful either. Moses asked what God's name was:

*And Moses said unto God, "Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, **What is his name?** what shall I say unto them?" And God said unto Moses, "I AM THAT I AM*

*...if we say this prayer and say, "hallowed be thy name," we promise to live lives that are pure in God's sight. If we don't, we are not His children, and we don't hallow His name.*

*[I WILL BE THAT I WILL BE]": and he said, "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM [I WILL BE] hath sent me unto you." And God said moreover unto Moses, "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God [Yahweh Elohim] of your fathers, the God [Elohim] of Abraham, the God [Elohim] of Isaac, and the God [Elohim] of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations." (Exodus 3:13-15).*

His name then is Yahweh Elohim, which means: He will be mighty ones. God wants to have children and all those who have believed in the promises God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will have the opportunity to become the children of God.

So, if we say this prayer and say, "hallowed be thy name," we promise to live lives that are pure in God's sight. If we don't, we are not His children, and we don't hallow His name. In fact, the opposite will be true; we do blaspheme His name. Look what James says:

*Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw*

*you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. (James 2:5-9).*

When we pray "hallowed be thy name," we promise to be like God and His Son, Jesus Christ. The Psalms have the same message:

*I will extol thee, my God, O king; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable. (Psalm 145:1-3).*

### **Thy Kingdom Come**

We all want the Kingdom to come as soon as possible. It will be a glorious time when the earth will be filled with God's glory, when all our troubles and diseases will be over, and our sins will be forgiven. The danger with this thought is that we may consider the Kingdom a glorified pension scheme.

Again, Psalm 145 paints a beautiful picture of the Kingdom:

*They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations. (Psalm 145:11-13).*

However, Psalm 22 shows us Jesus knew that only through suffering can we enter the Kingdom. We have already looked at Psalm 22, which Jesus prayed on the cross. It was only after he was saved from the "lion's mouth" that he could say:

*I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee. (Psalm 22:22).*

Jesus knew that only after he overcame sin and death could he look forward to the Kingdom: when (v. 23) the seed of Jacob (natural Jews) and the seed of Israel (spiritual Jews) will be united and all the "ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD," (Psalm 22:27) only then will the Kingdom be Yahweh's.

The phrase "for ever" is often used in the Psalms. It usually means "to the Ohlam," or "to the Age"—the hidden age of the Kingdom. When it says, "God's mercy is for ever," it actually is that God's mercy is toward the Kingdom.

*The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever [le-Ohlam] (Psalm 19:9).*

So, we need to cleanse ourselves if we want to enter the Kingdom. The Psalms contain many such instructions. Let's look them up and use them in our prayers!

*Leen Ritmeyer,  
Cardiff Ecclesia, UK*

# THE APOSTLES' TEACHING

*By Richard Morgan*

**A**S a Christadelphian, I want to get as close to the first-century ecclesia's teaching as possible. When establishing first principle doctrines, we rightly assert that we should gain understanding from the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. Both the Old and New Testaments are equally the Word of God. However, we make a mistake when we attempt to ascertain those fundamental teachings by starting in the Old Testament. Instead,

we should default to the teaching of Jesus and his disciples, otherwise termed by Luke in Acts 2:42 as the apostles' teaching.

Let me give you an example to illustrate the problem. In Genesis 14:17-24, we read about Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek. The only other Old Testament mention of Melchizedek by name is in Psalm 110:4. Imagine we didn't have the book of Hebrews in our Bible, the only New Testament

book that comments on the incident. Would any of us have figured out from reading Genesis 14 and Psalm 110 that Melchizedek represents Christ's priesthood because his parents aren't named, nor are the times of his birth and death? Perhaps one of us might have stumbled on these details and made a case in a magazine article that there's something important about the lack of information, the meaning of his name, and that he was a priest of Salem. It would have made for interesting reading, but what if we proposed in the article that this interpretation was the foundation for our understanding of Christ's priesthood? Would that assertion have been taken seriously, or would it have been dismissed and the writer accused of stretching the text?

The Epistle to the Hebrews explains the importance of Melchizedek. The difference between the exposition in Hebrews and our hypothetical article is one of inspiration. We can take the Apostle's word for it in Hebrews because God inspired him. We cannot say the same for the hypothetical article.

Unfortunately, sometimes we forget this aspect and start our consideration of first principles from the Old Testament. A classic example among Christadelphians concerns the

doctrine of the Atonement. The Law of Moses, with its rules and rituals, is an excellent study, but when we look at the offerings, for example, and then extract types that we say point forward to Christ's death, we can run into problems. Perhaps we've been looking, for instance, at the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16:15-16.

*Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. Thus, he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses.<sup>1</sup>*

What does this passage mean? Aaron was to make atonement for the Holy Place, for example. In attempting to understand this passage, we can formulate a typological interpretation in which we propose that Christ's atoning sacrifice was to atone for our nature.

That may, or may not, be a reasonable interpretation of the

The Law of Moses, with its rules and rituals, is an excellent study, but when we look at the offerings, for example, and then extract types that we say point forward to Christ's death, we can run into problems.

passage. So, how do we know? Let's imagine a second hypothetical article in which the writer has made this point about atonement for human nature. It might make for an intriguing idea, but what if, as with the first article, the writer asserted that this was a first principle doctrine necessary to believe if one wants to be in fellowship with other Christadelphians?

The topic of prophecy is a case in point. Many of us enjoy delving into Daniel, for instance, and it is a book referred to many times in Revelation. However, in the gospel records, Acts, and Epistles, there are references and allusions to Daniel's prophecies (for instance, the Olivet Prophecy) without there being a hard and fast apostolic interpretation for instance, of the metals in Nebuchadnezzar's image. Therefore, we are obliged to say that our interpretation of prophecy cannot be ranked as a first principle topic.

We could go on ad infinitum looking at examples from the Law, Psalms, and Prophets. Thousands of articles have been written, and talks put together, by Christadelphians on passages from Genesis through Malachi. But here's the bottom line: in attempting to understand first principle doctrines we always have to submit to the teaching of Christ and the apostles. This is more than a rule of thumb; it is fundamentally important because God inspired Jesus and the apostles to interpret Scripture, and He did not inspire us.

We know the Jews in Jesus' time misunderstood many parts of the Old Testament. Who are we to say

we are any more able to interpret the Old Testament than the Jews, people steeped in the Scriptures? Just like us, the Jews of Jesus' day were avid Bible readers and students. And just like us, they were prone to misinterpreting Scripture.

Jesus and the apostles did not have that problem because they *"spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."* (2 Peter 1:21). From the time Peter gave his first speech at Pentecost, the New Testament books were being formed not by errant Christians but by inerrant Holy Spirit-empowered men of God.

We have the New Testament to guide us in understanding the Old Testament's meaning regarding the gospel. Jesus and the apostles consistently quoted from the Old Testament and explained what it taught. They brought out the types from passages like Genesis 14 and preached Christ. If we want to know what the **truth** is, we always have to default to the apostles' teaching.

That is not to say we cannot use the apostles' interpretation of the Old Testament as a guide for our own reading and study. Not every passage of the Old Testament finds an exposition in the New Testament, and it is a delight to study passages using the apostles' hermeneutics. However, our interpretation can never be classified as the first principle doctrine or inspired by God.

When studying the Old Testament, we can follow these simple guidelines:

1. Do Jesus and/or the apostles comment on the passage? What



is their interpretation? We always default to what they say.

2. If they do not comment on the section we are studying, we can use their way of reading Scripture as a guide to interpretation. Our interpretations should always align in accordance with what Jesus and the apostles taught.

Point 1 represents the only time we can say we have discovered a first principle doctrine. If we publish an article based on point 2, we have no authority to state we have discovered a first principle doctrine.

The New Testament contains a wealth of information, which **God** deemed vital for us to know and live by. When we go outside those bounds and assert

a passage from the Law of Moses, for instance, teaches us something fundamental, we are in danger of contradicting inspired Scripture. Our mantra should always be “What do Jesus and the apostles have to say on the matter?” From then on, our Bible study in the Old Testament can use the lens of apostolic guidance. In other words, we have been given the importance and teaching in the New Testament, so now we can read the Old Testament to expand our understanding of doctrines, not to develop our understanding of what doctrine is.

*Richard Morgan,  
Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA*

<sup>1</sup> All Scriptural citations are taken from the English Standard Version.



# THE STORY OF BRO. KIZA FIDELE

*By Kiza Fidele*

**M**Y name is Kiza Fidele. I was born in 2000 and grew up in Mukwezi, Fizi (Eastern part of Democratic Republic of Congo—DRC). I was raised by Ann Marie, an old woman who adopted me and my cousin, Amisi, whom I knew as a brother until 2013. Our parents had died due to war in the year 2002, when I was just two years old, leaving us with no one to take care of us.

Concerning the death of our parents, I can't tell exactly how they died, but a lot of people were killed during that time. Some were locked in their houses and burned. Ann Marie did not tell us exactly how they died, nor did we see where they were buried. We were told that due to the massacres, people were buried in mass graves. So, I don't know if it was the same case as our parents, but most likely that is what happened.

Ann Marie was everything that we had. I don't remember her giving or taking us to Bible studies, but she was prayerful. I remember there were rebels who came into the village to forcefully take things from the villagers, especially those who were travelling. So, one night they came, and there were many gunshots all over the village. Ann Marie gathered us in her bedroom and started praying very hard. She even asked us to pray as well. After prayers, she told us to sleep beside her in her bedroom. This event helped develop my trust in God.

Ann Marie was very nice and a God-fearing woman. She took good care of us like we were her own children. She took us to school and worked hard to provide us with the essentials that we needed to go to school. She also took us to the Catholic Church where she worshipped. We led a peaceful life until 2011, when Ann Marie, our main support and our best friend, died. After her death, Ann Marie's son, David Nyarugabo, started taking care of us. He got married and went to his uncle to ask for the inheritance left for him by his father. His uncle was reluctant, and he got so angry about that. When David kept confronting his uncle for his inheritance, his uncle wanted to get him out of his sight. So, he plotted to kill him.

In early 2011, David discovered his uncle's plan, and he even knew that his uncle had already hired people to kill him. He decided to flee to Kenya. He couldn't leave us behind because he was the only person we knew as a family. In August 2011, we arrived in Kenya and submitted ourselves to

the UNHCR offices as refugees. The UNHCR took us to Kakuma Refugee Camp. In September 2011, Amisi and I tried to join a nearby primary school. We wanted to join the sixth-grade class, because that's where we left off in DRC. So, we were asked to count from 1 to at least 10 in the English language, but we couldn't because in the DRC, they didn't teach English in primary school. So, they said we had to start fresh from class one. We felt so sad that we both left school, but joined in 2012. Studying in a new language was hard. We could hardly understand the teachers. But this time we didn't give up. Through hard work, dedication, and the help of God, I was top of my class by the end of the same year (2012).

Early in 2013, Amisi and I went to watch a football match at a nearby football field. After the game was over and it was time to go back home, we couldn't see one another, so we started shouting each other's names. My cousin would shout "Kiza" while I shouted "Amisi." Amisi was named after our grandfather. A certain man heard us calling out those names, and when my cousin and I were together



Bro. Kiza

heading home, that strange man approached us, exchanged greetings and was curious about knowing us better. He wanted to see our parents, so he asked if we could take him with us to our home. Being teenagers, it wasn't a big deal. We took him home, where he introduced himself as Mulumba Byose Arsene. That evening, Mulumba and David had a very long conversation. When Mulumba left, David called us and told us that, apparently Mulumba had recognized his father's name and that he was our uncle! Mulumba was even willing to look after us. So, David and Mulumba started the legal process of handing us over to him through the UNHCR. Arsene was interviewed and proved he was really our uncle. He even told us that Amisi and I were cousins, not siblings, as we had always thought. When the process was complete, we moved to his house, where we found another two cousins of ours who were living with him—Shabani and Mema, the children of our aunt. We still live together as a family, up to today.

In 2014, a war broke out in Kakuma between the Great Lakes (Congolese, Burundian, and Rwandese) and the Nuer of South Sudan. The situation was so scary that most of the Great Lakes moved into nearby police stations for protection, including us. We stayed in a police station for almost two weeks and then returned to our homes. However, there were still a lot of insecurities, so people chose to stay close to their homes. Because of this, we couldn't attend service in our Catholic Church, which was far away.



Amisi

My cousins and I started attending a nearby church, a Christadelphian Hall. Their teachings were very strange to us, especially the fact that Satan is not a supernatural being, and that we were not going to go to Heaven when we died. This was extremely hard for us to believe at first, while at home, we made jokes about these teachings. The Christadelphians had a Bible study program every Saturday, which we attended, and began asking questions. One thing that started drawing my attention was how the Christadelphians provided many proofs from the Bible concerning their



proclaimed teachings. Even when the situation in the camp became more secure, Amisi and I never stopped going to that hall. Amisi even wanted to get baptized in 2015, but later he stopped abruptly. He even stopped going to church. Amisi is a footballer who plays defense and he loves it so much. I think this was why he stopped being interested. The Bible studies in preparation for baptism were done daily and in the evening. This meant there was no time left for him to practice with his teammates, as the practices were done in the evening as well. He was one of the team's best players, so I think he also has some pressure from his peers.

I kept studying along with Bro. Atembo, who was a few years older than I and had already been baptized. His friendship made things easier. When UNHCR founded a new camp, Kalobeyei settlement, in 2017, Atembo and I began riding bicycles to Kalobeyei to do door-to-door preaching. We gathered a group of people willing to know the truth from the Bible, and we invited older brothers to continue with the teachings and make clarifications for a better understanding.

In 2018, when I joined Secondary School, I decided to get baptized into Christ.

We also kept inviting Uncle Mulumba to Bible studies, where he could ask



Bro. Kiza with brethren from Kenya





Atembo and Bro. Kiza with Sis. Martha and Bro. Chris Sales

many questions that were always answered by thorough explanations from our brothers in Christ. He and his wife stopped going to the Catholic Church and decided to study the Bible. In January 2024, they both got baptized into Christ.

I graduated from Secondary School in December 2022. I struggled to find a scholarship through UNHCR, but I didn't find any. When I had given up, Agape In Action offered me a fully funded scholarship in September 2023.

I am now pursuing a course in Civil Engineering at Ziwa Technical Training Institute. Atembo and I are together in this institution, although he will be graduating this year, leaving me for another full year on my own. But we've been working together here at the college, conducting door-to-door preaching, holding Bible studies with fellow students, and we are praying that God may help us establish

an ecclesia in this area.

This year (April 2025), we were privileged to attend the LIFE Program in Nakuru with other youths. Atembo attended for a second time to help out as a LIFE grad. I met an amazing group of brothers and sisters from Canada and Australia, who helped us understand the Bible better. This program also imparted skills that helped us grow immensely in other aspects of our lives, so that we can become better leaders in our respective ecclesias.

We thank God for the many blessings that we are counting. We pray that God may strengthen us in serving Him, preaching His word and growing firmly in faith that we may inherit His Kingdom eternally on earth.

*Kiza Fidele,  
Kakuma Ecclesia, Kenya*

# BAPTISM IN MONTREAL

*By Mark Carr*

**SIS.** Justine Kaya Kasanga was baptized into the Lord on June 8, 2025. The day was described as including a beautiful ceremony of the baptism, Memorial Service, and

wonderful fellowship. We are very thankful that the ceremony, which was hosted at Bro. Dan and Sis. Maribel Archibald's home in Laval, Quebec.



Sis. Justine with her parents

Justine lives in St. Hyacinthe, Quebec, with her parents and siblings. She recently immigrated to Canada from Congo (DRC). Justine is the first member of her family to be baptized in the Christadelphian community, even though her family is Christian. She was introduced to the Christadelphians by Bro. Victor Kaiza of the Des Moines, USA ecclesia. Justine diligently studied the Scriptures and took baptism classes over the



Brothers and sisters at the baptism

last year via Zoom with brethren from Toronto West, Montreal, and Kilcoy (Guyana), in both English and Swahili. It is wonderful to witness someone who had never attended a Christadelphian meeting taking on the saving name of Christ and meeting brothers and sisters for the first time on this occasion. The Montreal and Toronto West brothers and sisters, together with Bro. Victor,

Justine's sister and a friend shared in the blessing of fellowship as they witnessed Justine's immersion in the river backing Archibald's home. We welcome our new sister Justine Kaya Kasanga into her new family in Christ.

*Mark Carr,  
CBMA/CBMC Refugee Support*



Brothers and sisters at the baptism



# ENCOURAGEMENT IN WINDSOR

**I**N a heartfelt display of support and fellowship, a recent CBMA/C-sponsored pastoral visit brought encouragement and unity to several Christadelphian families residing in Windsor, Ontario. These families, many of whom are recent immigrants, face challenges crossing the U.S.-Canada border due to documentation issues, limiting their access to nearby ecclesial gatherings in Detroit, Michigan. A monthly local meeting has been established in Windsor to ensure these brothers and sisters and contacts can regularly share fellowship and spiritual nourishment.

The trip, led by Bro. Innocent, with support from Sis. Linda Beckerson and others took place from June 20–22. Flying from Kansas City to Detroit, the group was warmly received and transported across the border to Windsor by Sis. Linda. On Saturday, June 21, they attended the monthly Windsor gathering, a day marked by uplifting worship, multilingual Scripture readings, and warm communal bonding.

Bro. Innocent delivered the exhortation, reflecting on Ruth's commitment to Naomi, a message of faithfulness and belonging that resonated deeply with the audience. The Scripture readings were shared in English, Swahili, and Farsi, to embrace the diversity of those

attending, while Bro. Benoit Mukendi (Toronto West) provided simultaneous Swahili translation during the exhortation. A shared meal, a cherished time of connection and conversation, followed the Memorial Service. Later in the afternoon, the group visited Sis. Maggie and her newborn baby, extending our love and encouragement to the young family.

On Sunday, June 22, Bro. Brian and Sis. Lynne Carrick assisted with transportation back to Detroit. The group then joined the Memorial Service at the Livonia Ecclesia before flying home to Kansas City that evening.

## A Call for Continued Support

The success of this visit highlights the importance of sustained pastoral care and community involvement. Bro. Innocent warmly encourages brothers and sisters in the U.S. and Canada to consider attending the next Windsor meeting. He notes, "This is one way to encourage those families so they don't feel isolated."

We thank our Heavenly Father for the safe travels, spiritual blessings, and joyful connections made during this visit.

*Innocent Baruani,  
CBMA/CBMC Refugee Support*



# FROM A SEED TO A HARVEST

The Growth of the Christadelphian Community in Sierra Leone

*By Bob Fox*

**T**HE story of the Christadelphians in Sierra Leone is a remarkable testimony to perseverance, faith, and the enduring power of the Gospel in even the most challenging circumstances.

## **Humble Beginnings (1976–1983)**

It began in 1976 when Bro. Stuart Cowlshaw travelled to visit Sis. Vicky Boyle Hebron, a UK Christadelphian who had married a Sierra Leonean doctor and returned to her homeland. That initial contact sparked the beginning of what would become a thriving Christadelphian presence in West Africa.

By 1982, efforts intensified as Bre. Tecwyn Morgan and Derek Hayward held public Bible talks in Freetown's

Central Library, supported by Bro. Steve Sykes and Bro. Philip Vyse. Their witness laid the groundwork for more committed missionary activity.

In 1983, Bro. Ron and Sis. Betty Sealey arrived in Sierra Leone, staying for six months. Armed with little more than leaflets, Bibles, and determination, they preached around the famous Cotton Tree in Freetown. Despite modest beginnings (all their possessions followed by sea, sealed in 40-gallon oil drums), their work bore fruit. That year saw five baptisms, with three still in fellowship today. Four more were baptized in January 1984, bringing early encouragement to the fledgling group.

## Establishing the Ecclesia (1984–1990)

In September 1984, Bro. Cowlshaw returned with Bro. Tecwyn and Sis. Mary Morgan. With a rented flat on Fort Street the Freetown ecclesia was formally established with thirteen members. Over the next few years, Bro. Ron and Sis. Betty Sealey, often joined by Bro. Michael Woodcock, visited regularly, nurturing the growing community.

A key feature of Christadelphian life in Sierra Leone soon became evident: **structured, community-driven preaching work.** Long before the era of digital preaching tools like CBM Media, every "mother ecclesia" (central or established ecclesia) formed its own preaching team. Each week, at least two brothers would travel from the mother ecclesia to more remote preaching areas, staying from Friday through Sunday after the service on hired motorbikes, the most common form of travel in the provinces.

Meanwhile, civil unrest brewed nearby. In 1990, Bro. Steve Sykes and Bro. Peter McEvoy traveled to the region intending to support Sierra Leone but diverted to Liberia due to conflict. There, Bro. David Mambu was baptized, illustrating how the gospel found a way despite obstacles.

## War and Witness (1991–2002)

The outbreak of civil war in Sierra Leone in March 1991 tested the community's resilience. That year, a new ecclesia was planted in Kenema. Though Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel forces pushed deep into the country, including near Freetown by 1993, faithful support continued. In 1994, Bro. Steve and Sis. Wendy

Sykes spent three months in Freetown, reporting thirty members in the capital, Freetown, and eight in Kenema.

The years that followed were marked by violence, uncertainty, and displacement. In 1997 there was a military coup, when the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council joined forces with the RUF to seize Freetown. As a result, many members were scattered. Despite the danger, three baptisms took place that year, bringing membership to thirty-four.

Aid efforts were coordinated by Bre. Ron Sealey and Andrew Briley, with food distribution and limited travel internally facilitated by Bro. Joseph Kandeh and others. By 1999, a tentative ceasefire was in place, although roads were still too dangerous to use.

In 2001, a new ecclesia was founded in Wanjamma. When the war officially ended in January 2002, many had fled, leaving only twenty members in Freetown. The Kenema ecclesia had effectively ceased.

## Recovery and Renewal (2003–2014)

With peace restored, renewed efforts focused on rebuilding. Bro. Bob Fox, the author, who would become a central figure in the post-war development, visited in 2003 and took over as linkman in 2004. Over the next few years, regular visits resumed, infrastructure was rebuilt, and the Freetown Hall was acquired and renovated in 2006.

In 2008, Christadelphian Meal a Day took over the running of a school previously managed by Muslims about twenty miles from Kenema, in a village called Talia Makia. Two years later, they provided funds for a street kids project set up by Bro. Bob.





Continued visits throughout the decade, including those by Bro. Dan and Sis. Corine Fox, Bro. Gordon Dawes, Bro. David Kirby and many young brothers and sisters revitalized both ecclesial and educational work.

### Harvest Time (2015–2025)

Despite the disruption caused by the Ebola outbreak in 2015 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–21, the Truth has seen extraordinary growth.

Baptism numbers skyrocketed. In 2018, eighty-seven new members were baptized. In 2019, another seventy-seven followed. Then in 2022, after the pandemic eased, an astonishing 358 baptisms were recorded during a visit by Bro. Bob Fox and Bro. David Gouldingay. The following year, 285 more joined the fold. By the end of 2024, there were thirty-one ecclesias and over 1,500 brothers and sisters. There remain hundreds undergoing instruction at the time of this report.

In areas too remote for weekly travel,

a brother from the mother ecclesia is assigned to live permanently in the region, receiving a small allowance for accommodation and basic living costs. These brothers, often supported by visiting preachers, carry on weekly Bible classes, baptismal preparation sessions every Saturday, Bible reading groups, and of course the Breaking of Bread Service.

### Welfare and Social Care

With little or no effective state-provided social care, each mother ecclesia appointed a welfare brother or team to look after needy members. Despite government policy promising free medical care for pregnant women, nursing mothers, and children under five, in practice this was, and still is, rarely the case, as confirmed by two Christadelphian sisters who had worked in local health services in the country. So CBM welfare has played a huge role in caring for brothers and sisters.

## Hymnbooks, Bibles, and Literacy

In 2016, a Sierra Leone hymnbook in English was developed, adding local flavor to worship and aiding consistency across ecclesias. Every newly baptized member receives a Bible, a personal planner, and a hymnbook, essential tools for spiritual growth.

However, one significant challenge remains: adult literacy. Literacy rates are estimated to be only around 30–40% outside the main urban centers. This situation makes verbal teaching, visual aids, and personal contact essential to discipleship and ongoing preaching. Bible reading is often done communally or through repetition and memorization, rather than individual study.

## Into the Future

Though no CBM visit took place in 2024, the work continues, sustained by dedicated local brothers and sisters, and supported by Christadelphians worldwide. From a single visit in 1976 to a vibrant, resilient, and growing community today, the story of the Christadelphians in Sierra Leone is a remarkable chapter in the wider narrative of the gospel's reach.

## CBM Media: Supporting Growth Through Digital Resources

With low literacy levels, rapid ecclesial growth, and a shortage of experienced brothers to lead new congregations, there was a clear need for new approaches in preaching, training elders, and managing ecclesias. This led to the development of CBM Media, a series of video-based training courses and preaching materials. Originally distributed on memory sticks and shown using rechargeable projectors, the resources are now increasingly accessed on handheld devices. While not a substitute for in-person visits from CBM (UK) brothers and sisters, CBM Media provides consistent, reusable content to support both ecclesial development and the preaching of a clear, unified message.

In addition to English and the two main languages spoken in Sierra Leone, these resources are being developed in over twenty-five languages, and will soon be available through a new online platform, launching at the end of 2025, Lord Willing.

As the Apostle Paul wrote, “*I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.*” (1 Corinthians 3:6 NKJV). Truly, God has given the increase in Sierra Leone.

*Bob Fox,  
CBM Link brother for Sierra Leone*



# PLANTING SEEDS OF FAITH

A Two-Part Workshop for Sunday School Teachers

*By Asia Pacific Bible Education Center Team*

**W**E praise God for the success of our Sunday School Teachers' Workshop with the theme "Planting Seeds of Faith," held in two main areas of the Philippines—Mindanao and Luzon. The event brought together volunteer teachers from different ecclesias for learning, fellowship, and encouragement. In addition to its preaching and pastoral work, the Bible Education Center (BEC) leads the Sunday School work in the Philippines. This work includes helping Sunday School teachers grow in their teaching skills and providing Sunday School notes and activity sheets for students, many of whom come from non-Christadelphian backgrounds. The BEC also conducts "First Principles"

lessons for senior high school classes in some areas. To support teachers, the BEC team creates weekly PowerPoint presentations that match the lessons and sends them by email. These are also uploaded to the Sunday School website for easy access and use by all teachers.

On June 20–22, over forty volunteer Sunday School teachers gathered at Hotel de Susana in Valencia City, Mindanao. The event started with great energy and enthusiasm. Teachers from various ecclesias in Mindanao came together for this uplifting workshop. It was heartwarming to see the passion of each participant as they joined the sessions, engaged in discussions, and built strong fellowship among fellow teachers.

## **Luzon Workshop: A Spirit-Filled Gathering at Lake Hotel Tagaytay**

Following the Mindanao event, our Luzon Workshop was held at the Lake Hotel in Tagaytay from June 27–29. Over thirty dedicated Sunday School teachers were in attendance, and teachers from different ecclesias groups in Luzon joined this inspiring event. Despite the rainy weather, everyone's spirit remained warm and joyful as we learned and shared. The peaceful setting of the Lake Hotel added to the beautiful experience of spiritual and practical training.

### **Opening Session: Grounded in Bible Principles**

Both workshops began with a meaningful session focused on Bible principles. Bro. Efren and Bro. Noli led the session titled “Planting Seeds of Faith,” reminding us of the deep and important role of Sunday School teachers in a child's spiritual growth. They encouraged us to continue the good work of teaching and guiding the young, trusting that God will bless the seeds we plant.

### **Main Sessions: Equipping Teachers with Knowledge and Skills**

Our main speaker, Bro. Ernesto Facun, a well-experienced and skilled Master Teacher, shared a very helpful topic titled “Adopting Teaching Methods in Different Age Groups.” He gave us many practical tips on how to effectively teach children of various age levels, helping us adjust our methods to match their understanding.

Sis. Eleanor, a former Head Principal, also shared an inspiring topic called “Creating a Positive and Engaging Classroom Environment.” Her

experiences and insights gave us new ideas on how to manage our classes in a loving and organized way that makes students excited to learn about God.

### **Using the Workbooks: Practical Training for Everyday Teaching**

Another important session was “Navigating Workbooks and Practical Guide for Learning,” led by Bro. Jodel. He walked us through the workbooks provided by the Bible Education Center (BEC), teaching us how to use them wisely and effectively in our Sunday School classes.

We are very thankful to the Australian Christadelphian Sunday School Union, who kindly gave us permission to reproduce their materials. Their generous support has greatly helped us in providing structured lessons for our Sunday School students.

In addition, Bro. Michael and Bro. Joshua showed us how to create engaging PowerPoint presentations that we can use to support our lessons visually. They are also committed to preparing and providing weekly slide presentations for each lesson. These slides will be available on the Sunday School website for all teachers to download and use in their classes.

### **Demonstration Classes: Showing What Was Learned**

One of the most exciting parts of the workshop was the Demonstration Classes. Teachers were given the chance to apply what they learned in front of everyone. In Mindanao, Sis. Charlize and Bro. Alexander confidently led lessons for the Primary and Junior classes. In Luzon, Sis. Nicole and Sis. Irine gave their demonstrations for the Kindergarten and Junior classes.



We admire their bravery, effort, and preparation in teaching God's Word. These demonstration classes were a great encouragement to everyone.

Aside from the learning sessions, our speakers also prepared fun activities and group exercises to help us bond with one another. There were moments of laughter and teamwork that brought joy and stronger unity among our fellow Sunday School teachers. These activities reminded us that serving God together can be both meaningful and enjoyable.

In Luzon, Bro. John Elton gave an inspiring exhortation that connected current world events, especially those in Israel, to the signs of the times. He emphasized that these events are reminders that the coming of our Lord

Jesus is near. His message filled us with hope and encouraged us to remain watchful and faithful as we wait for Christ's return.

### **Continuing the Work of Faith**

The Sunday School Teachers' Workshop 2025 was more than just a series of lectures and activities—it was a time of renewal, equipping, and encouragement for all who attended. With the theme "Planting Seeds of Faith," we were reminded of the great responsibility and joy that come with teaching the next generation about God's Word.

*Asia Pacific  
Bible Education Center Team*



*Maligcong, Bontoc, Mountain Province,  
Philippines*

*Thoughts on the Way*

# *A Kindhearted Woman*

*A kindhearted woman gains respect,  
but ruthless men gain **only** wealth. (Proverbs 11:16).*

**T**HE "*only*" here makes all the difference:

- A *kindhearted* [Hebrew *chen*: gracious, kind] *woman gains respect* [Hebrew *kabod*: glory, honor, splendor], *but*
- *Ruthless* [Hebrew *aritz*, cruel, fierce] *men gain only wealth!*

A gracious woman is kind to others, seeing their needs, and doing whatever she can to help them. Her honor and glory, her real "*wealth*," are found in her good deeds. She values that "*honor*," and cherishes it as her greatest possession. She values that honor in the same way that rich men may value their wealth.

Meanwhile, "*ruthless*" men value their wealth above (and even beyond) any virtue, such as integrity, civility, concern for others, and charity. To such men, even simple virtues look like the worst of vices, because those virtues hinder their ability to acquire more wealth, which is their sole

ambition in life. They build bigger barns and seek out more and more profitable enterprises, storing up wealth to last a dozen lifetimes, never realizing what fools they are.

To every such man, God says:

**You fool!** *This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?* (Luke 12:20 NIV).

How does a virtuous woman gain respect and honor? The story of Abigail illustrates this quite well. On the other hand, the brief and tragic story of her first husband Nabal illustrates how "*ruthless men*" try to hold on to their wealth, which means nothing when the angel of death beckons (1 Samuel 25:37-38).

What do we see in Abigail? A woman who quietly directs her servants and then brings gifts of food to the hungry. A woman who carefully chooses her words to turn others away from angry



actions. A woman who uses her wealth for what is good and who finally brings her honor and dignity, as her gift, to her new husband, King David.

Ruth the Moabitess is a wonderful example of Proverbs 11:16. This verse is probably the "working model" for Solomon's words there as Boaz (her husband-to-be) said to her, *"All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character,"* (Ruth 3:11 NIV) or *"a virtuous woman."* (KJV).

Ruth's noble character was demonstrated in her actions:

- She showed her strength of faith in leaving her homeland and her gods and her own family to become, like Abraham before her, a stranger and a pilgrim seeking the true God in a new land.
- She demonstrated her determination to remain with her destitute mother-in-law: *"Where you go I will go... your people will be my people, and your God my God!"* (Ruth 1:16 NIV); and then:
- She worked very hard to feed her mother-in-law, Naomi. We see her loving care for Naomi, gathering food, bit by bit, under the hot sun.

Ruth is genuinely surprised when she comes to the attention of her wealthy kinsman, Boaz:

*At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She exclaimed, "Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me, a foreigner?"* (Ruth 2:10 NIV).

An interesting fact: Nowhere in the Bible is Ruth described as beautiful. Of course, she may have been beautiful in the conventional sense. But then again, she may not have been beautiful after all. Her true "beauty," like her true character, is of a spiritual order, which has nothing to do with her hairstylist, her make-up, her jewelry, and the latest and most expensive fashions. Ruth has the truest kind of spiritual "beauty" in abundance.



Whatever else she is, she is genuinely modest. That is perhaps her greatest grace. She is unaffected; she honestly does not realize how attractive she is, how noble her devotion to an older woman, how exalted her choice of

She knows how to persuade strong men to do the right thing, by the very force of her tender and sympathetic disposition: 'You are a better man than this,' she tells him, and he listens to her.

The gracious, kindhearted woman retains her honor  
long after youthful beauty has faded, and that same  
honor is hers even after she has left this world.

an unseen God, how impressive her diligence in gleaning in the fields, and how touching her intelligent meekness and her sincere thankfulness are. There are no false pretenses, no pride, no make-believe in Ruth. She is the real thing!

The gracious, kindhearted woman retains her honor long after youthful beauty has faded, and that same honor is hers even after she has left this world.

But, as Ebenezer Scrooge finally learned in "*The Christmas Carol*," the wealth of a ruthless man does not remain with him for even one step beyond the threshold of the grave!

A kindhearted woman can work miracles. She knows how to care quietly for those who are ill. She knows how to enter a room without ostentation, vanity, or silly display. She knows how to speak the thoughtful word, offer the gracious look, and use the kind touch of friendship and trust.

Thank God for kindhearted women.

Robert Roberts shall have the last word, in *The Law of Moses*, page 220:

There is consistency in all the ways of God when the relations established by His law are observed. Man is the head, but only for nurture and protection and honor of the woman. Woman is man's equal, fellow-heir of the salvation that is offered in Christ... Man is for strength, judgment, and achievement. Woman is for grace, sympathy and ministration. Between them, they form a beautiful unit "heirs together of the grace of life."

George Booker,  
*Austin Leander Ecclesia, TX*





# THE CHRISTADELPHIAN TIDINGS

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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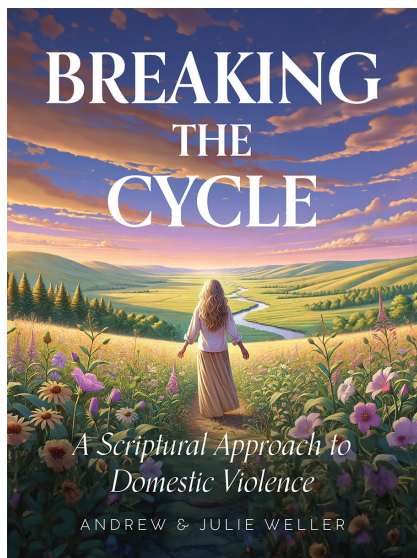
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Bro. Erik Sternad, MFT, Executive Director, Interface Children & Family Services (domestic violence prevention and intervention provider)

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