

TIDINGS

Volume 88, Number 9, October, 2025

THE GOSPEL *of growth*

Growth is a gift from God through the
Lord Jesus Christ.



Building faith in the
Christadelphian community.

TIDINGS

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E D I T O R I A L

THE GOSPEL OF GROWTH

**Ecclesias exist for two reasons:
edification of members and outreach
to those in darkness.**



THE directive of the gospel message is “go ye out.” The disciples were to bring the good news to communities in Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts. The gospel has always been about growth and expansion. Many of Jesus’ parables discuss how faith could grow and how God expects us to produce good fruit. There was never a command to form walled fortresses for believers to live within. The gospel flourishes where men and women of faith are active witnesses to their surroundings. In this way, faith is built for the existing community, and those in darkness are invited into light. We must always commit to growth.

Whether one is a young person in Sunday School or one in the twilight of life, the Lord offers continual growth for His children. There is no time in life when we should not be growing. I’ve heard faithful elders in their last years of life proclaim that their senior years have blessed them with greater clarity about the Kingdom and the character of God.

Hymn 377 is one of my favorite hymns. Written by Bro. Joseph Bland (1850-1916), it describes the “seasons of life” for believers. Each “season” provides a unique experience. In the Springtime, we learn when the “heart is fresh and tender.” It prepares us for the evil that lies ahead. As Solomon writes, “put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.” (Ecclesiastes 11:10). In the Summer, we reach the peak of our strength, producing fruit in

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abundance. We have reached a mature stage, where we can devote our energies to serving God. In the Autumn, we enjoy the storehouse of wisdom gained throughout our lives, for the harvest has come. The faith and wisdom we gained in the Spring and Summer determine the abundance of that harvest. Finally, Winter brings a certain dreariness, as health fails. But this is more than countered by the assurance of coming glory. In the Winter, we see the glory of the Kingdom with a level of acuity that we may not have had earlier. Every season of life, by God’s grace, builds on what we have learned and how we have grown.

We must bear fruit in all seasons of life. Even a weathered vine, through the power of our Lord, can bring forth an abundant harvest. We should never see aging like the world does. Secular thinking about aging is that our value is tied to our vitality. This notion is the opposite of how God sees us. He sees carefully shaped minds, modified to be more like His Son. What is happening with our bodies is irrelevant to Him. Instead of dismissing us in old age, He sees us as “jewels,” His special treasure resulting from decades of an intimate relationship.

Speaking of the commitment to growth, Paul wrote:

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the

truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:14-16).

The parable of the vine in John 15 tells us that we abide in Christ, the vine, only if we are bearing fruit. The husbandman (the Father) will cut off branches that are not bearing fruit, purging the vine so it can produce a greater harvest. We glorify God when we are fully committed to serving Him. Fruit isn't limited to good works that only a young, vibrant body can perform. As Paul describes, the fruit has characteristics that reflect the presence of God in our lives. It is Him working through us.

Not Just Holding On

Ecclesias exist for two reasons: edification of members and outreach to those in darkness. We do His will

when we are committed to **both** of these pursuits. Though we may see infrequent interest in the gospel when we speak to our neighbors, we cannot shrink back into an unhealthy practice of only considering and feeding ourselves. We don't hold onto the Truth, like we would prepare for a hurricane, shuttering the windows. That is losing the perspective of the gospel of growth. Life in the Truth, and life in healthy ecclesias, is active and faith-driven. We know God can give us strength in our weakness to do His work, and we can rejoice in this. Ecclesias must be a microcosm of people who are committed to growth. We read how the Lord added to the church daily in the Acts of the Apostles. It was His work. They were the means of His operation. Paul wrote:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in



whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22 ESV).

Paul understood that having the proper foundation is essential. But a foundation is of little use unless someone builds on it. That structure, Paul says, “grows into a holy temple in the Lord.”

I sometimes hear a sad misuse of Revelation 3:2, “*Strengthen the things that remain.*” This expression is often used when ecclesias are not getting the expected preaching results or are losing members. This situation understandably ushers in thoughts of just trying to hold on, laboring to keep what you have. It may seem better to focus on the consolation and edification of members. The conclusion is that growth is impossible, so just hold on and pray our ecclesia will last until Christ returns. But this interpretation is a misuse of this passage in the Apocalypse. It was spoken to Sardis, an ecclesia whose majority were **not** walking with Christ or meeting the requirements of God. They were alive, but they were dead. Strengthening what remained was to reinforce the faith of the few who were listening, and a call to the rest of the ecclesia to significantly change their lives. So, “*strengthening the things that remain*” was never about faithful ecclesias deciding to batten down the hatches, hold on to what they had, and gravitate to an exclusively internal focus. It was about an ecclesia in real trouble, whose

judgment was coming soon. The call to Sardis was to help them see their need for repentance and spiritual growth was urgent.

Nature teaches us there are only two states of life—growth and decay. Most of us reach the peak of our physical growth by age twenty-one. The body begins a slow decline from that point forward. If we neglect a healthy diet and exercise, our bodies will teach us that this comes with consequences.

What Does This Look Like “Operationally?”

So how do ecclesias remain focused on the gospel of growth?

The effort begins with a sincere recognition that through Christ, anything can be done. It is not about us. It is about him and his unlimited power. We know this on a personal level. We may be powerless to overcome a lust of the flesh, but the Lord promises to succor us when tempted. (Hebrews 2:18). He does not neglect those who prayerfully ask him to help them fulfill God’s will. Growth is the will of God, and He will not disappoint. Growth may come in ways and timing that are often quite unexpected.

For ecclesias striving to jumpstart growth, knowing what we **should not do** is essential. Sometimes churches, in order to find growth, or limit their losses, take on a “market-driven” strategy. This involves finding out what people want, and giving that to them. But that is flipping the purpose of worship services upside down. Our commitment must be to let the Word guide us, educate us, and inspire us.

One example of this market-driven strategy was seen in the Anglican Church in the UK. Membership dropped 90% from 1930 to 2024, down to about one million members. The church heavily debated what to do to mitigate these losses. In the end, the Anglican Church determined to be more culturally relevant to emerging views in current society. This strategy has been a woeful failure, as many perceived the church had compromised Scriptural principles to chase membership. Here's what one journalist wrote:

The question is: how did we get here? The answer lies in the choices made by the Church itself. In a world increasingly captivated by secular ideologies, the Church of England has floundered. Instead of standing firm against the tide, it has sought to ride the waves, abandoning timeless principles in favour of fleeting trends. Its leaders, once unafraid to speak truth to power, now seem more concerned with appealing to cultural sensibilities than with safeguarding the eternal truths of the Gospel.¹

We may decide it is appropriate to adjust certain practices, such as worship music, the Bible version used, or how we conduct our Memorial Services. However, we cannot compromise

truth. The gospel of God is beautiful and requires no censoring. It is the power of God unto salvation.

We must start by praying to God about our concerns about stalled growth. He knows we have lost members in our ecclesia, even those just hanging on. He knows our once-vibrant ecclesia is aging, and the future of our lightstand appears to be at risk for us. He knows we have faithfully preached in our communities, spending many hours distributing handbills, arranging talks and seminars, speaking to our neighbors. Our Lord Jesus Christ knows exactly how it feels to speak gracious words, only to be rejected. He knows this can be a challenge to our faith. Take these concerns as an ecclesia to God in **constant** prayer. Identify the presenting need for your ecclesia and engage everyone in personal prayers about it. Include this petition every week in your worship service prayers, including each week in the opening prayer by the presider.

We are reminded that the ecclesia was huddled together in prayer at the time Peter was in prison and Herod had killed James. Prayer was their only option, as they were powerless to save Peter. They must have believed logically that the Lord could arrange the release of Peter, but they doubted it would happen. Imagine their shock when Peter knocked on the front door.

It was too much for them to believe. “*It is his angel,*” some replied. (Acts 12:15). Peter kept knocking. Finally, they saw him and were astonished. Even these faithful in Jerusalem had difficulty believing God could answer their petitions. But that is precisely what is required by faith. Ask and believe that our God will perform.

Small Ecclesias

Bro. Harry Tennant once gave a class on “The Joys and Sorrows of Small Ecclesias.” I remember it well, since I was once part of a smaller ecclesia. The joys are realized in the level of intimacy that exists. The ecclesia feels like your family. We all know each other, and there are opportunities for all to contribute. But the flip side is that we can feel overwhelmed by the many responsibilities. Brothers may exhort at least once a month, lead Bible classes, and support other ecclesial activities. Sisters carry similar responsibilities week to week. Many take this burden with grace and love. However, these internal requirements make it challenging to think about outreach work and growth. Hands are full. We feel that if we can just do an adequate job teaching our own children and encouraging our members, this is likely the best we can do. However, the

ecclesia, perhaps understandably, is out of balance.

The Lord knows we are working faithfully. He knows we must consider the few in our flock and provide encouragement and sustenance. But He also knows how to help the ecclesia grow. He can introduce us to people we did not know, add new families that bolster our ecclesial life, and lead us to the individual in our community we had never met but who yearns for truth. We must have the faith to ask and believe He can do this.

Growth is an Assurance

Growing is so much better than declining. But growth is more than the number of people sitting in seats. It is about excitement for the gospel and a nourishing fellowship. In the end, we cannot grow spiritually on our own. This growth is a gift from God through the Lord Jesus Christ. When we grow, personally, ecclesially, or as a community, it is evidence our faith is genuine and the Father and Son are with us. As I look at our global community today, there is overwhelming evidence our Lord is blessing our work, helping us to grow and bear much fruit.

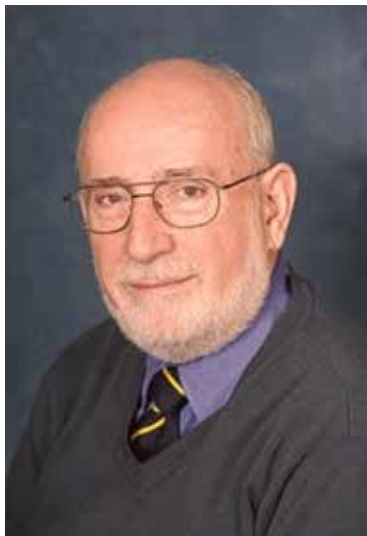
Dave Jennings

¹ *The Crisis of Faith: How the Church Abandoned Its Flock and Lost Its Soul*, John Galt, December 17, 2024

THE FALLING ASLEEP OF BRO. JOHN BILELLO

Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: Happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. (Psalm 128:1-4).

ON August 19, Bro. John Bilello fell asleep peacefully in the Lord at 86 years old. He had been diagnosed with an aggressive brain tumor only a few weeks earlier. The LORD was gracious in allowing him to be with his family at home under hospice care. Our deepest condolences and prayers for God's comfort go out to his loving wife, Sis. Mary. John was able to share with her their 66th wedding anniversary on August 1, and Sis. Mary's birthday was two days before he fell asleep. Our prayers also go out to the entire Bilello family: sons Bro. Andy (wife Sis. Shelly), Bro. Peter (wife Sis. Dotti), Bro. Matt, as well as John and Mary's four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.



John was a member of ecclesias from New York to California, and lastly with the Ann Arbor Ecclesia in Michigan. On multiple occasions, he lived overseas and was a member

of ecclesias in the UK. These experiences gave him great insight into the spiritual needs of brothers and sisters of diverse backgrounds. All this helped to equip him in his contributions to the *Christadelphian Tidings Magazine*, and in sharing the word by teaching at multiple Bible

Schools across North America, and leading studies in Australia, the UK, New Zealand, China, and South Africa.

John was the first chairperson of the *Tidings* Committee. He provided

steady leadership and counsel to the committee and editorial team for over thirty years, as many topics needed spiritual wisdom based on a sound understanding of Godly principles. John has shared similar counsel through many articles and authored several books to benefit the community. John worked tirelessly to help build the faith of brothers and sisters in Christ.

John was born in Brooklyn, N.Y., to first-generation Italian Americans, Bro. Charles and Sis. Catherine Bilello (Buonadonna). Thanks to his multiple God-given talents, he had a long and notable professional career. He graduated from Brooklyn Technical High School in 1956, then attended New York University (NYU). At NYU, he earned a bachelor's in metallurgical engineering in 1960, followed by a Master's in Materials Science in 1962. He received a Ph.D. in Materials Science and Physics from the University of Illinois (Champaign-Urbana) in 1965. He spent nearly two decades in a faculty position at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, later serving as the Dean of the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences. In 1986, he became the founding Dean of the College of Engineering and Computer Science at the California State University, Fullerton. Leaving administration behind, he joined the University of Michigan in a dual appointment as Professor of Materials Science and Engineering and Applied Physics. After retiring from the University of Michigan in 2004, he worked in the private sector as Vice President for Research and Development at MetaGlass Coatings, LLC. As a scientist, John developed a reputation as an expert in using high-

intensity X-ray (synchrotron radiation) diffraction imaging, microdiffraction, grazing angle incidence scattering, and other associated techniques to characterize non-destructive materials. He studied a wide range of problems in metals, alloys, and semiconductors, where it is necessary to control the structure-property relationships to achieve improved performance or to create new materials. He authored more than 140 papers in technical journals plus chapters in books.

John has demonstrated a work ethic that is worthy of note throughout his life. He lived the principles conveyed in these passages:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. (Matthew 22:37).

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest. (Ecclesiastes 9:9-10).

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. (Colossians 3:17).

John will be greatly missed by me personally and by many brothers and sisters around the world who he touched and helped through his ministry. We pray his sleep will be short: *"Even so, come Lord Jesus."*

Alan Markwith,
Chairman,
Christadelphian Tidings
Publishing Committee

P A R T 2

WATCH!

A CALL TO SPIRITUAL VIGILANCE

Fellowship and the Responsibility to Watch for One Another.
By David Fraser



If watching were merely an individual discipline, it would be challenging enough. But Scripture reveals that true watchfulness extends far beyond personal vigilance. It encompasses a profound responsibility for the spiritual welfare of our brothers and sisters in Christ. The Apostle Paul's urgent words to the Romans establish the communal nature of our watch, while Jesus' own experience with his sleeping disciples teaches us both the difficulty and the grace inherent in this calling.

The Watchfulness We Must Have

The watchfulness Scripture commands involves three critical dimensions that work together to form a complete spiritual discipline:

- First, we must maintain sleepless vigilance during this “Gentile night”—the present age of spiritual darkness that will continue until Christ returns to establish his Kingdom. This state isn't physical insomnia, but the spiritual alertness that refuses to become comfortable with this world's values and priorities.

- Second, we must resist the deceptive nature of darkness that makes us believe our thoughts and actions remain hidden. Just as alcohol, which Scripture calls a “mocker,” represents false doctrine, spiritual stupor, and moral depravity, the darkness of this age tempts us to compromise our standards. We forget that all will ultimately be brought to light.

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- Third, we must remember Jesus' sobering words in John 3:19-21:

And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.¹

Paul's Urgent Call to Awakening

Paul's letter to the Romans provides the definitive statement on communal watchfulness. Writing to believers who

lived in the very heart of the Roman Empire, surrounded by paganism and moral corruption, Paul's words ring with urgent relevance for our own times:

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore

let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. (Romans 13:11-14).

Notice the corporate language: “let us cast off,” “let us put on,” “let us walk properly.” Paul doesn’t address individual believers in isolation but calls the entire community to mutual accountability in their watching.

The Inescapable Duty of Mutual Care

If we truly understand the times in which we live and the urgency of Christ’s approaching return, we bear an inescapable responsibility toward one another, one for which we will give account when the Master returns. This obligation isn’t optional. It’s integral to Christian discipleship.

Paul illustrates this responsibility through the metaphor of spiritual parenthood: “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers.” (1 Corinthians 4:15 NKJV). Fathers watch over their children, not with harsh criticism, but with loving concern for their welfare.

The writer to the Hebrews makes this duty explicit:

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. (Hebrews 13:17 KJV).

Be obedient to those leading you, and be subject, for these do watch for your souls, as about to give account, that with joy they may do this, and not sighing, for this is unprofitable to you. (Same, YLT).

While this passage specifically addresses those in positions of spiritual

leadership, the principle extends throughout the body of Christ. We are all called to watch for one another’s spiritual welfare, to encourage the fainthearted, support the weak, and be patient with all (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

What Happens When We Miss the Ideal?

Honest self-examination reveals uncomfortable truths about our spiritual condition:

- None of us completely realizes the tremendous necessity of watchfulness.
- None of us lives in that constant search for Christ’s return.
- None of us remains fully prepared in daily and hourly anticipation of the Lord’s arrival.

Yet we should earnestly desire to achieve this ideal, recognizing that our ability to do so comes from God alone. As the psalmist declares:

I will lift up my eyes to the hills—from whence comes my help? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore. (Psalm 121:1-8).

Lessons from the Ten Virgins

The parable of the ten virgins provides

crucial insight into what happens when our watching falls short of the ideal. Jesus told this story to illustrate the kingdom of heaven and the importance of preparedness for his return (Matthew 25:1-13).

The similarities between the wise and foolish virgins are striking and should make us pause:

- **All of them had lamps.** Every virgin possessed the basic equipment for her role.
- **All “went out to meet the bridegroom.”** Every virgin had the right intention and took action.
- **Remarkably, “they all slumbered and slept.”** This similarity is perhaps the most surprising and instructive.

Scripture explicitly states that all ten virgins—both wise and foolish—fell asleep. This description isn’t only about the sleep of death awaiting resurrection, but also represents a lack of readiness that affected everyone. None of the virgins were perfectly ready for the bridegroom’s coming. Like us, they found their eyelids drooping despite their best intentions. Their spirit was willing, but their flesh was weak.

Jesus had emphasized this principle in John 12:35-36:

A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.

What was the sole distinguishing factor between the virgins? The foolish virgins “took no oil with them,” while the wise

virgins carried extra oil for their lamps. Only the wise had reserves to draw upon when the crisis came at the darkest hour.

But why would the foolish have insufficient oil? Perhaps the answer lies in the previous chapter, where the Lord says in Matthew 24:36: “*But of that day and hour no one knows*,” and again in verse 42: “*Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming*.” What if the foolish virgins presumed to know, or to calculate when the bridegroom would come, and allowed for just enough oil to meet **their** expected timing of his appearance? They would set their hearts on a time that would pass and thus were not spiritually ready.

In contrast, the wise virgins complied with the instruction not to presume to know the bridegroom’s arrival other than the general epoch. They consequently ensured they had more than enough oil to last through the unexpectedly long wait that ensued. The wise virgins were “*children of light*.” When the crucial moment arrived, their deep spiritual reserves sustained them through the darkness.

In ecclesial circles, there have been similar well-intentioned attempts to guess “likely” times when the Lord might return, albeit couched in the language of possibility. We’ve heard this for years, based on many different premises—all of them wrong. Consider the wisdom of brethren such as Harry Tennant, who said: “Prophecy was not given to us to make us prophets!” How right he was! The effect of “false anticipation” is initial fervent



excitement, followed by lingering disenchantment, disillusionment, and even loss of faith, with the young and the young-in-faith suffering the most. Our Master's words ring out in warning: "You **do not** know."

Paul's Application to the Thessalonians

Paul appears to draw directly from the sobering parable of the virgins in his letter to the Thessalonian ecclesia, creating one of Scripture's most comprehensive treatments of watching:

But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains

upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also do. (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11).

The Spiritual Process: Called, Chosen, Faithful

This progression finds its ultimate expression in Revelation 17:14: *“These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.”*

Paul’s teaching reveals a clear spiritual progression for those who are ready when Christ returns.

1. **Called:** We begin as *“children of the bridechamber,”* invited to participate in the wedding feast.
2. **Chosen:** We become *“companions of the Bride,”* selected for special intimacy with Christ.
3. **Faithful:** We develop into *“children of light,”* ultimately becoming the Bride herself.

The imagery of bridal processional lamps carried on long poles above the procession, lighting the way through dark streets, beautifully illustrates our role as light-bearers in this present darkness.

The Ephesian Application: Walking as Children of Light

Paul continues this theme in his letter to the Ephesians, providing practical guidance for living as children of light.

Be imitators [followers] of God as dear children...For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have

no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: “Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.” See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit. (Ephesians 5:1, 8-18).

Paul then proceeds to describe the spiritual relationship between Christ and His bride, the ultimate goal of our watching and preparation.

The Preciousness of Time

Understanding our responsibility to watch for one another requires recognizing the preciousness of time. So many lives resemble ships that spend considerable time at sea but never complete a meaningful voyage. The Master has entrusted us with precious goods during his absence; among the most valuable of these is time.

Ecclesiastes 8:5-6 reminds us:

A wise man’s heart discerns both time and judgment. Because for every matter there is a time and judgment, though the misery of man increases greatly.

What distinguishes mere activity from meaningful service? It's far too easy to mistake the form for the substance:

- We might confuse attendance with worship.
- We might substitute reading for faith.
- We might use time without applying wisdom to make it worthwhile.

"Now" is the only time we possess. *"Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."* (2 Corinthians 6:2 KJV). It was to spiritually complacent people that Jesus said: *"You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times."* (Matthew 16:3).

Jesus's words should draw our attention to the signs that herald His return. These signs should prompt us to *"watch and be sober,"* (1 Thessalonians 5:6), as Jesus warns in Luke 21. We live in times that offer no purely human solutions to humanity's deepest problems, which should drive us to increased dependence on divine intervention.

The Song of Songs Pattern

The Song of Solomon provides a beautiful picture of the relationship between the watching believer and her returning Lord.

I sleep, but my heart watches; it is the voice of my beloved! He knocks, saying, "Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is covered with dew, my locks with the drops of the night." (Song of Songs 5:2).

Even when our physical strength fails as we struggle with the weakness of flesh, our hearts can remain watchful for His voice. This grace enables imperfect watchers to be ready when He comes.

Staying Awake: The Increasing Challenge

Anyone who has worked through the night understands that maintaining vigilance becomes exponentially more difficult as the hours progress. Staying up slightly past our usual bedtime is manageable, but extending our wakefulness deep into the night tests our limits severely.

This natural pattern carries spiritual risks. As physical fatigue increases, our emotional guard drops, making us more irritable and sensitive to offense. Our judgment becomes clouded, and our resistance to temptation weakens. This tendency is why Jesus' parable in Luke 12 takes on such urgency:

Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. (Luke 12:35-38).

Notice that Jesus specifically mentions finding faithful servants during the second and third watches, the most difficult hours to maintain vigilance. The spiritual preparedness required to remain faithful during these periods calls for something beyond natural human strength.

Grace for the Faithful Watcher

The parable continues with both warning and encouragement:

But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (Luke 12:39-40).

When Peter asked whether this parable applied to the disciples specifically or to everyone, Jesus responded with both promise and warning:

Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. But if that servant says in his heart, "My master is delaying his coming," and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the lord of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. (Luke 12:42-47).

The contrast is stark but hopeful. Those who remain faithful in watching,

caring for others, maintaining spiritual disciplines, and serving actively will be found "so doing" when the Master returns. Their reward will be unimaginable, including authority over all that he possesses.

But those who abandon their watch, who begin to abuse their responsibilities and indulge in spiritual drunkenness, face certain judgment—the servant who "knew his master's will" but failed to prepare bears special responsibility.

The Comfort of Mutual Encouragement

Paul concludes his teaching to the Thessalonians with words of comfort that apply directly to our mutual responsibility in watching. "Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing." (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

We don't watch alone. The very fact that we struggle with the weakness of flesh while earnestly desiring to remain faithful qualifies us for divine grace and mutual support. Our watching is not perfect, but it is sincere. Our vigilance is not complete, but it is heartfelt.

In our next and final article, Lord Willing, we'll examine the ultimate example of faithful watching through our Lord's experience in Gethsemane, where we see both the cost of perfect obedience and the grace extended to failing disciples.

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

HOW SHOULD WE DESCRIBE HER?

By Kevin Flatley



IT'S no secret that words have power, and some are more powerful than others. While two English words might have similar (or identical) meanings, they often can create different feelings or mental pictures. Think of house versus home. These words illustrate the difference between the concepts of **denotation** and **connotation**. Denotation is how we describe a word's direct meaning or definition. Connotation is how we define the ideas or meanings associated with it. For example, the word "homework" refers to schoolwork done outside of school—that's its denotation. For many young people, the word has a negative connotation, meaning it

gives them the bad feeling of having to do homework when they'd rather be doing something else. This concept is particularly important when reading the Bible, especially when not reading in the original Hebrew, Chaldean, Greek, or Aramaic. If you are, then you have my deepest respect!

To expand on this, let's take a little two-part quiz. Don't worry; it's easy, no grades will be given, and there will be no wrong answers.

Part One:

Consider the following Biblical words. What mental pictures emerge, and what feelings do you associate with them? For the moment, ignore the numbers as we'll get to them later.

ARMY (56)	VALIANT (13)	RICHES (11)
HOST (26)	STRENGTH (12)	WEALTH (10)
FORCES (14)	MIGHT (6)	SUBSTANCE (8)
	POWER (9)	
	STRONG (5)	

These English words don't have identical denotations (definitions), but their connotations (ideas/feelings) are all similar. They conjure images of fighters, soldiers, superheroes, billionaires, and collections of important people. It's hard to describe their connotations without using one of the words themselves, but I'm sure you get the idea.

These are all words from the King James Bible used to translate the Hebrew word **GHAH-YIL'** (# 2428). What about the numbers? They represent the total occurrences of those words used to render that one Hebrew word. I've grouped them into categories with the

same or similar denotations. But these aren't the only English words the KJV used. According to the *Englishman's Hebrew Concordance of the Old Testament*,¹ **GHAH-YIL'** shows up 243 times. In addition to the list above, there are 33 different instances of different translations, each used less than five times. The translators decided to use so many English words to "connotate" various meanings of the word, based on the context in which it appears.

This **GHAH-YIL'** word is used to describe things as varied as Pharaoh's soldiers, the wealth of the sons of Jacob, Joshua's men of valor, Jonathan, both

David and his mighty men, King Saul, and others. It's impossible to look at these words and not see the theme that runs through them. They all refer to, dare I say, something "manly."

Part Two:

Let's look at one of the 33 less-frequently used English words used in the KJV to translate that singular Hebrew word.

Virtuous (3)

What does this word conjure up in your mind? Ethical, godly, well-behaved, empathetic, meek, esteemed or the like? Whatever image it creates, it's hard to see it as synonymous with any of the words in Part One. Now consider three women in the Bible, Ruth *"thou art a virtuous woman"* (Ruth 3:11) and two unnamed women described in Proverbs *"a virtuous woman is a crown to her husband"* (Proverbs 12:4) and *"Who can find a virtuous woman?"* (Proverbs 31:10). These three are the only Biblical characters (male or female) so described in English.

What's the result of this little quiz? It intends to help you understand the importance of connotation in Scripture. Because all the English words in Part One **and** Part Two are translations of the exact same Hebrew word. Yet the KJV translators used a unique English word to describe the women in the Bible to whom this Hebrew word is applied. While it may be clear that it shouldn't be translated

as "army" or "host" (more on this later thought), the context doesn't suggest the need for a unique word. More modern translations of Proverbs 31:10

use more gender-neutral words like "excellent" (ESV and NASB), "noble" (NIV), and "capable" (NRSV).

Proverbs 31:10-31 takes on the familiar Hebrew construction of an acrostic, with each verse beginning with a letter from the Hebrew alphabet (from *aleph* to *tav*). This

format was familiar to the Jews. It occurs 14 times in the Bible, including the entire book of Lamentations and all of Psalm 119. This linguistic tool probably helped the Jews memorize those sections of Scripture. These are also the verses describing the person who has come to be known to us as the "Virtuous Woman." Some see her as an actual person, usually Bathsheba, others as an idealization of womanhood or the church. I see her as a kind of "everywoman," not someone on a pedestal, but a composite that embodies the full potential of women. While being virtuous is something we all should strive for, it does seem to sell short the "Virtuous Woman" of Proverbs 31. Considering her merely as virtuous seems to limit her; what if she were thought of as a woman of valor, or strong, or powerful, or a force?

These are also the verses describing the person who has come to be known to us as the "Virtuous Woman..." I see her as a kind of "everywoman," not someone on a pedestal, but a composite that embodies the full potential of women.

This woman is not limited to what we might think of as “women’s roles,” but takes on a full range of activities, both within and outside the home. If she were writing her own modern skills-based resume, she might highlight the following talents:

- **Interpersonal Skills:** the relationship between the woman and the man displays partnership and mutual respect: “*The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.*” (v. 11).
- **Business Development:** She is active in business ventures, including agriculture: “*She seeketh wool and flax and worketh willingly with her hands.*” (v. 13).
- **Real Estate Development:** “*She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands, she planteth a vineyard.*” (v. 16).
- **Sales Management:** She works in both a retail and wholesale setting: “*She perceiveth that her merchandise is good*” (v. 18) and “*She maketh fine linen and selleth it; and delivereth girdles to the merchant.*” (v. 24).
- **Production and Logistics:** She has a manufacturing facility: “*She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands to the distaff.*” (v. 19).
- **Human Resources Management:** She is a manager of a staff: “*She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household and a portion to her maidens.*” (v. 15) and “*She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.*” (v. 27).

- **Community Outreach:** She cares for the less fortunate: “*She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.*” (v. 20).
- **Strategic Planning:** She makes provision for the future: “*She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household is clothed with scarlet*” [margin: double garments—warm clothing for the coming winter]. (v. 21).
- **Team Player:** She is not merely a doer, ticking off a list, but rather is considerate “*She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life*” (v. 12), wise and kind “*She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.*” (v. 26) and well-regarded “*Her children arise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her. Many daughters have done virtuously [same word], but thou excellest them all.*” (vv. 28-29) and “*Give her the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.*” (v. 31).

Remember the chart from Part One of the quiz? The most common translation of this Hebrew word was “army.” Somehow, it does feel like she is like an army—a one-woman army!

How does she manage all of this? Is she Uber-Woman? Possessor of Super-Powers? No! Psalm 31 tells us the reason she can fully use her many talents. Consider verse 30: “*A woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised.*” She demonstrates the **fear of the LORD!**

This fear is why she is so capable across many disciplines. However, this concept is neither feminine nor masculine. Rather, it is universal, an attribute all people can show. The Bible tells us in many places why the fear of the LORD matters:

The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom. (Proverbs 15:33).

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. (Psalm 111:10).

Behold, the fear of the LORD, that is wisdom. (Job 28:28).

It is fitting that Proverbs opens and closes with thoughts about wisdom and how to get it. *“To know wisdom and instruction; To perceive the words of understanding;”* (Proverbs 1:2) and how *“A woman that feareth the LORD she shall be praised.”* (Proverbs 31:30). The question is, what exactly is the fear of the LORD? We know it is not the usual meaning of fear. In the Bible, fear has a few meanings: something frightening, respect for a superior, awe in the presence

of greatness. The fear of the LORD is all these things. GotQuestions.org puts it this way: “the continual awareness that our loving heavenly Father is watching and evaluating everything we think, say, and do.”² I think this captures the essence of the idea well.

We must recognize God for who and what He is, not who we would like Him to be. Fear of the LORD is seeing God in His majesty, power, and greatness. We may be created in God’s image, but God is not “one of us.” He is as much “otherness” as possible. Wisdom is seeing life from God’s perspective and responding accordingly. Without the fear of the LORD, we tend to make decisions based on our faulty human understanding: *“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways, acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths.”* (Proverbs 3:5-6).

The fear of the LORD can make each one of us a Valiant Woman or a Virtuous Man.

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¹ *The Englishman’s Hebrew Concordance of the Old Testament*, George V. Wigram, Second Printing, May 1997, pp. 423—425.

² [gotquestions.org](http://gotquestions.org/fear-Lord-beginning-wisdom.html), June 9, 2025, www.gotquestions.org/fear-Lord-beginning-wisdom.html

DENY YOUR FAITH!

The Silent Betrayal in Everyday Life

By Charles Cintron

DENY your faith! Go ahead, deny it! Right here, right now! Anyone? Any takers? No? Did I get your attention? Was it my brazen and callous attitude towards your salvation? Could it possibly be because we are out in the open for all to see?

We often think of denying the faith as something loud and dramatic—an outright rejection of God in the face of persecution, like that of the Apostle Peter by the fire on the night our Lord

Jesus was betrayed. And yes, there **are** moments when standing up for our faith may demand public courage. But more often than not, denial creeps in silently. Subtly. In small compromises. In the quiet moments, when no one is looking—or when **everyone** is looking and we fear standing out. We fear being different from the crowd.

Let's consider how we deny our faith not in moments of crisis but in the comfort of everyday life.

The Everyday Denial

Denying your faith doesn't always mean saying "I don't believe in Jesus." It can mean:

- Putting your reputation before your righteousness.
- Saying nothing when others mock God's name.
- Choosing comfort over conscience.
- Letting your computer screen teach you more than your Bible.
- Living Monday to Saturday like a practical atheist, and Sunday like a Christian.

The Apostle Peter didn't plan to deny Christ. He was afraid, the attention was on him and under stressful circumstances, he didn't want to be identified with Him.

How often is that us?

The Soft Extortion of the World

We are surrounded by a culture that does not demand we reject God outright. It only asks that we keep quiet, blend in. The world wants us to be reasonable, not "too spiritual." Keep our convictions to ourselves. Mask our beliefs and our faith in God.

The world doesn't say "Curse God." It says:

- "Don't bring your faith to work—keep that personal."
- "You don't have to talk about God all the time."
- "It's just a show, it's just a joke, it's not that serious."

And slowly, inch by inch, we comply.

We let our prayers grow cold. We put off our readings because we're "too tired." We compromise our standards

to avoid awkwardness. We adopt values that are not ours just to keep the peace. We become silent where we should speak, passive where we should act, and tolerant where we should uphold our values. And all the while, we deny our faith.

The Compelling Nature of Compromise

Compromise sells itself as the middle ground. It says:

- "You can still believe in God—just don't be **so** intense."
- "You don't have to speak up—just be nice."
- "You're still faithful—just be flexible."

It tells you that conviction is too costly, that obedience is too extreme, that truth needs to be edited so it doesn't offend. It doesn't challenge you to **deny** your faith. It simply encourages you to **adjust** it—ever so slightly—until it fits neatly into the world's mold. And by the time you realize what is happening, worldliness has taken everything from you.

The Corruption Beneath the Surface

Compromise can be corrosive. It often begins by softening the edges of your convictions, then it hardens your heart against the Word. It doesn't destroy your faith instantly. It **hollows it out**, leaving behind the shell of religion, while the substance rots away. You still go through the motions, but the fire, the passion, is gone. You still know the verses, but they don't move you. You still say the right things, but you no longer do them. Compromise doesn't ask you to choose evil. It just convinces you to stop choosing good.

Once that pattern sets in, it no longer **needs** to tempt you. You've already taught yourself how to live without full obedience.

The False Safety of Compromise

Compromise promises peace, but delivers paralysis. It makes you feel secure because you've avoided conflict, but what you've really avoided is **faithfulness**. It encourages you to hold hands with both God and the world until you realize the world never intended to hold yours. It was only meant to bind them. It's not a bridge between holiness and worldliness. It's a road away from the cross. It leads, slowly but surely, to spiritual compromise and ultimate ruin.

Compromise Can Be the Language of the Lukewarm

Christ said clearly:

So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. (Revelation 3:16 ESV).

That's not about passion, it's about purity. God doesn't want us to be lukewarm and pretending.

The cost of compromise is not always immediate, but it is eternal. So, beware of what seems small.

Beware of what sounds smart but makes you less faithful. Beware of whatever teaches you how to ignore the cross without ever leaving the pew, because not all denial is dramatic. Sometimes it's just quiet, and it doesn't look deadly at all.

Monotony Is the True Test

We are tested less in moments of heroism and more in the repetition of the mundane. Faithfulness isn't forged on the mountaintop; it's proven in the valley, in the quiet, in the daily choices no one sees. It's when we choose to speak graciously instead of gossiping about others. Faithfulness is when we sacrifice time to study God's Word

instead of watching one more episode on television. It is when we pray for someone instead of scrolling past. It's when we show up to serve, read, and fellowship, even if others don't.

Christ Did Not Deny You

Our Lord knew Peter would deny him. But still, he washed Peter's feet. Still, he prayed for him. Still, he went to the cross. And he has not denied you. Though we stumble, though we fall into silence or fear, he remains faithful. But he also calls us, as he called Peter, *"Do you love me? Then feed my sheep."* *"Follow me."*

Call to Action: Refuse to Deny Him

A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. (Galatians 5:9 KJV).

Compromise is rarely a crash—it's a slide. It doesn't begin with a rebellion, but with a shrug. It whispers, "Just this once," and then it waits. And it **rarely** comes dressed like sin. It may even come dressed like peace, wisdom, and balance. It sounds reasonable. It feels mature. It looks safe. And that's what makes it so dangerous.

So, I ask you, as I ask myself, are we denying Him in the silence of our choices?

*Whoever denies Me before men,
I will also deny before My Father*
(Matthew 10:33 NKJV).

Let us not wait for persecution to test our faith. Let us prove our faith now, in the monotony, in daily life. Let us be bold in our witness, unwavering in our devotion, and watchful against compromise. Because the world is not always shouting at us to fail. Sometimes, it quietly ushers us to sleep. "*Be sober, be vigilant.*" (1 Peter 5:8).

We need to remain clear-minded. Not just avoiding intoxication, but steering away from anything that clouds judgment, such as pride, complacency, bitterness, and worldly distractions. A sober mind sees the world as it truly is: fallen, temporary, desperate. To be vigilant is to stay spiritually awake and aware of all dangers that subtly creep in. It's not paranoia. It's a watchful hope knowing that the real fight in our lives is balancing the physical with the spiritual.

The Apostle Peter's experience teaches us not to be asleep.

And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.
(Matthew 26:40-45 KJV).

Let our eyes be open and sober, not falling to the exploitations of the world. Let us be awake and vigilant, staying spiritually attentive. Let us not deny our faith, whether in times of trial, or quiet times behind closed doors. May God bless you, and may Christ return to see how you contended and persevered for your faith.

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THE RIGHT DIRECTION

I may never reach perfection,
I just need some correction,
And start heading in the right direction.

When His mighty word I love,
And daily seek the will of God above,
I'm heading in the right direction.

When I bring some love wherever I go,
And bring some joy to those I know,
I'm heading in the right direction.

When I focus on others' behalf,
When I laugh with those who laugh,
I'm heading in the right direction.

When gentleness and mercy I keep,
When I weep with those who weep,
I'm headed in the right direction.

When I faithfully carry my cross,
If I count everything as loss,
I'm headed in the right direction.

The Lord will bless me someday,
With a crown that will never fade away,
If I keep heading in the right direction.

By God's grace, I will reach perfection,
And receive the Eternal's redemption,
Because I'm headed in the right direction.

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(Written in 2003)*

TURNING AWAY FROM GOSSIP

When we gossip, we cause division.

By Kate Hewitson



MY goal in writing this article is simply to understand gossip better. Not just the obvious kind we label as “gossip,” but also the more subtle kind, the behind-the-back talk. By that, I mean the kind of conversations that arise when speaking about someone who is not present, which inevitably leads to misunderstandings, judgments, and withholding the benefit of the doubt. The word that comes to mind to describe this is “drama.” I began this study with no one in mind but myself. I need to understand God’s view because, the truth is, this kind of behavior has been part of my life, and it is ingrained in our human nature.

While gossip doesn’t exactly feel right when we do it, it also doesn’t always feel wrong. It’s sneaky and it’s everywhere. It’s normalized. It’s in movies, classic rom-coms, high school dramas, and reality TV. It’s almost become part of our global culture.

Another focus of this study is the kind of talk that quietly damages, even when we don’t mean it to. The sort of talk that creates division without us even realizing it. Because often we just fall into it. Subtly, it becomes a method of bonding, a way to pass time and “catch up.” Sometimes, to be honest, we’re even waiting for something dramatic to happen, so we’ll have something to talk about. For these reasons, I am seeking to understand, not just gossip, but also how it affects us and how the division it causes is relevant to our walk in Christ.

Let’s turn to the Bible to explore the lessons and examples about unity and division, and how the tongue shapes both outcomes. Gossip is generally defined as speaking carelessly or

foolishly about others. The phrase “to be a gossip” often refers to someone in society, sometimes a woman, who engages in this kind of talk. Paul appears to be addressing what may have been a particular challenge for women when he wrote,

Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. (1 Timothy 3:11 ESV).

Besides that, they [young widows] learn to be idle, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they should not. (1 Timothy 5:13 ESV).

Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good. (Titus 2:3 ESV).

Here are a few possible reasons why Paul wrote this way. Firstly, perhaps women are stereotyped as more talkative and less confrontational? Maybe women tend to express their feelings more openly.

The verse “*A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends*” (Proverbs 16:28 NIV) makes it clear that gossip isn’t harmless chatter. It has the power to separate close friends and cause divisions. According to the Blue Letter Bible, the Hebrew word translated “gossip” comes from an unused root meaning “to roll to pieces.” It’s used to describe a slanderer, talebearer, or whisperer, someone who quietly but intentionally spreads harmful talk. In this context, a “whisperer” isn’t just someone speaking softly; it refers to a malicious

person who breaks trust and damages relationships.

Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered. (Proverbs 11:13 ESV).

Let everyone beware of his neighbor, and put no trust in any brother, for every brother is a deceiver, and every neighbor goes about as a slanderer. (Jeremiah 9:4 ESV).

In Hebrew, “slanderer” comes from a root meaning “to go about,” like someone who goes around gathering and spreading tales. These verses remind us how harmful this kind of talk can be, leading to betrayal and breaking trust in our relationships.

The words of a gossip are like dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts of the body. (Proverbs 26:22 NASB).

Here in Proverbs, gossip is described as tempting and hard to resist. It pulls at our desires. Based on what I’ve learned, here’s how I would define gossip: it’s the act of sharing specific, private, and often unnecessary or unconfirmed information about someone behind their back, usually with the intent of harming their reputation. The keyword here is intent. That’s what sets gossip apart from simply confiding in someone or venting. Do you know the difference between venting and gossiping? They might sound similar, but there’s an important distinction. Venting is about expressing your own feelings and experiences. Gossiping is talking about someone else’s life, often without their knowledge and in a way that could hurt them.

Here are a few examples to help distinguish between the two:



Example 1—Venting:

It's been very difficult dealing with the children. I love them so much, but I struggle to make it through the day.

Example 2—Venting:

I was sad to hear there was a party and I wasn't invited. It made me feel unimportant.

Example 3—Gossiping:

Did I tell you what Amelia told me? You won't believe it!

Example 4—Gossiping:

Lili acts like she's better than everyone, but she isn't.

Your intentions matter. Sometimes, we might think we're just venting when we could be gossiping without realizing it. If we're talking about someone and our goal is to make the situation sound worse or add unnecessary details, then our intention has shifted, and that's when it crosses the line into gossip.

I once read that not all gossip is negative. It's possible that sharing facts about others is a form of talk known as "neutral" or "informational gossip." It's usually harmless and can, in fact, help people feel more connected. In many cases, it's a way for friends or family to bond and stay in the loop with what's going on in each other's lives. But this represents non-malicious sharing of information rather than gossip.

Here's an example:

Did you know that Betty recently moved back to Tahiti? She had been living in New Caledonia for

many years but returned to her homeland not too long ago.

In a recent sister's class with the Baltimore sisters, we had a wonderful discussion about how to share "information" without slipping into harmful gossip. One helpful idea was to remember James 1:19, *"Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger."*

On another note, I came across an article in *Psychology Today* saying that we're more likely to gossip around people who share a mutual dislike for someone. This shared feeling can make us feel justified in speaking negatively, as if agreeing with each other gives us permission to talk badly. Gossip in this form often includes exaggeration or the urge to make stories more dramatic or entertaining, even if it hurts the person being talked about.

Gossip can be driven by many things, like our emotions, personal opinions, interpretations, beliefs, and even our unresolved insecurities or need for validation. What is needed is an honest look at our intentions. Be honest with ourselves and pay attention. If you feel like what you're about to say might be wrong, it probably is. So, it's best to avoid that path when you know the kind of trouble it can bring.

Gossip is something God views seriously.

They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness.

They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. (Romans 1:29-32 ESV).

So, when we find ourselves in a moment of temptation, whether it's to share something we shouldn't or to listen in, we can pause and ask: What would Jesus do in this moment? If you find yourself in a conversation where someone is gossiping, remember, you still have a choice in how to respond. Maybe gently saying you're willing to listen if they need to confide in you about a problem, but you will not listen to gossip.

When Paul mentions gossip in 1 Timothy 3:11, 2 Timothy 3:3, and Titus 2:3, he uses the Greek word *diabolos*, which means "false accuser." Interestingly, this is the same word often translated as "devil." It's a strong reminder that when we spread gossip, we can unknowingly take part in wrong that causes harm and division. How could we call ourselves followers of Christ, yet speak in a way that doesn't mirror Him?

But I tell you that for every careless word that people speak, they will

give an account of it on the day of judgment. (Matthew 12:36 NASB).

Jesus reminds us that our words carry weight, and we'll be held accountable for every careless thing we say. That doesn't mean we need to be perfect, but it does mean we need to be intentional and thoughtful about what comes out of our mouths. Scripture encourages us with this reminder, "*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up.*" (Ephesians 4:29 NIV).

Philippians 4:8 offers another helpful strategy: focusing on the good in others. Look for what is true, honorable, lovely, and praiseworthy, and

choose to "*think about these things.*" When our minds dwell on the positive, our words are more likely to reflect grace and encouragement.

Even something small, a quick comment or careless remark, can cause massive destruction, just like a tiny spark can set an entire forest on fire.

The tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. (James 3:5-6 NIV).

When we gossip, we cause division. As followers of Christ, we are responsible for representing God and Jesus in the best possible way.

When we find ourselves in a moment of temptation, whether it's to share something we shouldn't or to listen in, we can pause and ask: What would Jesus do in this moment?

Pride and harshness do not build unity but rather create division.



Division leads to missed opportunities. Here's an example in 1 Kings 12. After King Solomon's death, his son Rehoboam took the throne. Not long after, the people led by Jeroboam came to him with a request. They asked him to lighten the heavy burdens Solomon had placed on them, promising they would serve him faithfully in return. Rehoboam first went to the older, wiser men for advice, and they encouraged him to respond with kindness and to serve the people well. But then he turned to the younger men he had grown up with, and they urged him to be severe. Rehoboam chose the harsh route. Because of that decision, the ten northern tribes rebelled. They rejected the house of David and made Jeroboam their king,

leaving only Judah and Benjamin loyal to Rehoboam. This account reminds us that pride and harshness do not build unity but rather create division. In this case, the division of the kingdom also opened the door to idolatry, ultimately leading Israel away from God. Unity is not just for our benefit; it allows us to glorify God more fully as one body, and helps us do that in a powerful, visible way.

Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made. (Isaiah 43:7 ESV).

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which

binds them all together in perfect unity. (Colossians 3:13–14 NIV).

Love is presented here as the glue that holds everything, and everyone, together in perfect unity. My husband Micah is an arborist, which means he knows and talks a lot about trees! I used to enjoy peaceful, quiet walks. Now every stroll turns into a full-blown tree tour! While most of what he says goes over my head, here's one lesson that stuck with me. Which tree do you think thrives more, a lone tree standing in an open field or one rooted in a forest? The answer is the tree rooted in a forest. Surrounded by others, it stands stronger through storms, acting as windbreakers and supporting each other through their roots, allowing them to share nutrients,

water, and even chemical signals to help one another thrive. Alone in a field, a tree lacks this network and must survive entirely on its own.

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. (Ecclesiastes 4:9–12 NIV).

Just like trees thrive when connected, people are stronger and more resilient together.



For just as each of us has one body with many members... so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. (Romans 12:4-5 NIV).

Like roots intertwined under the forest floor, we are designed to be interconnected and interdependent.

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up. (1 Thessalonians 5:11 NIV).

Mutual support is key to spiritual strength, just like trees sharing nutrients. Remember 1 Corinthians 16:14 (NIV): *“Do everything in love.”* And love isn't just a feeling. It's meant to shape our actions, words, and motives in everything we do. If you find it hard to connect with others and feel tempted to bond over gossip, you're not alone; we've all been there. But there are many more meaningful (and fulfilling!) ways to build real connections. Here are a few simple, but powerful questions we can ask each other:

- What's God been teaching you lately?
- How can I support you this week? (Inspired by Aunt Audrey)
- What's been challenging your faith?

We can also pray together and seek God as a group. Let's encourage each other by sharing something kind or uplifting, reminding people that even if we don't see them often, we still see them, value them, and are thinking of them. Let's be a community that reflects Christ's love in every conversation. Let us not forget that Christ died for our sins. (1 Peter 2:24).

Jesus willingly took the weight of our sins upon Himself. This sacrifice wasn't something forced; it was a loving, intentional act. He took what we deserved (death) so we could receive what we didn't deserve (forgiveness and life).

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV).

We didn't (and couldn't) earn God's love or salvation. It's a gift, given out of His incredible mercy and grace. Time is a precious gift, and how we use it matters. I hope we all choose to spend it in ways that honor God and bring peace to our hearts.

The one takeaway is this: our words carry power. They can either tear down or build up. They can isolate or bring us closer. And while gossip might feel small or even harmless in the moment, it can do real damage, not just to others, but to our own hearts, our friendships, and our unity as a body. God calls us to protect, encourage, and uplift one another. Like trees in a forest stand strong when they're rooted together, we too are stronger when we are united in love, grace, and truth. So, let's be intentional. Let's choose to pause, to pray, and to speak in ways that reflect Jesus. Let's build a culture of trust with God in the center, where love leads, curiosity replaces judgment, and unity becomes our norm.

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THE NEXT REVOLT

By Jason Hensley

A**FTER** the Romans set fire to the Temple and razed the city of Jerusalem, Judaism changed indelibly. But what happened to the land itself? Did it stay the same as it had for centuries? Did its Jewish population still stay in the area?

Hadrian

For a few decades, things in Judea remained quiet. The Jewish population continued to live under Roman rule and acknowledged that any aspirations for independence had been crushed. As one Roman emperor followed another, many of them simply decided to allow Judea to manage its own affairs, with the thought that if the Romans didn't provoke the Jews, the Jews wouldn't rebel.

Nevertheless, Hadrian ascended the throne in AD 117. For about 15 years, he left Judea alone. But, sometime

in the 130s, he began to change Jerusalem. Cassius Dio, writing about 70 years after the event, described it thus:

At Jerusalem Hadrian founded a city in place of the one which had been razed to the ground, naming it Aelia Capitolina, and on the site of the temple of the god he raised a new temple to Jupiter. This brought on a war of no slight importance nor of brief duration, for the Jews deemed it intolerable that foreign races should be settled in their city and foreign religious rites planted there.¹

Another source, written in the late 300s, states that Hadrian forbade the Jews from practicing circumcision.² As can be expected, at the same time, the Jews of the area also revolted. The leader called himself Simon

Bar Kokhba, or by translation from Aramaic, Simon, the son of the star. (This name wasn't an accident. It found its basis in a messianic prophecy: Numbers 24:17). Rabbi Akiva, one of the major rabbis of the time (and also still highly respected today), threw his support behind the rebellion, not simply because he wanted freedom from Rome, but because he proclaimed Bar Kokhba as the long-awaited Messiah. While the Jerusalem Talmud transliterates some of the names differently from how we spell them today, the quote below gives an idea of what Akiva taught:

Rebbi Simeon ben Yohai stated: Aqiba my teacher used to preach, there appeared a star out of Jacob there appeared Koziba out of Jacob. When Rebbi Aqiba saw Bar Koziba he said, this is King Messiah. Rebbi Johanan ben Torta said to him,

Aqiba! Grass will grow from your jaws and still David's son (still has to/will not have) come.³

Though some rabbis disagreed with him, Akiva was such a powerful force in Rabbinic Judaism that many believed Bar Kokhba would bring God's salvation to Israel. And, for a time, it appeared as though he might win. He drove out the Romans from the area, established the last independent Jewish kingdom in history, and even minted his own coins, proclaiming the redemption of Jerusalem.

On the Roman side, this war significantly damaged the Roman army. Cassius Dio states that when Hadrian stood before the Senate, the emperor couldn't bring himself to address them with the customary greeting, "I and the legions are in health," simply because after fighting the rebellion, they weren't.⁴



Image: The front reads "Shimon" while the back reads "for the freedom of Jerusalem."

But, as we know, Bar Kokhba wasn't the Messiah. And thus, his kingdom would not "stand forever." By AD 136, the Romans had killed both Bar Kokhba and Rabbi Akiva. Akiva's death, in

which he, while being tortured by the Romans, shouted out the words of the *Shema*, became a touchstone of Jewish history and an action that gave example to many Jews who would suffer at the

hands of others. For centuries, many Jews believed their role was not to fight back, but to suffer as Rabbi Akiva, proclaiming their belief in one God—they referred to this sacrifice as *kiddush HaShem*, or sanctifying the name [of God].

When working with ancient sources, it's difficult to know exactly what happened, and sometimes to know what happened first. Some historians believe the Jews in the area chose to revolt first. Then, Hadrian began turning Jerusalem into a Roman city and removing all of its Jewishness as a response to the rebellion. Others see the Jewish revolt as a response to Hadrian's changes. Either way, Jerusalem became a Roman city, and one can walk along Hadrian's *cardo* (a main road that ran through the middle of all Roman Cities) in the old city today. Jerome, the Christian monk responsible for the Latin Vulgate translation, describes the carnage of this transformation:

In Hadrian's reign, when Jerusalem was completely destroyed and the Jewish nation was massacred in large groups at a time, with the result that they were even expelled from the borders of Judaea... that being the time when Barcochebas, the leader of the Jews, was crushed and Jerusalem was demolished to the very ground.⁵

From that point on, while Jews still lived in the area of the former Israel and Judah, they no longer lived in Jerusalem. Slowly, different Jewish groups made their way back to the city, but for centuries, Jerusalem took on a Roman character.

When the Land Became Palestine

Depending on the sources we read, we may hear different narratives about the name "Palestine." Some people don't think at all about where it comes from and use the name as a way to give validity to the Palestinians and their quest for statehood. Others argue that Hadrian purposefully changed the name of Judea, which clearly bears a Jewish heritage, to Palestine to spite the Jews.⁶ As is typical, the actual history of the term is more complicated. *Palestine* is simply the Greek for *Philistia*, and thus, the name isn't a reflection of the Palestinians (who are instead named after it), but a reflection of the Philistines, who have not existed since Nebuchadnezzar wiped out Philistia in the late 500s BC

However, even though the Philistines no longer existed in the area, the Greeks continued to refer to that area, including the adjacent Judea, after the Philistines. Herodotus, writing in the 400s, first used the term in his book *Histories*.⁷ His uses don't appear to have any political attachment to them; he simply uses the word "Palestine" to reference the general area and describe its geography. Aristotle also did the same thing.⁸ Perhaps what is most fascinating about this history, though, is that as the Romans began to use the Greek term "Palestine," they continued to do the same thing. Thus, they sometimes called the area Judea, and other times they called it Palestine. Its inhabitants were thus Palestinians. Ovid, the Roman poet famous for his *Metamorphoses*, wrote this description of the people. Consider what group of people he was referring to:

You may make a beginning on the day on which tearful Allia was stained with the blood of the Latian wounds; on the day, too, when the festival recurs, observed each seventh day by the Syrian of Palestine, a day not suited for the transaction of business.⁹

This quote states that these Palestinians didn't work on the seventh day! In this way, the Jews were the first group of people called Palestinians, or inhabitants of Palestine. Josephus wrote similarly, describing the Jews as "the Syrians that live in Palestine."¹⁰ Ultimately, as time passed, the Romans used "Judea" less and less, and instead used "Palestine" more frequently. Many historians attribute this not to Hadrian's desire to spite the Jews but to Hadrian's fascination with all things Greek, thus wanting to refer to the area by its Greek name.

Going through ancient sources allows us to understand what really took place at the time. The name change was not some kind of Roman conspiracy against the Jews. Nor is the name one that necessarily advances Palestinian statehood. Historically, it was the Greek way of referring to the territory, and thus, since many of the inhabitants

of the area were Jews, Jews were the first to be called Palestinians.

Conclusion

History is complicated, and yet by going back through it, we can peel away layers and better understand a region's complexity. We can see how populations shifted, and acknowledge how certain choices, like Akiva's willingness to die for his beliefs, continued to impact later generations. Ultimately, this article focused on the second century and the changes that took place in Judea/Palestine at the time. Those changes laid the foundation for what we see in the region today. As we progress through this series and look more at the nexus between this history and prophecy, we will see the miraculous. At this point, however, the prophecies would have sounded impossible. How could it be that "*Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD*" (Jeremiah 3:17 ESV) and "*Out of Zion shall go forth the law.*" (Micah 4:2 ESV)? No Jews even lived in the city at that time. But when has impossible ever stopped God?

Jason Hensley,
Associate Editor

¹ Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 69.12.

² Anonymous, *Historia Augusta*, Hadrian 14.2.

³ Jerusalem Talmud Taanit 4:5:13.

⁴ Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 69.14.2–3.

⁵ Jerome, *Commentary on the Bible*, Daniel 9:24–27.

⁶ Noa Tishby, *Israel* (New York: Free Press, 2021), 169–170.

⁷ Herodotus, *Histories*, 4.39 and 7.89

⁸ Aristotle, *Meteorology*, 2.3.

⁹ Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, trans. Henry Riley, 1.769–770.

¹⁰ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 10.3.262.

PART 5

HIDDEN TREASURES IN THE TITLES OF THE PSALMS

By Leen Ritmeyer

PSALMS FOR OVERCOMERS



THE LORD'S PRAYER, (continued)

Thy Will Be Done In Earth, As It Is In Heaven.

GOD'S will shall be done, but the question is: are we doing God's will? How can we pray this if we are only willing to do our own and not God's will? We would be hypocrites. How do we do God's will? Grudgingly, if I have to! Or I have no other choice. Or do we do God's will from the heart? Jesus is our example, and he did not come to do his own will:

Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. (John 4:34).

And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. (Matthew 26:39).

It teaches us to accept God's will, whatever difficulty comes our way. God is our Father, as we said at the beginning of this prayer, and He knows all our affairs. It is our task to do God's will in whatever circumstance we find ourselves, knowing that God is in control. We may not always like it, but God may test our faith.

In Psalm 119, we pray therefore:

Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight. (Psalm 119:33-35).

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread.

In Hebrew, our daily bread is *lehem chukeynu*—the bread we need daily, not what we want. We should not ask for an opulent dinner, but only for what we actually need. Some suggest it means the Breaking of Bread, for Jesus is the "bread of life," but I believe it simply refers to our daily nutritional needs. God feeds every living thing:

*Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father **feedeth** them. Are ye not much better than they? (Matthew 6:26).*

*Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the **desire** of every living thing. (Psalm 145:16).*

It takes away the worry of how we shall eat tomorrow. It does not mean that after having prayed this communal prayer, we can sit down and do nothing, and the food miraculously appears on our table. God is not spoon-feeding anybody. He also does not stock the shelves in the supermarket. We need to work for our food, just as the Apostle did:

*Neither did we **eat** any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you...For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he **eat**...Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and **eat** their own bread. (2 Thessalonians 3:8, 10, 12).*

This prayer also makes us share our food: Give **us** our daily bread. God is a merciful God:

He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth. (Psalm 104:14).

I often conclude my prayer for food with: "*Who giveth food to all flesh: for his mercy endureth for ever (to the Age).*" (Psalm 136:25).

And Forgive Us Our Debts, As We Forgive Our Debtors

The previous request was to give us our daily bread. This one asks Him to forgive our sins. The word "*debt*" can mean a financial or moral debt. It has also been translated as "trespasses" or "sins."

Sin, in its wider interpretation, is "missing the mark," a failure to realize the true aim of life, a failure to do what we should, and a failure to obey God's commands. We need to remember that what is not of faith is sin. Jesus did not tell the disciples that **only sinners should say this prayer; he said, "After this manner therefore pray ye."** That is to say, it is a prayer that everybody should pray, for all have sinned. In fact, when we ask for forgiveness, we acknowledge our guilt, as we have seen earlier in Psalm 32:5:

I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

Using the Psalms makes us realize that when we sin, we first of all sin against God. David realized this in his sin with Bathsheba, for he prayed to God:

Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. (Psalm 51:4).

The Lord's Prayer also teaches us to forgive others. God's forgiveness depends on our forgiving of other people. If we don't forgive others, neither will God forgive us. David said as much in the same Psalm 51:

Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. (Psalm 51:12,13).

Both the Lord's Prayer and the Psalms teach us to love our neighbor as ourselves, for God's attitude toward man is determined by man's attitude toward his fellowman. Forgiving others brings us closer to God.

And Lead Us Not Into Temptation

What does that mean? How can we ask this of God when we know very well that the world is full of temptations? Never to be tempted would appeal to our human weakness and fear of danger. But we know that human existence without temptation is impossible.

The word for "*temptation*" in Greek means to test or to try, and not to tempt somebody to sin. God certainly doesn't tempt any man to sin, James says as much:

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. (James 1:13).

The testing of our faith, however, is necessary. Job said:

*He knoweth the way that I take:
when he hath tried me, I shall come
forth as gold. (Job 23:10).*

Psalms 17 is a most helpful prayer to stay away from the temptations of the world:

A Prayer of David. Hear the right, O LORD, attend unto my cry, give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips. Let my sentence come forth from thy presence; let thine eyes behold the things that are equal. Thou has proved mine heart; thou hast visited me in the night; thou has tried me, and shalt find nothing; I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress. Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer. (Psalm 17:1-4).

In praying "lead us not into temptation," or other expressions found in the Psalms, we pray that God will give us the strength to overcome temptation and not be overcome by it.

But Deliver Us From Evil

Whether you call evil the Devil, or just plain badness, it does not matter. We know that evil stands between God and man. It destroys that beautiful relationship we can have with God through Jesus Christ.

"Deliver us from evil" acknowledges our danger and inadequacy to deal with evil alone. We ask God's help not to be overcome by evil, realizing that we cannot overcome evil by ourselves. Our life in the Truth depends on God's protective power to save us.

Especially, Psalm 119 is full of expressions to help us:

I am thine, save me; for I have sought thy precepts. The wicked have waited for me to destroy me: but I will consider thy testimonies. (Psalm 119:94,95).

I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies. I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word. Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word. (Psalm 119:146-8).

The best way to be delivered from evil is to prayerfully meditate on His Word, as the same Psalm proclaims: "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day." (Psalm 119:97). The Lord's Prayer then ends with acknowledging God's power and glory:

For Thine is The Kingdom, and The Power, and The Glory, For Ever. Amen.

This is not a new ending to a prayer. David already said this when he had prepared many materials for the new Temple:

Wherefore David blessed Yahweh before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee,

and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. (1 Chronicles 29:10-13).

Thine is the Kingdom: We all look forward to that great time of peace on earth when Christ and the saints shall rule the world in righteousness. We need to pray this prayer constantly in preparation for our task of bringing people back to God in the Kingdom to come.

And the power: The Greek word is *dunamis*, and from whence we have dynamic and dynamo. Using this phrase, we acknowledge that God is both willing to listen and act on our behalf.

And the glory for ever: We remind ourselves that with this prayer, we present ourselves in the presence of the divine glory. It means that we must live a life in reverence for the Almighty God, and if we do this right, we can trust in His power to answer our prayers and give us an inheritance with all those who love His name.

Amen. This is a Hebrew word that means "It is faithful," "It is true." We don't have to say "Amen" to our prayer, only to the prayers of others. This beautiful prayer then binds us together as brethren and sisters in Christ who are trying to overcome sin with God's help and look forward to a new life in the Kingdom and a new body that will last forever.

Usually, we say, "In the name of Jesus, Amen," or something like it.

I was taught to end my prayers with that phrase in the Dutch Reformed Church. In fact, most Christians end their prayer with that formula, which appears to sanctify what they have just prayed about. Jesus, of course, said: "*If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.*" (John 14:14).

In the next chapter (John 15:16), however, Jesus clarifies this: "*Whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.*" In the Greek, it says, "*Whatsoever you may ask.*" We may not ask for anything we like, but only what we are allowed to ask. How do we go about that? What does it mean to pray in the name of Jesus? I believe it is not a sanctifying formula to end our prayers, but a concept. We can learn the concept of saying something in somebody else's name from David.

David sent out ten young men, and David said unto the young men, Get you up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name: And thus shall ye say to him that liveth in prosperity, Peace be both to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast. And now I have heard that thou hast shearers: now thy shepherds, which were with us, we hurt them not, neither was there ought missing unto them, all the while they were in Carmel. Ask thy young men, and they will shew thee. Wherefore let the young men find favour in thine eyes: for we come in a good day: give, I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David. (1 Samuel 25:5-8).

When David's young men came, they spoke to Nabal according to all those words in David's name and ceased. The word "*ceased*" here means "rested" or "stopped." In other words, they said the precise words of David and added nothing to them. This is the Biblical concept of saying something in somebody else's name. If we use the words of Jesus in the Psalms, we do not have to tack on the formula "In the name of Jesus, Amen," for we have just done it! Jesus tells us to end our prayers with, "*Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever, Amen.*"

Jesus commanded us to pray in his name. Let us therefore do it, knowing that even:

When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do. (Luke 17:10).

To conclude, here are two examples of how the Lord's Prayer could be used as a pattern for our prayers, using the Psalms.

Our Father, our God, and the Rock of our salvation. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy Name. Thy **Kingdom** is an everlasting **Kingdom**, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations. Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfies the **desire** of every living thing.

Bring thou me out of my distresses. Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins. We pray that Thou mayest soon make Jerusalem a praise in the earth in that Kingdom that is Thine and the Power and the Glory, Amen.

Our Father, who art a father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows. Yahweh's throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men, for thou art King for ever and ever. Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy Name. The eyes of all wait upon Thee, and Thou givest them their food in due season. Thou, Yahweh, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee and have mercy upon us, O God, according to thy lovingkindness. For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory for ever, Amen.

We all feel a bit inadequate (I certainly do) at composing prayers to God. But this method has worked for us, and I offer it as a suggestion. When we do this, we follow in the footsteps of David, Solomon, Hannah, and Mary, who used parts of the Psalms to make their prayers. In so doing, we are "*instructed in the Songs of the LORD*" and can say Psalm 119:54:

Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.

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PART 3

TITUS: TRANSFORMED BY GRACE

Leaders Who Look Like Christ—The Qualification of Elders

By Andrew Weller



IF you had to choose one word to describe the kind of person who should lead an ecclesia, what would it be? Paul uses one word twice in Titus 1:6-7. It's not "successful." It's not "gifted." It's not even "capable." It's "blameless," or some translations have "above reproach."

If anyone is above reproach. (Titus 1:6).¹

For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. (Titus 1:7).

That's the first and primary qualification for elders in the ecclesia. Not perfection. Not performance. But a life of integrity. Someone whose life is lived out in the open. Someone whose public role is supported by a private life of godliness. This article will explore what Paul says about these men. Who are they? What are their households like? How do they relate to others? How do they handle the Word of God? Because Titus 1:6-9 gives us not just a checklist, but a portrait. It's a picture of the kind of shepherd Christ wants for his flock.

These qualities are not just for elders. They're a model for all of us. But they are essential for those entrusted with spiritual oversight because they represent Christ to the community. When leaders reflect him, the body flourishes. When they don't, the body suffers.

Blameless at Home

Paul begins where we might not expect—in the home. The very first criterion is this:

The husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. (Titus 1:6).

Leadership in the ecclesia starts with leadership in the home. Before anyone is entrusted with the care of a spiritual family, they must have shown faithfulness in their natural family. This condition doesn't mean that every child of an elder will be perfect. It does mean that the tone, discipline, love, and leadership in that home reflect gospel priorities.

The phrase "husband of one wife" is not about marital status or remarriage after a death. It speaks to faithfulness. Is this man loyal? Has he been true to his marriage covenant? Does his wife trust him? Does he treat her with the love Christ shows the ecclesia?

Then Paul mentions children. The language he uses is "believing children" and not "wild or disobedient." This description indicates that these children are being raised under godly discipline. Again, this is not about controlling every decision of a grown child, but about the pattern established in the home. Does this father shepherd his children with grace and truth? Is the gospel central in the household?

Because here's the truth: it is easy to hide in public. It is much harder to fake it at home. If a man is disrespected by his own children, he's not ready to shepherd God's. This matters, not because elders are perfect fathers, but because the home is the proving ground of character. If he is neglecting his family, no amount of ecclesial effort makes up for it.

What Elders Must Not Be

Paul now shifts from what an elder should be to what he must **not** be. Before listing the traits to look for, Paul eliminates a few disqualifying qualities:

For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain. (Titus 1:7).

This is not a throwaway list. Every one of these characteristics is a spiritual red flag, not just for leadership, but for discipleship in general. But when these are present in leaders, they do far more damage.

Not arrogant. Elders cannot be in it for ego. They do not need to always be right, nor use their role to assert their superiority. The spirit of Christ is not proud. Leadership is not a platform for personal significance; it's a calling to die to self.

Not quick-tempered. This one stings. Anger is not always loud. It can be cold and simmering. It can flare up in meetings, in emails, in conversations. But an elder must not be ruled by emotion. He must be gentle, patient, slow to speak, slow to become angry.

Not a drunkard. This requirement is about self-control. Elders must not be known for overindulgence, whether in alcohol or anything else. It's about freedom from addiction and clarity of judgment, not a legalistic ban. A man who is not disciplined in his personal life is not fit to guide the spiritual lives of others.

Not violent. Paul's language here includes both physical aggression and domineering leadership. An elder cannot use force to get his way, not physical, emotional,

verbal, or spiritual force. The shepherd's rod is for protection, not intimidation.

Not greedy for gain. If an elder is driven by money, even subtly, he cannot be trusted with spiritual things. This obligation includes not just overt corruption, but a heart that finds value and identity in wealth or material success.

Every one of these disqualifying traits reflects a heart problem. If left unchecked, they always bear bad fruit in the community. Paul's warning is clear: do not put these men in charge, no matter how talented they are. The damage will come.

What Elders Must Be

Now that Paul has cleared away the dangers, he moves to the kind of man Titus should seek out and appoint. He lists five qualities:

But hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. (Titus 1:8).

These are not advanced traits for the spiritual elite; they are the ordinary marks of Christian maturity. But in elders, they must be especially visible.

Hospitable. Elders must open their homes as well as their hearts. Hospitality is not entertainment. It's the willingness to welcome people into your space, your time, and your life. A closed home often reveals a closed spirit. An elder needs to make time to prioritize shepherding and ensure it is connected with his life. A hospitable man reflects the welcome of Christ.

A lover of good. This phrase is one of the most beautiful in the list. An elder must be someone who delights in what is good, who treasures Scripture, loves holiness, and rejoices in others' growth. If someone constantly gravitates toward controversy, conflict, or critique, he is not qualified.

Self-controlled. Elders must have mastery over their impulses. This qualification doesn't mean they never struggle. But they are not driven by emotion, lust, appetite, or ambition. They have learned to say "no," even to good things, for the sake of what is better.

Upright. This element speaks to integrity. Elders must be just and fair in how they treat others, consistent in their words and actions, and trustworthy in both private and public. People should instinctively feel safe around them.

Holy. This point is about "Godwardness." Elders live in reverence. They love the presence of God. They pursue purity. Their lives are not compartmentalized into Sunday faith and weekday compromise. Instead, they are marked by sincere devotion to God.

Disciplined. A man without discipline is like a house with broken walls. An elder must have structure in his life—habits of prayer, study, worship, and service. Discipline isn't glamorous, but it is the trellis that allows spiritual fruit to grow.

None of these traits emerge overnight. They are the fruit of grace at work over time. But when they are present, they form a strong, steady foundation for leading others. The elder's life becomes a living sermon, not of perfection, but of perseverance.

Holding Firm to the Word

Finally, Paul ends this list with what might be the most public aspect of an elder's role—his relationship with the Word of God.

He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.
(Titus 1:9).

Notice the order here. First, the elder must "*hold firm*" to the trustworthy word. That's not just intellectual agreement. It's a personal conviction. It's the difference between being able to quote Scripture and being shaped by it.

Elders are not innovators. They are not free to rewrite or adjust the apostolic teaching to suit modern tastes. Their role is to hold firm, to stay anchored, to the Word as taught. That phrase reminds us that the Word has a shape, a structure, a truthfulness that must not be distorted. The elder's strength is not in novelty, but in fidelity.

But it doesn't stop there. Elders must also be able to teach. That doesn't necessarily mean they need to give public talks every week. But they must be able to explain the gospel clearly, answer questions patiently, and help others grow in sound doctrine.

They must be able to rebuke. Rebuke is a hard word. It means confronting false teaching, having the courage to speak when others stay silent, and caring enough about the flock to say, “That’s not what God says.”

This kind of leadership is deeply countercultural. In a world where every opinion is equally valid and personal correction is seen as judgmental; the elder’s task will often be uncomfortable. But love does what is hard. And Paul is crystal clear: elders must be men of the Word, shaped by it, faithful to it, and ready to defend it.

It’s no coincidence that Paul ends here. The Word is the lifeblood of the ecclesia. Elders must be their faithful stewards.

Conclusion: Christlike Leadership

Paul’s picture in Titus 1:6-9 is not a checklist for spiritual elites. It’s a portrait of Christlikeness. These qualifications are not arbitrary; they are grounded in the gospel. They reflect what Jesus is like.

Jesus is the faithful husband to his bride. He is the perfect Son who obeyed His Father. He is slow to anger, rich in mercy, holy, upright, and full of truth. He welcomed the stranger. He loved what was good. He taught the truth with clarity and authority. He gave himself for the sheep.

So, when Paul says an elder must be above reproach, he is really saying: he must look like Jesus.

This perception is why leadership in the ecclesia is first about godliness. It’s not about presence or charisma. It’s about character. It’s why the work of recognizing and appointing elders must be done prayerfully, patiently, and with full awareness of what’s at stake.

A man may be brilliant in Bible study, clever in speech, or reliable in logistics, but if he is domineering, impatient, proud, or unreliable at home, he is not qualified to lead the flock. Paul doesn’t say this to exclude people harshly, but to protect the body.

The challenge to us is twofold:

First, we must value and support leaders who quietly meet these qualifications, even if they don’t stand out. The most godly elders are often the least noticed. They serve faithfully, love deeply, and lead by example. Let’s honor them.

Second, we must all aspire to these qualities. Eldership is not a status to be achieved, but a standard of maturity to be pursued. These traits, hospitality, self-control, integrity, and love for good, are not for the few. They are the shape of a life transformed by grace.

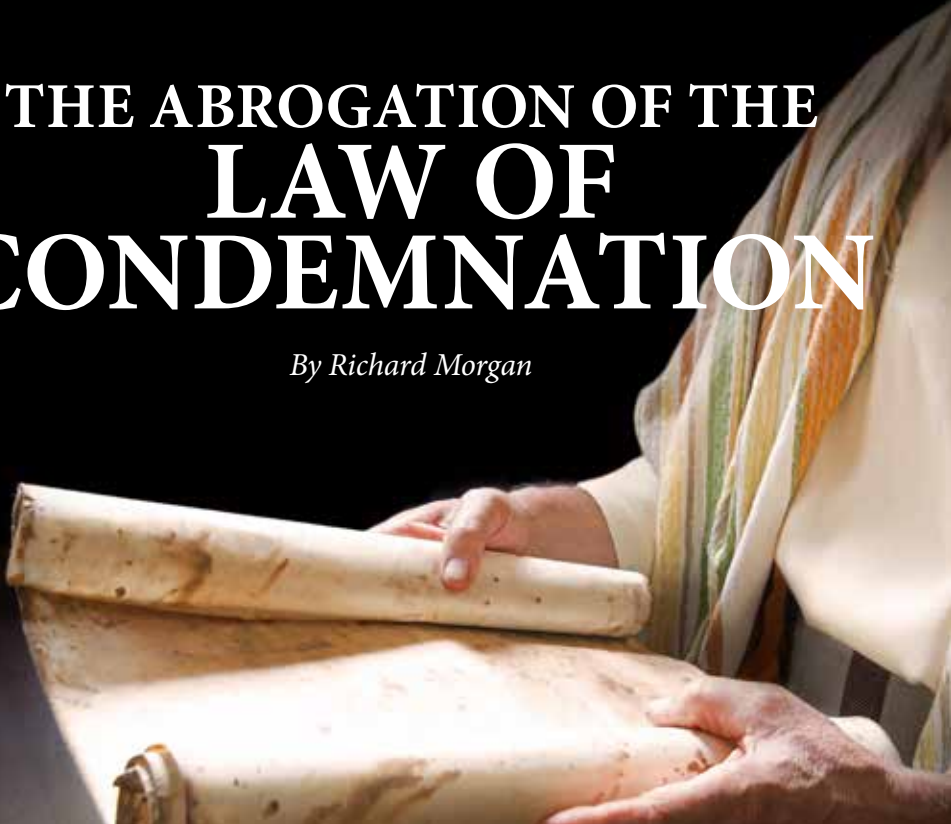
So, as we continue this journey through Titus, let’s recommit to seeking leaders who reflect Christ, and becoming people who do, too. The health of the ecclesia depends on it. More than that, the glory of Christ is displayed through it.

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

THE ABROGATION OF THE LAW OF CONDEMNATION

By Richard Morgan



SOMETIMES the language in the BASF is a little challenging to understand, and one such case is found in Clause 8:

That these promises had reference to Jesus Christ, who was to be raised up in the condemned line of Abraham and David, and who, though wearing their condemned nature, was to obtain a title to resurrection by perfect obedience, and, by dying, abrogate the law of

condemnation for himself, and all who should believe and obey him.

Jesus is said to “abrogate the law of condemnation” with the clause using a word that we don’t tend to use very often, if at all. Let’s see if we can reverse engineer this clause and figure out what was on the mind of those who penned it.

First, the clause emphasizes the idea of condemnation. Jesus “was to be raised up in the condemned line of Abraham

and David” and was “wearing their condemned nature, so he could “abrogate the law of condemnation.” Clearly, this has reference to the fact that *“flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God”* (1 Corinthians 15:50), and we are all born into a situation where our fleshly nature leads to death. Jesus, in sharing that nature, was also condemned to death.

The phrase “abrogate the law of condemnation” therefore refers to how Jesus solved our shared problem. A quick perusal of the Scriptural passages associated with Clause 8 tells us this is what was intended by that phrase. For instance, here are some of the verses listed:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil. (Hebrews 2:14).¹

For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. (Romans 6:10).

For then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. (Hebrews 9:26).

In each of these verses (along with others listed pertaining to the clause), the writer speaks of our predicament, followed by the solution in Christ. We were condemned, but have been released from that condemnation through his death and resurrection.

That’s pretty straightforward, but why did our pioneer brethren choose to use the unusual word “abrogate?” I asked

ChatGPT what the word meant in the late 19th century:

In the **late 19th century**, the word “**abrogate**” carried essentially the same meaning it does today: **To annul, repeal, or abolish by authoritative action** (especially a law, custom, treaty, or regulation).

It comes from the Latin *abrogare* (“to repeal, annul”), and English usage of the term had already been stable for centuries by the 1800s.

For example, you’ll find it in **19th-century legal and political writings** in contexts like:

- “to abrogate a treaty” (terminate or formally cancel it),
- “to abrogate a statute” (repeal a law), or
- “to abrogate a custom” (do away with an established practice).

Sometimes it was also used in a **broader moral or rhetorical sense**, meaning “to put aside, treat as non-existent, or ignore.”

That’s fine as far as English usage at the time the BASF was penned, but does it have any Scriptural justification?

Indeed, it does, and our first clue is in one of the first verses listed with the clause:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil. (Hebrews 2:14).

Jesus destroyed the devil, but the word does not mean to destroy in the sense of annihilation. The writer used the Greek word *katargeo*, which means “to

render inoperative,” or “abolish,” which is the idea of abrogation. Let’s see how the word is used throughout the New Testament, which will help us appreciate a little more what Jesus accomplished.

The first occurrence of the word is in Luke 13, where Jesus tells his Parable of the Barren Fig Tree. The owner of the fig tree, upon learning that the tree was not bearing any fruit, told the vinedresser, “Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?” (v. 7). The phrase “use up” is our word *katargeo*. If the fig tree represents Israel in this parable, then there was something about the nation that was abolishing the ground’s ability to support a fruitful tree. What caused that to happen?

The word *katargeo* is a favorite one of Paul’s, and he uses it in a passage that helps us understand the parable. In Romans 4, as he often does in his writings, he contrasts law and faith. In verse 14, he writes, “For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void [*katargeo*].” While this is a counterfactual statement, the point is that the Jews “pursued a law that would lead to righteousness.” (Romans 9:31).

Jesus’ point in the parable is that a law-based religion abolishes one’s ability to be fruitful.

On the other hand, Paul first uses the *katargeo* in Romans 3:3 when he asks, “What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify [*katargeo*] the faithfulness of God?” The fig tree could not bear fruit, but that does not abrogate God’s purpose, which stands firm despite Israel’s best efforts to frustrate it.

Later in the same chapter, Paul makes an important clarification: “Do we then overthrow [*katargeo*] the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.” (v. 31). It is not the Law itself that Christ’s death abrogated. It

is the **law of condemnation**.

To put it another way, it is the effect of a law-based religion (condemnation) that is done away with in Christ. Jesus himself said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” (Matthew 5:17). In Christ we do not follow the letter of the law, but what we are meant to be following is its spirit (2 Corinthians 3:6). We fulfil the law by loving God and our neighbor

(Romans 13:10; Galatians 5:14).

Paul consistently uses *katargeo* to illustrate what Christ accomplished through his death and resurrection. He dealt with the three main enemies in our lives: law, sin, and death.

Continuing in Romans, Paul tells us that “our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing [*katargeo*], so

Jesus destroyed the devil, but the word does not mean to destroy in the sense of annihilation. The writer used the Greek word *katargeo*, which means “to render inoperative,” or “abolish,” which is the idea of abrogation.

that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.” (Romans 6:6). In some sense, therefore, our body of sin has been rendered inoperative, or has had its power over us abolished.

But how can this be? After being baptized into Christ, we still sin, and there has been no physical change to our bodies. How can it be rendered powerless?

The answer lies in the context in which Paul, in the previous chapter, tells us that “the law came in to increase the trespass.”

(Romans 5:20). There is something about being under law that incites us to sin, as Paul states plainly in chapter 7, “our sinful passions, aroused by the law.” (v. 5). The abrogation of the law of condemnation, therefore, does something to affect us spiritually. Paul writes in chapter 6, “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.” (v. 14).

Being under grace, rather than under law, dethrones sin so that “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1).

Paul uses *katargeo* two more times in the context of explaining how the law of condemnation has been done away with in Christ. Using the analogy of marriage broken by the death of a spouse, Paul writes, “For a married

woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released [*katargeo*] from the law of marriage.” (Romans 7:2). Paul continues to relate this to the law by saying, “But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.” (v. 6).

Outside of Romans, Paul uses the word *katargeo* several other times in similar contexts. In 2 Corinthians 3,

speaking of the contrast between the Old and New Covenants, he used *katargeo* four times. Each time he says the Old Covenant has been “brought to an end.” (vv. 7, 11, 13) and “taken away” (v. 14). In Ephesians 2:15, Paul explains that Christ made peace “by abolishing [*katargeo*] the law of commandments expressed in ordinances.”

It is important to note here that this is the law “expressed in

ordinances,” the word for “ordinances” is “dogma.” In this passage, therefore, it is not the Law itself that God abrogated but how it was used by people, like the scribes and Pharisees, to make dogmatic assertions. In other words, it is the **effect** of the Law that is done away with in Christ. Putting Romans, Corinthians, and Ephesians together, we can draw the following conclusions:

We are not under the Law of Moses in the sense of it being a manual that defines our religion and whereby, because of our inability to keep the Law, we are condemned.

- The way someone under the Law was condemned has been abrogated in Christ.
- The Old Covenant, established by the Law, has been abrogated in Christ.
- The way the Law was used in dogmatic assertions, often to condemn others, has been abrogated in Christ.

We are not under the Law of Moses in the sense of it being a manual that defines our religion and whereby, because of our inability to keep the Law, we are condemned. Instead, in the New Covenant, the spirit of the Law (2 Corinthians 3:6) becomes internalized (Hebrews 8:10).

When Paul wrote to the Galatians, he did so to a group of brothers and sisters who were tempted to return to a law-based religion. In Chapter 3, he explains that the Law as part of the Old Covenant *“does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void [katargeo].”* (v. 17). That is to say, a law-based religion does not render the promises of God inoperative. God has always saved

people by grace, and the Old Covenant itself illustrates the impossibility of being saved by keeping a law. In fact, having a law-based religion means *“You are severed [katargeo] from Christ, you who are justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.”* (Galatians 5:4). Just like with our first reference from the parable, the meaning here is that a law-based religion abolishes one’s ability to bear the fruit of the spirit, something which Paul expands on in the rest of the chapter.

The wonderful news for us is that this abrogation of the law of condemnation has brought with it the solution to our greatest problem. Again, it is Paul who tells us that Christ *“abolished [katargeo] death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”* (2 Timothy 1:10). He also writes, *“The last enemy to be destroyed [katargeo] is death.”* (1 Corinthians 15:26).

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

Editor's Note: Bro. John Pople wrote *"To Speak Well of God—An Exposition of the Book of Job"* in 2009 (available through tidings.org). I was pleased to receive this paraphrase he recently completed of the story of Job.

THE BOOK OF JOB: A PARAPHRASE

By John Pople



CONSIDER righteous Job: a Gentile with no known lineage living in the wilderness of Uz. He has seven sons, three daughters and many flocks and herds: a considerable fortune. He serves God flawlessly, but only because he fears God will punish any misstep with instant destruction. So terrified is he of God that he offers sacrifices for his sons and daughters just in case they have spoken ill of God in their hearts while they celebrated together.

God rejoices and laments.

“My dear son Job,” He reflects. “Your flawless life is so pleasurable, yet your fear distances you from Me. How can I transform your discipleship so we connect through loving trust, not your fear?”

Job has three friends: Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, all children of Abraham within the Israelite diaspora, wandering to and fro (Job 1:6-7) in the wilderness. Job’s established wealth rankles with them.

“I’d constantly praise God too if He gave me Job’s life,” they connive, for Leviathan, the Beast of Pride, had consumed them. “Disappointing,” thinks God. “That old dragon has devoured them. How shall I rescue these lost children of Mine from his belly?”

God formed a plan.

One day, in the assembly of the faithful, the three friends find they can’t stop noticing Job and their seething jealousy boils over. Everyone thinks Job is amazing, but if he were destitute, “He’d curse God in a heartbeat!” they agreed.

“I hear your slander,” frowns God. “Watch this.”

God strikes Job. In the country, raiders capture his herds and flocks, and in the city (Deuteronomy 28:16), a hurricane strikes the house where his children are gathered. Horrifyingly, all ten are killed.

Job collapses, yet his faith is unshaken.

“The Lord has given and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be His Name.” The friends are wrong, but their Pride, ever God’s opponent, stops them from admitting it.

Another assembly convenes, and God again causes Job to be inescapable from his friends’ notice. Pride drives them to shift the goalposts:

“Job’s health hasn’t suffered, though, has it? If he loses that, he’ll curse God for sure,” they pondered. “You think?” muses God. “You’ve learned nothing yet, so I’ll enact this evil plan, too.”

God smites Job with painful boils and a wasting illness, where he can barely digest food. He becomes so disfigured that he’s mocked when he goes out and rebuffed by his wife when he comes home. (Deuteronomy 28:19).

“Speak ill of God and die!” she despairs. “That’s foolish talk,” Job replies. But privately, he feels abused. “Since God considers me trash,” he mourns bitterly, “I guess the trash heap is where I belong.” He sits in the dust and ashes (Job 42:6) of his burn pile in silent protest.

The three friends visit Job. They’re genuinely horrified to see his devastated body; totally unaware they are the catalytic cause. They sit with him in silence for seven days.

Job laments:

“Why was I even born? Just let me die. Let those who curse days curse my birthday—those who are ready to rouse Leviathan!” he exclaimed. “Be careful what you wish for,” cautions God, quietly.

Round 1

Eliphaz breaks the silence.

“May I venture a word?” he interjects. “A man can’t be righteous before God, but God will never harm the innocent. You’re a champion to the poor and needy; you’ve always supported them in their distress. Appeal to God, and He will have to remove all affliction from you because of your piety. We’re very clever men; you must heed us.”

“But I haven’t committed any sin!” cried Job. “Prove me wrong! Lord, why should I be chained up like a Monster of the Deep? Isn’t my time short enough before I go to the place of no return?”

“Oh, stop blustering innocence!” snapped Bildad. “God would never bring curses on the guiltless; He’s not unjust. Your children were all sinners, so God killed them, simple as that. If you really were pure and upright, you wouldn’t be suffering.”

“A man can’t be righteous before God, but God rules however He wants,” countered Job. “I hate my afflictions because you use them to condemn me, but I can’t confront God. Lord: depart from me so I can enjoy a moment without you and die.”

“Is no one going to rebut this folly?” snorted Zophar. “You’ve sinned so much that even God can’t remember it all! But if you confess and repent, God is obliged to restore you.”

“Do you think you’re the only ones with brains?” grated Job. “I know all this! But these are no mere accidents that have befallen me; every creature on Earth knows this is God’s Hand. You smear me with lies. Why don’t you just shut up? Even a tree can be resurrected via a new shoot, but I can’t; my life is expiring fast! I trust in God, and if He would only stop torturing me, I’d have my day in court and prove my innocence.”

Leviathan, the Beast of Pride, stirs, roused by Job’s self-justifications. His predatory instincts scent a new target.

Round 2

Eliphaz is stung. He commanded Job to marvel at his wisdom and was spurned, his ego scarred. Pride amplifies his indignation:

“Who would talk such nonsense?” Your speech is entirely born of sin. Wisdom is on our side: Moses himself explained how curses would come to the wicked—precisely the way they’ve come to you! My superior wisdom must be heard.”

“You’re worthless comforters, the lot of you!” cried Job, equally riled. “Come on, fight me again; none of you are smart enough to defeat me!”

“You think we’re stupid?” snarled

Bildad. “At least we know how to recognize a wicked man: all his children get killed and everyone is rightly appalled.”

Job is breath-taken, yet inflamed, by Bildad’s viciousness.

“How long will you keep attacking me?” he cried out. “I know my Redeemer lives and I’ll see Him before I die—with my own eyes! How my heart yearns for that day! You delight in hounding me, but you three should be in fear; the sword of judgment is coming for you!”

“Is someone dishonoring me?” pontificated Zophar, pompously. “My wisdom reassures me that God always destroys the wicked immediately.”

“Really?” said Job in amazement. “I wish He would! Until then, how is your stupidity any comfort?”

Round 3

“So you think God is punishing you for being a good guy?” Eliphaz spat. “Your wickedness is endless! You’re a predator to the poor and needy; you’ve always persecuted them in their distress. Return to God; only then will He restore you.”

“How am I supposed to do that?” said Job. “If I knew how to find Him, I could easily prove my innocence.”

“A man can’t be righteous before God: blabbered Bildad redundantly. “In fact...”

“Enough!” shouted Job, “Especially from you! What stunning wisdom you’ve all brought forth! You don’t understand God’s power at all, do you? He destroyed Egypt in the Red Sea, and that was just the fringe of His might! Let’s be clear: God has treated me unjustly; I haven’t sinned at all. You three are wrong: my integrity is a shining example; I’ll never rebuke myself!”

Job continued:

“Man has unearthed many priceless jewels from the natural world, but only God knows where the jewel of wisdom lies. Man’s only way to wisdom is fearing God.

How I loved the days God favored me! Feeling Him close gave me everything I wanted, and everyone respected me. But now I’m a joke: God savages me cruelly and refuses to answer my pleas. Yet I never sinned! I walked a perfect line precisely because I knew God would slaughter me otherwise. If I’ve done anything wrong let God destroy me! I hereby subpoena Him—even He can’t bring any indictment against me. I will crown myself and stride up to Him like a prince!”

And thus, it happened. Job, the righteous man, fought Satan in the wilderness. Satan, Leviathan, the Beast of Pride, won as always. Righteousness can never defeat Pride: worse, it can form a gateway to Pride. Leviathan notches another victory: Job is clamped in his powerful jaws, poised to be

swallowed, just as he consumed the three friends long before. God delays rescuing Job because Job has unwisely subpoenaed Him, and God won't mislead anyone into thinking He can be summoned.

An intercessor is needed. Enter Elihu the Buzite, who comes first (Matthew 17:10) to prepare the way in the wilderness (Isaiah 40:3) for the Word of God to be received. Elihu has listened patiently to the whole debate. He's angry because Job devolved into speaking well of himself rather than God, and the friends, far from helping Job with wise counsel, spouted self-glorifying nonsense instead. He rails at them.

"I let you three speak because you're older than me and I thought we'd hear wisdom. Apparently not! So, it falls to me to advocate for God and correct Job. I won't show favoritism because I fear God.

Job, understand this: I'm not better than you. But you said God is unjust and refuses to answer your cries. That's not right: God speaks to us; but sometimes we must learn to listen differently. And even if He does terrify us, it's only to keep us from Pride. I want you to be exonerated, Job, but for that to happen, I must straighten some things out (Isaiah 40:3). God is just. You're wrong to accuse Him of injustice and cruelty. He can use calamity to develop people, and only those who don't heed Him perish. Finally, Job, remember to praise His work. Though His ways are beyond our understanding, His approaches can be perceived—

just like this thunderstorm that's building up."

The way is made straight (Isaiah 40:3). Job can now hear God. Thunder detonates the air, and from amidst the very lightning bolts, God speaks:

"Who dares to call My actions unwise? You're the one who lacks understanding! Lady Wisdom herself witnessed Me form the Universe and lauded My works (Proverbs 8). I forged the elements, constrained the Proud Sea, and choreographed the ecosystems in all their complexity. Were you there to hear her joyful acclamations? No!"

God also remembers Job's calamitous condition, languishing in Leviathan's maw. His tone changes.

"Do you have much success controlling wild beasts, Job? Think on that a while. Consider the land beasts: the lions, wild goats, wild donkeys, wild oxen. Can you tame any of them? Or the beasts of the air: the raven, ostrich, hawk, and eagle? Can you control wild beasts, Job?"

Job is broken. His life is destroyed and, even worse, God seems completely uncaring, asking off-topic questions about his mastery of nature while ignoring his plight. He gives up.

"Whatever. I call to You for help, and all You do is highlight my impotence, ignoring my distress. I'm done."

But God knows His excellent servant will see the truth he hasn't yet noticed.

"No, Job, don't play the victim! Come and see (John 1:39). Can

you humble a Proud Man? Can you tame that Man's Pride? If so, I'll be the first to admit you don't need Me. Let Me show you the Wild Beast that has been here all along.

Look at Behemoth, whom I made as part of you. One so stubborn that his bones are like iron and bronze. The immovable object. But look even farther, look into that Proud Sea I chained in place the Day Earth was born. Ah, there he is! Leviathan, Job! Pride himself! Behold that indomitable monster. You think any man can control that? The thrashings of self-glory, that irresistible force: a steel-plated Goliath armed with missiles of lightning and fire! He crushes even the bronze and iron of stubbornness in his wake. Pride answers to no one but Me, Job. You crowned yourself a Prince, but in whose royal court did you serve? Mine? Alas, no. Look now, I give you the King of Pride!"

Revelation! The Satan unmasked.

And brilliant Job sees it immediately. Sees not only that Pride has seized him, but also how God's genius directorship has used his suffering to save his fallen friends. This Gentile without father or mother (Hebrews 7:3), who learned obedience through suffering (Hebrews 5:6-8), sees God work the salvation of his friends through his afflictions; the mechanism by which their pride has been isolated for judgment and destruction.

Job marvels at God's supremacy:

"Surely, I spoke rashly of things I hadn't seen or understood."

His discipleship is transformed to a new level; never again will his godliness derive from the terror of Divine Destruction. In his flesh, he has seen God's Redeeming love at work with his own eyes, not those of another (Job 19:25-27) and his honored role as priest within it.

"My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you," he blissfully declares. Joy floods through him, seeing that God had never abused or abandoned him. But wait: he's still sitting in the dust and ashes of his trash pile: the location he specifically chose to showcase God's injustice. Oops.

I despise and repent of dust and ashes!" he adds rapidly, springing off the ashes heap, never to settle there again.

Job heard God's second speech **one time**—and thereby immediately understood both speeches. He saw the Satan exposed in the vision presented in two forms: Behemoth and Leviathan. He understood the vision was given to him in two forms because the Judgment of the Satan had been firmly decided by God, and God would do it soon (Genesis 41:32). Immediately, in fact.

"I am angry with you and your two friends; you have not spoken well of me, as my servant Job has. If Job intercedes for you, I will let you live; otherwise, you will pay for

your folly of not speaking what is right about me, as my servant Job did.”

As ever, Satan does not escape God’s rebuke. But Satan’s erstwhile three hosts/victims are saved by God’s plan, given the cooperation of His priest in Melchizedek’s order: righteous Job. Job thereby silently transmits God’s greatest message for the world: the suffering of a righteous man brings salvation to unrighteous men. This, in turn, reveals who we’ve been considering this whole time: Jesus the Christ, whose priesthood Job had been spirited out of nowhere to model. And the suffering of this righteous man, Messiah, triggers salvation for innumerable unrighteous, indeed for the whole world.

Yet Job’s greatest delight was still to come.

God doubles Job’s former fortunes, providing twice as many flocks and herds. Yet in a curious twist, Job only receives the same number of children as

before: seven sons and three daughters. As the years tick by, and his wife’s fertility window closes, Job gradually sees he won’t receive the double-portion of children as he did with the animals. Transformed, Job doubtless trusts completely that God isn’t short-changing him. What profound joy fills him as this final truth blossoms within him. Job sees the reality of resurrection! He realizes he can only have fourteen sons and six daughters if his deceased children live again one day.

Job heard the promise God spoke so softly, in the still small voice in which all the greatest truths are shared. He saw the Resurrection Day to come and rejoiced in the glory it portends. He rejoiced most of all in the One who planned it and will perform it.

We do indeed have an awesome God.

*John Pople,
San Francisco Peninsula Ecclesia, CA*



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TWICE recently in our publications, once in *Christadelphian Tidings*, I have come across the recommendation that private prayer be said in kneeling position.

I thought I should speak up for those who are not able to kneel. Kneeling is something which has been absent from my accomplishments for nearly thirty years. If I get down to ground level, I will only get up with help. Assistance is not always available. Personal prayer is supposed to be private, and I do not think it is appropriate to depend on someone for assistance, nor is it always convenient.

My prayers are nonetheless sincere. I humble myself gladly, in bent posture, before the great and mighty hand of the Creator. He will return to me the ability

to kneel in His Kingdom if that is His intention.

Perhaps such references to kneeling could please be tempered in future with a little parenthesis for those no longer able. I speak for all in my situation.

David Welch

Teignmouth Ecclesia, UK,

long-time subscriber to The Tidings

Editor's Note: We sincerely thank our Bro. Welch for his letter. We fully agree with him that physical acts done in prayer are not what is essential, but rather the humility and sincerity of heart. Thank you, brother, for reminding us to show greater sensitivity on this issue.



TEXAS CHRISTADELPHIAN CAMP AND CONFERENCE CENTER

AS we all realize, we are indeed living in the last days before our Lord's return. Places of refuge for us and our young people are more important than ever before. Over the last nineteen years, we have enjoyed the blessings of the Texas Christadelphian Camp and Conference Center, lovingly and more easily referred to as T4C. Located almost centrally among the five sponsoring Texas ecclesias, this camp was built from the ground up by the ecclesial members of Texas, young and old alike. Our Heavenly Father has blessed us with numerous study weekends, work weekends and over nineteen Texas Youth Conferences. The Youth Conference is generally held in the last week of the year for those seventeen and up and/or baptized. We have had many attendees from all parts of North America, Australia, New Zealand, and the U.K.

We currently have a 40'x100' main building encompassing a large meeting area, a full kitchen, and restrooms with shower facilities. We also have separate dorm buildings for men and

women, a concrete court for basketball, pickleball, and other games, and a large fire pit area. There is a pond for fishing and canoeing, and many acres available for hiking, softball, volleyball, etc.

The success of the T4C camp has, from the beginning, been made possible by the generous financial support from ecclesias and individuals worldwide and by the tireless donations of time and effort by the local brothers, sisters, and young people from the sponsoring Texas ecclesias. As we all know, the daily costs of owning and maintaining anything keep increasing. Electricity, water, sewer, propane, and insurance rates have risen dramatically. Building upkeep, future building plans (such as a small structure for a speaker's quarters), landscaping projects, and RV campsites are always on the to-do list. Unfortunately, these projects are sometimes delayed because of a lack of funds.

If our Lord remains away, what better investment can we make than in a place where not only our young people but also brothers and sisters of all



ages can gather in peace and safety to be strengthened in the bonds of fellowship? We aim to raise \$35,000 to put towards the speaker's cabin, restrooms, and dormitories. With this thought in mind, we, the T4C Committee, humbly request financial donations for the continuation of the T4C camp. This assistance from the community from all areas of the globe will help ensure we can continue this

most worthwhile effort our Heavenly Father has blessed us with.

May our Lord's return circumvent this request; if not, may He continue to bless our efforts until His return.

*On behalf of the T4C Committee,
Bro. Mark Ishman,
Secretary*

Committee Members:

Brethren Larry Beutel,
Paul Burkett,
Kainon Irons,
Nate Daniels,
Stan Isbell

Send Financial donations to:

Bro. Dave Gadberry
4310 Wyanngate Dr.
Spring, Texas 77373

If anyone would like to donate via Zelle, the name on the account is Texas Christadelphian Camp and Conference Center, and the email address is: t4cccc@outlook.com

There is also a Venmo account available: venmo@mark-ishman-1

THE NEW FRONTIER FOR PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL

By Geoffrey Smith

Editor's Note: Bro. Geoffrey Smith, from the Ware Ecclesia in the UK, wrote the following article. He shares some important information about a new Williamsburg Christadelphian Foundation (WCF) program, and also provides helpful insights into the world of digital preaching. Bro. Geoff is exceptionally qualified to write this article, having been a double Emmy award winner and documentary professional for over thirty years, many of them at the BBC in London.

THE Williamsburg Christadelphian Foundation (WCF) is launching a major new outreach initiative on YouTube, one of the world's largest digital platforms. This article discusses the approach we're taking on YouTube and why. Even though we're using a 21st-century digital tool, the approach conforms with the general principle of Jesus' own preaching. A second, upcoming article will show how our YouTube videos connect those seeking faith with a panoply of resources to help their faith progress. It will also show how you can be involved.

Jesus gave us a timeless imperative: "Go into all the world and proclaim the

Gospel to the whole creation." (Mark 16:15). For centuries, Christians did this in person, meeting one individual or small gathering at a time. Today, the internet allows us to reach millions of people instantly. As we know from the Parable of the Sower, however, reaching individuals is one thing; growing genuine faith is another.

Jesus followed a simple but powerful principle in his preaching: Meet people where they are. He met them where they were physically: public spaces, synagogues, temple courtyards, open-air locations, the roadside and private homes. He also met them where they were socially and culturally. Like us,

his audience felt more comfortable in familiar places, which made them more receptive to his message.

Above all, Jesus met people where they were in how he spoke to them. Perhaps the most significant way he did this was with parables—short, relatable stories illustrating profound spiritual truths.

Research groups like Barna Group tell us many people in the Western world are now looking for something beyond the material. More people, particularly young people, believe the secular world is increasingly failing them. These seekers want to know more about God and Jesus. But there is a big caveat. The seekers mainly want to find out about



These stories often used everyday situations and characters to convey complex ideas.

Why the heavy reliance on stories? Jesus knew the real power of communicating in stories is that our brains process them differently from factual information. Modern neuroscience confirms that stories engage multiple areas in the brain, including those related to emotions, sensory experiences, and even motor skills, and this leads to a much more immersive experience, one that we will remember.

What can we learn from our Master about the best way to preach today? We must meet people where they are and then use the power of stories to introduce the uninitiated to the Gospel message.

This principle squares with everything we know about our present world.

God on their own terms, starting with where they are in their life journey. At least initially, that does not include a conventional Church setting with sermons and study. (See this link for more findings about faith seekers today: www.barna.com/the-open-generation)

Where are these seekers, people on the cusp of discovering real faith? No doubt many YouTube users are faith seekers. Every month, more than 2.5 billion people view YouTube, two-thirds of whom are under 45. Even if Christian faith material interests only 0.1% of this potential audience, that is already 2.5 million viewers. Raise that to a still insignificant 0.5% and you have 12.5 million interested people we could reach.

To use YouTube to spread the gospel, one of the first decisions we faced was whether to base our video content

on traditional community preaching methods or to change to another model. Having worked in professional broadcasting for the past thirty years, I have seen a quantum shift in how people consume media. Before the widespread use of social media, many people accepted a professional broadcaster or media narrator as a presenter of “objective” truth. But those days are gone.

As social media took off, suddenly everyone could present their own version of the truth online. “My truth” became a byword. This development had a powerful impact on how people consume online information as the “subjective” became dominant. Being vain creatures, people became enamored with likes, validation, and instant fame. Meanwhile, people grew much more skeptical of the authority of mainstream broadcasting. Some individuals even noticed that being controversial (expressing a different “truth”) soon gave them more hits and perceived importance online. In the monetized world of YouTube, it even made them more money. If a high enough number of viewers click on a post because it is deliberately provocative, the amoral algorithms underlying social media will then feed that to even more people, and it grows exponentially, regardless of whether it is true or not. In all, this downward spiral has led to what many call the “Post-Truth Society.”

Broadcasters and visual storytellers have reacted to this changing landscape by fully embracing the power of subjective stories. This resonates well with social media users, who are used to people speaking their “own truth.” In short, the new norm for communicating through

digital platforms is personal testimony.

Further reflection leads us to the truth that Jesus and his Father are the pre-eminent storytellers. All known human stories derive from seven basic story types, or archetypes. Each of these archetypes derives from God’s creative genius, and they are the basis of the powerful stories in the Old and New Testaments. Simply put, “stories” are God’s chosen way of communicating with us. Is it any wonder then, that human stories built on His archetypes and made accessible to us through platforms like YouTube are so impactful? Given this change in the media landscape and the underlying cultural shifts, and the strong foundation of scriptural precedents, we concluded that storytelling would also be the best way to capture viewers’ interest in faith.

What does this mean for this new outreach initiative? We consciously decided to film personal and heartfelt stories of genuine faith given by real people—and to do this at a high-quality standard. Think about the last time you were watching a film or a TV program, and someone made an impression on you. Almost invariably, this was because their story resonated with your own emotional experience. They “let you in,” as we say. Today’s viewers look for these shared experiences to not feel so alone in the world and to learn from the experiences of others. Our faith stories need to do the same to meet our audience where they are.

In many Scriptural stories, the strength and deliverance God provides in response to faith shine a powerful new light to those suffering through their own life crises. Seeing such faith in action may encourage viewers to

embrace a belief in God, reignite a lapsed faith, or strengthen an existing one.

This is the primary reason we have chosen to film personal stories of faith. As we add to the Big Leap YouTube Channel, we will reflect all genders, backgrounds, and experiences, both the dramatic and the everyday. As Jesus showed, we think the story is the most powerful initial means of sharing the Gospel's good news in this new forum. Just look again at the first few sentences of Jesus' parables, and you find an intriguing first hook of a story that immediately drew in his audience.

Once we have powerful stories to tell, how do we capture and retain our audience's attention? We consulted with a Christian YouTube expert to explore the best answer. He quickly stressed the make-or-break importance of the video's title, the thumbnail image used with that title, and the first thirty seconds of the video. If the title and/or the image get a viewer to click through (experts consider 5% a good rate), the next major hurdle is the video's first 30 seconds. Most YouTube videos lose over 60% of their potential audience in this critical window by not paying attention to what matters, namely, giving viewers something personal and meaningful to keep them watching.

When does solid Bible instruction and study enter this bold new initiative? The short answer is that it comes later, not when people are just starting their faith journey. Just as Jesus spoke differently to his disciples than to the masses he often addressed, and just as Paul in 1 Corinthians 3 makes a distinction

between milk and meat for different levels of spiritual maturity, we too need to nurture those who are just starting to explore what Faith can mean, rather than possibly alienate them with too much Bible doctrine immediately.

As someone who came into our faith community from outside, I am very passionate about giving this priceless gift to others. These videos are not primarily for us as baptized Christadelphians, though they can certainly inspire us. They are also not meant to be compared to doctrinally based preaching material that still has many valid uses for those who are more spiritually mature (just as we see in Paul's letters to baptized believers).

In conclusion, WCF's outreach initiative aims to heed our Master's imperative to preach the Gospel and to follow his principles of meeting people where they are with the enduring power of faith stories. We pray for your blessing on this effort. In the next article, we'll show how we connect faith seekers with resources and personal connections that help them start a lifelong journey of faith.

(to be continued.)

*Geoffrey Smith,
Ware Ecclesia, UK*



A VISIT TO PANAMA

By Tim Drepaul

IN August 2025 I visited Panama with my son, Bro. Caleb, and my dad, Bro. Clive. It was not the first time my Dad had visited Panama. He and my late mom (Sis. Christine) made several trips there. In fact, we heard so much about the country of Panama from them that we had to plan a trip. My first impression of Panama was how similar it is to Guyana, where I was born. The climate is hot, but not humid, and there is plenty of greenery all around.

The first meeting was a joint Bible Class held at the Colon Ecclesia, with members of the Panama City

Ecclesia. Colon has fifteen members (six brothers and nine sisters) and there are eight members in Panama City (three brothers and five sisters). Bro. Clive led the class on the Levites, which had to be translated to Spanish. It was very interesting, and there were some good discussions during a nice lunch prepared by the sisters. On the following Sunday, we attended the Panama City Ecclesia, where I gave the exhortation, being translated by the very capable Bro. David Timm. The fellowship was very nice there and plenty of good food also.

I want to suggest that anyone visiting Panama bring an exhortation or a Bible class with you so you can share it with the members. There is a definite need for speaking brethren, especially in Panama City.

Speakers Needed

I want to suggest that anyone visiting Panama bring an exhortation or a Bible class with you so you can share it with the members. There is a definite need for speaking brethren, especially in Panama City. Panama City only has three brethren, and one of them, Bro. Jose, has a heart condition and unable to attend. We are praying he will be well enough to attend soon. Just recently he was placed in the intensive care unit for treatment after a mild heart attack. The young people there in both ecclesias need a lot of encouragement, and there

is work to be done to guide them and give instructions for baptism.

It is very easy to get around in Panama, and not too costly. Taxi fares can be negotiated prior to your ride anywhere. They also have a very efficient Metro railroad system which we rode around a few times. Buses run often, and are very cheap compared to some big cities. The Panama Canal is an amazing place, and well worth visiting. We were able to visit two of the three locks where very large container ships pass through from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean, and the other way around. It was a great experience.

The Big Question

Will I visit Panama again? The answer is yes, God willing. I find the place very interesting and beautiful, but the members are very nice, hospitable and friendly. They made us feel very welcome and one of the sisters even took some time off to show us around Colon, for which we are so thankful. May God bless the ecclesias there and all those who labor in this part of Central America.

*Tim Drepaul,
Brooklyn Ecclesia, NY*



David Timm and William Lackwood

UPCOMING TRIP TO ISRAEL

By Ivor Southgate

Sea of Galilee

BRO. Ivor Southgate is organizing an exciting tour to Israel from May 7-18, 2026, Lord willing.

Locations to be visited include: Caesarea, Mt Carmel, Megiddo, Beit Shean, Jezreel Valley, Lower Galilee and the Sea of Galilee, Northern Israel, Banias (Caesarea Philippi), the Dead Sea, Ein Gedi, Masada, Samaria region, Tel Lachish, Ekron, Jaffa, and in Jerusalem the City of David, the Old City, and Yad Vashem (World Holocaust Remembrance Center).

On this tour you will enjoy wonderful fellowship with the group, as well as brothers and sisters living in Israel.

For further information, please email Bro. Ivor at:

iandmsouthgate@gmail.com

A visit to the Holy Land is an experience like no other.

*Ivor Southgate,
Bracknell Ecclesia, UK*

KENYAN MISSION VISIT

By Dave Jennings

Nairobi, Kenya

BRO. Simon Tarypally of the Shadnagar Ecclesia, Hyderabad, India, travelled to Kenya between November 2024 and January 2025 for several gatherings. The main event was the Kenyan Christadelphian Bible Youth Camp. However, he also visited other regions of Kenya during his trip.

Christadelphian Worldwide Praise and Worship Program

During the pandemic lockdown period, Bro. Simon began a project called “The Christadelphian Worldwide

Praise and Worship Program.” This program is a weekly Zoom meeting that involves many brothers and sisters from over thirty-five countries. These meetings have fostered strong bonds of fellowship. I have participated in a few, and it is wonderful to have brothers and sisters worldwide sharing in singing, reading, and praise. It was during these Praise events that Bro. Simon developed an initial connection with the Kenyan brothers and sisters.



The National Kenyan Youth Camp (Bro. Simon on the far left.)

Since 2020, Kenyan Brethren have video-recorded beautiful Swahili hymns and sent them to the Praise and Worship Program. The group was really touched by the music of the Kenyan brothers and sisters and their amazing vocal harmonies. Bro. Simon was invited by Bro. Jacob Mutunga and the Kenyan Committee to speak at the Kenyan Bible Youth Camps. His theme was “Living a Life for Christ.” The talks focused on having a balanced, practical, and spiritual life in following Christ.

Bro. Simon and Bro. Jacob Matunga travelled to six regions in Kenya for the camps: Nairobi, Matuu, Mombasa, Kitale, East Inland, and back to Mombasa, the last of the camps. There were participants from Congo (DRC), and Burundi.

The first camp was the “National Kenyan Youth Camp,” which was organized for youth eighteen years of age and up. The other classes were given by native Swahili speakers, Bre. Jacob, Sammy, and Zakayo Mutunga.

The group next traveled to the Likoni Ecclesia in the Mombasa Region for the Second Youth Camp, which Bro. Zakayo Mutunga and his ecclesia organized and hosted.

On that Friday, they hosted the “Praise and Worship” Zoom meeting live broadcast from Kenya. On Saturday, Bro. Simon gave a talk on “Living a Life for Christ,” followed by much singing and fellowship. The following day, there were three baptisms at Likoni Ecclesia, Mombasa. The baptisms were performed at the Indian Ocean. The beach was a short one third mile walk from the Likoni Ecclesia, so the whole ecclesia walked together to the baptism.

Bro. Simon gave the exhortation on Sunday at Likoni, on “Baptism and the New Life,” with the three new members in mind.

Next, the group travelled to Yatta, Matuu region, about 186 miles by car. This was to attend the first Agape in Action-sponsored Youth Camp. It was a good time and fellowship. The Camp was already full of young people. Most were in their early teens and above, around 14 and above.

There was a wonderful Song & Praise Night at the Camp, and the young people demonstrated their talents by singing. Bro. Jacob hosted the “Crazy Olympics” and “Sports for Youth” program, which included such games as



Baptisms at MajiMoto Springs



Baptisms in the North Rift Valley

“Slippery Football,” “Thug or War,” and many more. Bro. Simon exhorted on Sunday on the subject of “Having Belief Based on Jesus’ Resurrection and Life.”

On the fourth week, Bro. Simon travelled with Bro. Vincent to the North Rift Valley Region. The camp venue was at full capacity. Each camp had new people, new faces, and new ways of singing. The study talks went really well. The group met the elders of the ecclesia, Bro. Issac Kapa (CBM Chair for North Rift) and Bro. Simon Wafula, Director. The venue was at a CMaD Venue School, where the Agape Youth Camps were organized.

On Sunday morning, there were twenty-six baptisms at the Camp. Baptisms were done at the large Athi River, which flows nearly 150 miles from the City of Nairobi.

Bro. Jacob delivered the Sunday exhortation, and CBM members Joshua

Kweye, Simon Wafula, and Issac Kapa organized the farewell arrangements. Over 450 participants attended this Camp!

The last week of the trip was spent at Maji-Moto Springs, Mombasa Region, a nearly 500-mile trip. There, they experienced the largest congregation of youth, with more than 600 attendees and another 250 ecclesial members. Bro. Simon exhorted on, “I am the Living Bread.” While they were in Maji-Moto Springs, there were seventeen baptisms. The group had a wonderful time, with sports, singing, fellowship, and warm love.

Bro. Simon highly recommends that those interested in visiting or serving in Kenya contact the Kenyan CBM Link Brother, Bro. Jeremy Morgan. His email is kenya@cbm.org.uk.



Dave Jennings

Thoughts on the Way

God Moves in a Mysterious Way

HYMN 142 is one of my favorite hymns. I believe it is good to base an exhortation on a hymn, especially when the Bible references may be traced. We are told to exhort one another in "*psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*." (Colossians 3:16). So, when we sing with one another, we are also exhorting one another.

One of the benefits of our Christadelphian hymnbook is that all the hymns are based on the Bible. This is partly because a significant portion of the words have been composed by Christadelphians, and partly because the words of non-Christadelphians have been selected only when they are truly Bible-based.

The words of Hymn 142 were written by the poet and non-Christadelphian, William Cowper, pronounced "Cooper," (1731-1800). Throughout his life, William Cowper was frail and emotionally sensitive. At an early

age, he lost his mother, after which he suffered a mental breakdown. He spent time in a mental institution, and in later years, he continued to be plagued by depression. But in the times between such spells, he devoted himself to reading the Bible and composing hymns that are characterized by a strikingly vivid use of Bible imagery.

Something To Consider

It may be that Cowper, with his poor physical and mental health, saw himself in the story of Job. So, like Job, he too was also asking God, "Why? Why? Why am I suffering, and not getting satisfactory answers?" The Book of Job, with its observations, may have led Cowper to write the lyrics to the hymn, "*God Moves in a Mysterious Way*".

Cowper's Hymn 142 praises the one God, who dwells in and rules over all parts of His creation. As we look at the hymn, we see that:

- Stanza 1 is about the sea.
- Stanza 2 describes things under the earth, and
- Stanza 3 describes the heavens, while...
- Stanza 4 discusses the crops and plants that grow in the earth; and
- The final stanza is a summary, exhorting us to consider all God's work.

The hymn is based largely on Job 28. Its theme is that one day, God will make everything plain to us.

This is not only an idea found in Job 28, but also one of the main points in the whole Book of Job. It is God's central theme when He finally speaks directly to Job.

The suffering Job asks, "Why? Why?" in ever-increasing pain and bewilderment. Job's angry complaints come very close to sin. We shouldn't be too hard on Job, however. Most of us haven't come close to experiencing the depth of suffering and loss of family that Job had.

Toward the end of the Book of Job, God reveals Himself to him. Ironically, even when He speaks directly to Job, God doesn't give him point-by-point answers to his questions about his losses and trials. Instead, God tells Job to look at the world around him, with its natural phenomena: Job, were you there when I created the heavens and the earth? Can you feed the wild animals? Can you explain how the child grows in the womb? Can you tame the mighty beasts and sea-creatures, and

get them to do your will? In short, and rather bluntly paraphrased, God tells Job: "I am God, and you are not!"

Evidently, Job finds that answer satisfactory, for he repents "*in dust and ashes*" (Job 42:6), and then he is forgiven for his indiscretions and his speaking against God. God, at last, blesses Job once more. Even then, Job gets no definitive answer from God as to why he needed to suffer as much as he did. Instead, the real answer is: "Job, you let Me worry about that!"

God's answer is not much different from the parents' answer, familiar to every child. The child asks, "Why? Why? Why do I have to go to school today? Why do I have to eat my broccoli? Why do I have to go to bed at 7 pm? Why? Why?" The parent says, "Because I said so!" Or perhaps, "I'm the parent, and you aren't."

Which is another way of saying, "Trust in me to do the right things with your life, and one day, I will explain it all to you. That will be the day when you will be prepared to understand what I will tell you. Until then, you'll just have to be patient and believe in me."

It is a hard answer to accept. At every stage of our lives, we imagine ourselves to be so intelligent that we can understand the Bible as we read it. But we can't, evidently! God tells us, "You can't handle the facts! I'll tell you what you need to know for now. The rest will have to come later."

Let's take a look at what this hymn is all about.

Stanza 1: The Sea

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
and rides upon the storm.

The profound thought of this stanza is the image of God's footsteps in the sea. Paul concludes a main section of his letter to the Romans with praise to God, in these words:

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! (Romans 11:33 NIV).

The wisdom of God, Paul says, is in the "depths" of the sea, and it is "unsearchable" or "mysterious." It is a place where man can scarcely venture without sinking into oblivion. There was a time when the Israelites followed the footsteps of God through the sea. That was when He led them out of Egypt. Psalm 77 alludes to this:

Your path [Oh, Lord] led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron. (Psalm 77:19-20 NIV).

The footprints were unseen because, after the glory of God led the Israelites through the seabed, the waters closed over their path, drowning the Egyptian army that attempted to follow them there. The only way we are safe in the "depths" of the sea is when our Heavenly Father takes us by the hand to lead us. Even there, we must stay close to Him, just as the flock of sheep had to stay close to the shepherd. Those who attempt to walk through that "sea" on their own initiative, like Pharaoh's army, will surely sink and drown in their own pride and ignorance.

Stanza 2: Under the Earth

Deep in unfathomable mines
of never-failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs,
and works His sov'reign will.

Here we get even closer to Job 28, an extended parable. The miner tunnels underground to find the precious metal ore or gems which are hidden from ordinary view, where "*wisdom be found.*" (Job 28:12 NIV). Wisdom cannot be bought, yet it is worth far more than any gold or jewels:

God understands the way to wisdom, "*and he alone knows where it dwells.*" (v. 23). It is buried, as far as natural man can see. It can be found in the wonderful word. In "*unfathomable*" places. We cannot reach the "*depths*" where God's wisdom is hidden!

Elsewhere, however, Job himself has spoken about this theme, for he says, in Job 23:8-10 NIV:

But if I go to the east, he [God] is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find him. When he is at work in the north, I do not see him; when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him. But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.

There is an irony here, and it contains a powerful exhortation. Wherever Job seeks to find God, he fails: "*I look for Him like I might seek a man, but He is never there.*" However, even though Job cannot "*find*" God, Job is never out of God's sight. God is always with him, seeing him, and watching over every step he takes. "*Even though I can't see him, He sees me, and He knows the way that I take.*"

God is always there, though never seen. All the while, Job is asking his questions and seems to get no answers, and looking for the face of God, he seems to find nothing. All that time, God was mining and extracting the most precious metals from Job's life: *"When He has tested me, I will come forth as gold!"* Out of the unfathomable mine of human nature, God by His never-failing skill is extracting and refining His own special treasure: the

which He is seeking. We thought we were seeking God and His wisdom, but all the while He was seeking us and developing our wisdom! In His providential guiding of our lives, our heavenly Father has been molding our character, putting that character to the test, purifying and preparing it for eternity with Him.

This scenario reminds us that God's work of "creation" did not end on the sixth day. It is an ongoing work of

**Wisdom is not so much the "object" one finds
somewhere along the way. Rather, it is the "journey"
one takes in the quest for that wisdom.**

tried faith of His servant Job, a faith that is like gold tried in a furnace (1 Peter 1:7)!

The treasure to be desired, as Job 28 (and Proverbs) says, is *"wisdom,"* but it is not wisdom in abstract. Instead, it is wisdom that has been tried and tested, traveled in the way of God, and sought for God: *"He knows the way I take."* (Job 23:10).

What a wonderful thought, and what a remarkable irony! Wisdom is not so much the "object" one finds somewhere along the way. Rather, it is the "journey" one takes in the quest for that wisdom. It is through the journeys of our lives in the Truth, and arising out of those journeys, that God Himself, in His wisdom (what William Cowper calls His "bright designs" and His "sovereign will") extracts the "treasure"

"creation," called in the New Testament the "new creation" (Galatians 6:15; Ephesians 2:11-22; 4:17-24). By His "never failing skill" God is turning us into something worth preserving, something worth His love and time and effort. *"Behold, I create all things new."* That includes all of us!

Stanza 3: The Heavens

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take.

The clouds ye so much dread
are big with mercy, and shall break
in blessings on your head.

From a discussion of "wisdom" being mined out of the earth, the Book of Job moves to a consideration of the heavens. Elihu finally speaks, and he describes a God who is beyond our understanding, even as the phenomena of the sky are beyond our understanding or control.

How great is God—beyond our understanding! The number of his years is past finding out. He draws up the drops of water, which distill from the mist as rain; the clouds pour down their moisture and abundant showers fall on mankind. Who can understand how he spreads out the clouds, how he thunders from his pavilion? See how he scatters his lightning about him, bathing the depths of the sea. (Job 36:26-30).

The storm clouds bring rain, which nourishes the earth and humans. But those clouds can be frightening, even to the children of God! In Job 37, Elihu seems to be describing, in great detail, an approaching storm (vv. 1-5, 11-13). Closer and closer it comes, and fiercer and fiercer it grows, until finally the Lord Himself speaks out of the storm (Job 38:1).

The scene here is similar to the one described in 1 Kings 19, where the prophet Elijah fled for his life to Mount Horeb. There, he experienced a "theophany," a manifestation of God that was frightening in the extreme. A great and terrible wind (something like a tornado?) tore the mountains apart, and a savage earthquake shook them even further. Then came the great fire (lightning?), so the prophet retreated into the cave to escape. All this served to introduce the Lord Himself, who finally spoke to him, in "*a still, small voice*" (KJV, RSV), or by a "*gentle whisper*." (NIV).

The way God acts, in the world at large and with the nations, or in the individual trials of our lives, can at first

seem fearsome, like the rumbling of thunder or the crash of lightning. But we find, in time, that the "clouds" we so much dreaded are in fact filled with the mercy of God. All that He does is, ultimately, for our blessing. When He speaks to us in a gentle voice, then we understand. All that went before, even what seemed "bad," was for our own good (Romans 8:28). He is truly in charge and has a design and a purpose for each of us, in every particular.

Stanza 4: Upon the Earth

His purposes will ripen fast,
unfolding every hour;

The bud may have a bitter taste,
but sweet will be the flower.

The parables of the farmer, the seed, and the harvest, found throughout the Bible in many forms, are the basis of this stanza. The farmer must sow his seed, and then trust in God to bring the sun and the rains at the proper times to produce a harvest, even though he cannot understand how it all works together (Ecclesiastes 11:1, 5, 6). The poor family, down to their last stores of grain, must sow in faith, trusting that God will give them an increase to support their lives in the coming year (Psalm 126:5, 6). The gospel preacher must cast his "seed" into all kinds of soil, trusting that some of it will take root and produce a good harvest (Matthew 13; Mark 4).

It is the same with Almighty God Himself. He must cast the single kernel of wheat (the seed representing Jesus Christ himself) into the ground, where

that seed will die and be buried before that seed can produce the harvest of much grain. (John 12:23-28). For each of us, discipline, and correction from God, though unpleasant, will *"produce a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."* (Hebrews 12:11 NIV). The "bud" may be exceedingly "bitter," but the "flower," the final result, will be "sweet" beyond all reckoning. What blessings He has in store for those who love Him.

Stanza 5: Summary

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
and scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
and He will make it plain.

God will make it all plain, in His own time. What we need is patience, faith, and trust in Him. We need to recognize that all the answers to our questions are not immediately available, and that we may need to wait for them to be given to us. Our heavenly Father is working in all aspects of our lives, for our personal benefit.

We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose... And if God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:28,31 NIV).

This, I believe, also has a bearing on how we consider Last Days prophecies. When we sing, "God is his own interpreter, and he will make it plain," we are really saying we can't understand all the prophecies in the

Bible, nor do we need to know how or when everything will work to fulfill the prophecy of the Last Days. The details can surely be left to God, and He will make it plain when it is being fulfilled. In those cases, where we are uncertain now, we can safely wait to see how He brings it to pass when the time comes. After all, it's His plan, not ours! Our Bibles remind us, quite often, that this privilege rests solely with Him. (Mark 13:32; Matthew 24:36; Acts 1:7).

Isaac Newton, the extraordinary scientist and Bible scholar, wrote that God did not give us prophecy so we can predict the future, but rather that we will know when the prophecy is being fulfilled.

Again, what we need is the patience and faith to *"wait for the Lord."* (Proverbs 20:22; Psalm 27:14). We need to be willing to let go of our own desires, timetables, and preconceived ideas of how things ought to be. We need to let God decide how, when, and where to try us, mold us, and discipline us. He alone, a loving Father, knows best what we need.

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he [Christ] appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2 NIV).

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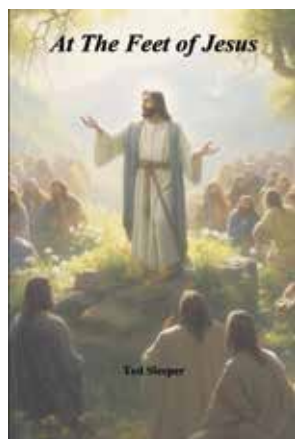
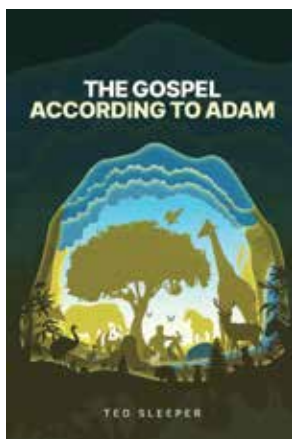
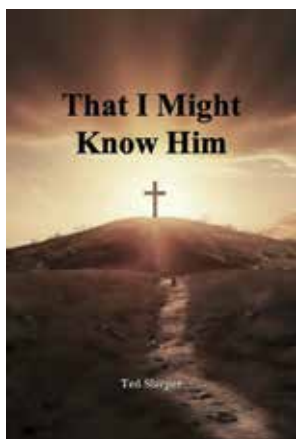
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