TIDINGS

Volume 89, Number 10, November, 2026

nothing left but *faith*



Building faith in the Christadelphian community.

TIDINGS

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“FAILURE THROUGH COMPROMISE”



WHAT do you think of when you think of compromise? With a community as diverse as ours, there's bound to be a wide range of answers. Maybe you think about bringing two disagreeing parties together and helping them trust one another. Maybe you think of the contrast between compromise and collaboration, with compromise often seen in a negative light, whereas collaboration carries more positive associations. Or maybe you think about losing what is true, with compromise suggesting that aspects of the gospel are given up repeatedly until the gospel is no longer recognizable. In one of these cases, we seek compromise, whereas in the other two, we avoid it.

The problem here stems from the fact that we have one word that describes different things. Certainly, working together is a good thing. Losing the Truth? Not so much. Nevertheless, because one word can stand for such a wide range of ideas, people will often use it with one of those meanings in mind, without specifying which one they actually meant. For me, and maybe for you, with my experience in our community, I've found that "compromise" often takes on the latter meaning—the one that indicates a degradation of Truth and God's principles—both in what people say to me and often how I perceive what they're saying.

A Strong Stance

Just to give you a few examples, in *A Sound Mind*, L.G. Sargent wrote about early Christadelphians:

> Believing they had the 'Truth,' they stood apart from all the churches, refusing any compromise of their distinctiveness or any association which could lead to their being regarded as merely one 'persuasion' among many. They rejoiced in being "the sect everywhere spoken against."[1]

Here, Brother Sargent described a refusal to compromise as a positive thing—through this refusal, Christadelphians were able to maintain their distinctiveness and preach the truth to those around them. Writing about the Book of Joshua, John Ullman stated, "There can be no compromise with divine Truth. One may feel the urge to deviate, even from the loftiest of motives, but such action will not be tolerated by God."[2] Similarly, many of our community's works describe the period of the Judges as "failure through compromise,"[3] and rightly so. God commanded the Israelites to refuse treaties with the Canaanites and to remove them from the land. They didn't, and because of that compromise, the Canaanites had a poor influence on God's people. This way of viewing Judges became so ingrained that a former editor of this magazine even wrote a book on this period, titled *Failure Through Compromise*.[4] Even though the title is an apt way to describe that time period, it's difficult to escape a negative picture of compromise with that phrase imprinted in our minds.

Yet, our community's feelings about compromise go deeper than just a handful of books and a defense of Truth. Going further than some of the other writers, H.P. Mansfield cautioned against compromise in

general—not just compromise of the Truth. He wrote:

> We can be deluded with the desire for peace, and depreciate the storm which is sometimes necessary. Because the desire is so great, we can set about compromising the requirements of Yahweh to obtain it, and forget that Yahweh is in the storm. But there can be no divine peace with people who set themselves against Yahweh or His Word… Let us compromise with such and there will be no true peace; let us fail to uphold the standards of God in doctrine and practice, and we will fall on evil days.[5]

As brother Mansfield makes clear, he isn't referring simply to doctrine; he's also referring to practice. Compromise to him thus takes on a darker meaning: compromise in anything meant giving up some of what God had given, and God's ways cannot be compromised.

Let me be clear: I didn't quote the writers above to offend or diminish their contributions to our community in any way. I have deep respect for all of those whom I referenced, and that's why I chose them. I wanted to make it clear that throughout our community, over many decades, we've consistently emphasized that compromise is wrong, and whether or not that was exactly what those authors meant, experience suggests this is often how we have interpreted these teachings and ideas.

Missing Something

While it's true that we can't ever compromise on Truth, nor should we want to, it's also true that we can allow our community's overarching feelings about compromise to color our thinking and actions to such a point that we find ourselves following an approach that doesn't necessarily reflect Scripture. Have you ever said, "I'll never compromise"? Or made the blanket statement that God hates compromise? Biblically, however, compromise, in certain situations, isn't just not wrong—it's actually what

God wants. For instance, consider the following situation: *"Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison."* (Matthew 5:25).[6] Do you see the idea of compromise here? How can this verse actually work without compromise? It's not as though Christ is saying his listeners were to overwhelm their accusers with all the evidence for their side until the accuser gave up—he's saying they needed to work something out with them. That's negotiation. That's compromise.

Again, in 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote, *"Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."* (1 Corinthians 7:5). This, too, sounds like a compromise, a situation in which two people agree to something difficult because they believe in working together.

Perhaps the most famous Biblical compromise is the decision of the Jerusalem Conference. Remember the story? Paul argued with a group of Pharisee believers over whether or not Gentile followers of Christ should be circumcised. Gathered in Jerusalem, the leaders of the community concluded that the Gentiles should be asked to follow certain aspects of the law but did not need to be circumcised (Acts 15:28-29). Just let that sink in a little bit. Can you imagine some of the reactions when Gentile believers received this message? Some would have perhaps been thankful they didn't need circumcision. At the same time, however, some likely would have been angry that they had to follow any of these vestiges of the Law of Moses. Why couldn't they eat food sacrificed to idols? Why did it matter if their food was strangled? Surely that had nothing to do with following God in faith.

Yet because these things mattered to the Jewish brothers and sisters, Gentile brothers and sisters chose to give up a little bit of their freedom. And Jewish brothers and sisters chose to give up a little bit of their exclusivity. Their belief in God and God's character, namely, that He is a God who wants peace among His followers (Romans 12:18), led them to relent a little for the sake of reaching an agreement.

What does that mean for us? It means that this whole approach, that compromise is wrong and always leads to failure, is unbiblical. It's true that God's Truth can't be compromised, but sometimes compromise is necessary to bring the followers of God's Truth together. Sometimes we have to give a little bit, not give up the first principles, but be flexible in our expectations and our practices, in order to bring peace. After all, it's not for nothing that Scripture calls the gospel *"the gospel of peace."* (Ephesians 6:15); peace is the fruit of the Truth itself. In other words, our grasp of the Truth affects us in such a way that it leads us to seek ways to work together as believers.

Introduction to This Issue

So, in this issue, we have a number of articles that will help us recognize the value of community and, in so doing, encourage us to work together further and accept (maybe even embrace?) those moments of compromise. In our Life Application section, Josh Sullivan writes about taking advantage of opportunities to do good, and Russell Li describes how "Auntie Gong" came to understand the gospel and thus joined our community. In Exhortation and Consolation, Ruth Hensley writes about Hagar, emphasizing that while the story of Hagar is indeed about Hagar, it's ultimately about God.

Moving on to Back to the Original, Mark Vincent writes about the Proverbs and how the way something is said can impact how memorable it is. For Stuff that Works, James Styles builds on the Camp Kaio story by describing how weekly Kaio nights have helped their family and ecclesia to build that sense of community around the Scriptures. Will Rundle writes this month's First Principles article regarding angels and their inability to sin.

This month's Bible Studies section has Ben Brinkerhoff continuing his series on Romans, this time looking at how Christ condemned sin in the flesh. Ben Kitchen begins a new series on Ruth, considering how Boaz's role as the redeemer presents Ruth and Naomi's story in a different light than it's typically understood—and shows a little bit of how Israelite community functioned. In the Moms' section, Nancy Brinkerhoff writes about loneliness as a mom and our need for community.

As we move into the latter section of the magazine, Anna Tikvah will continue *Held in His Hands* with chapter 3, and we'll have one article on the Christadelphian Preaching Campaign in Tobago (reminding us that our community is greater than just our local ecclesias). Finally, George Booker continues his consideration of New Testament characters with a look at Peter.

These articles help us to look beyond our current circumstances and to recognize that we are part of a global community. As such, our ecclesias and regions bring together a highly diverse group, united by a love for the Lord Jesus and the Truth about him. We're a family, built on a common foundation. And even in a family, compromise can help hold us together and also bring us closer when we've split apart.

Jason Hensley

1 L.G. Sargent, *A Sound Mind* (Birmingham, UK: The Christadelphian, 1976), 106.
2 John Ullman, *Joshua: His Life and Times* (Hawthorndene, SA: Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, 1984), 19.
3 Ron Abel, *Better Is He Who Rules His Spirit* (Self-Published; Undated), 6; Graeme Mansfield, The Judges Expositor (Findon, SA: Logos, Undated), 9.
4 Don Styles, *Failure Through Compromise* (Self-Published; 1972).
5 H.P. Mansfield, "Peace in the Storms of Life," *In Defence of the Faith* (West Beach, SA: Logos, 1988), 110.
6 All quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the *English Standard Version*.

Sister Olivia Keene wrote this poem for our magazine last school year while attending the Christadelphian Secondary School in Ontario. In it, she reflects on how quietness itself, though sometimes looked down upon today, can sometimes be truly helpful and a meaningful service.

Jason Hensley

HER QUIET LIGHT

A Poem About the Quiet Sister

Her light is soft
It's unyielding, you can't deny
With a gentle hand
She wipes the tearful eye:
She holds my hand
She never says goodbye.
Without a word, she comforts
On her we all rely.

Her quiet light
On it we all depend.
And if she were to leave us
We would be left
with a gaping void
That no one would be sure
how to fill.
Even though she isn't loud,
Her voice never raised.
Those who listen to her wisdom
Often think again.

For all her words are a
Repeat of Scripture
The verses she is always reading,
Meditating,
Pondering.

Sometimes she sits alone,
Only approached by those
Who know her.
She sits like a doe,
Peaceful, knowing
Gentle.

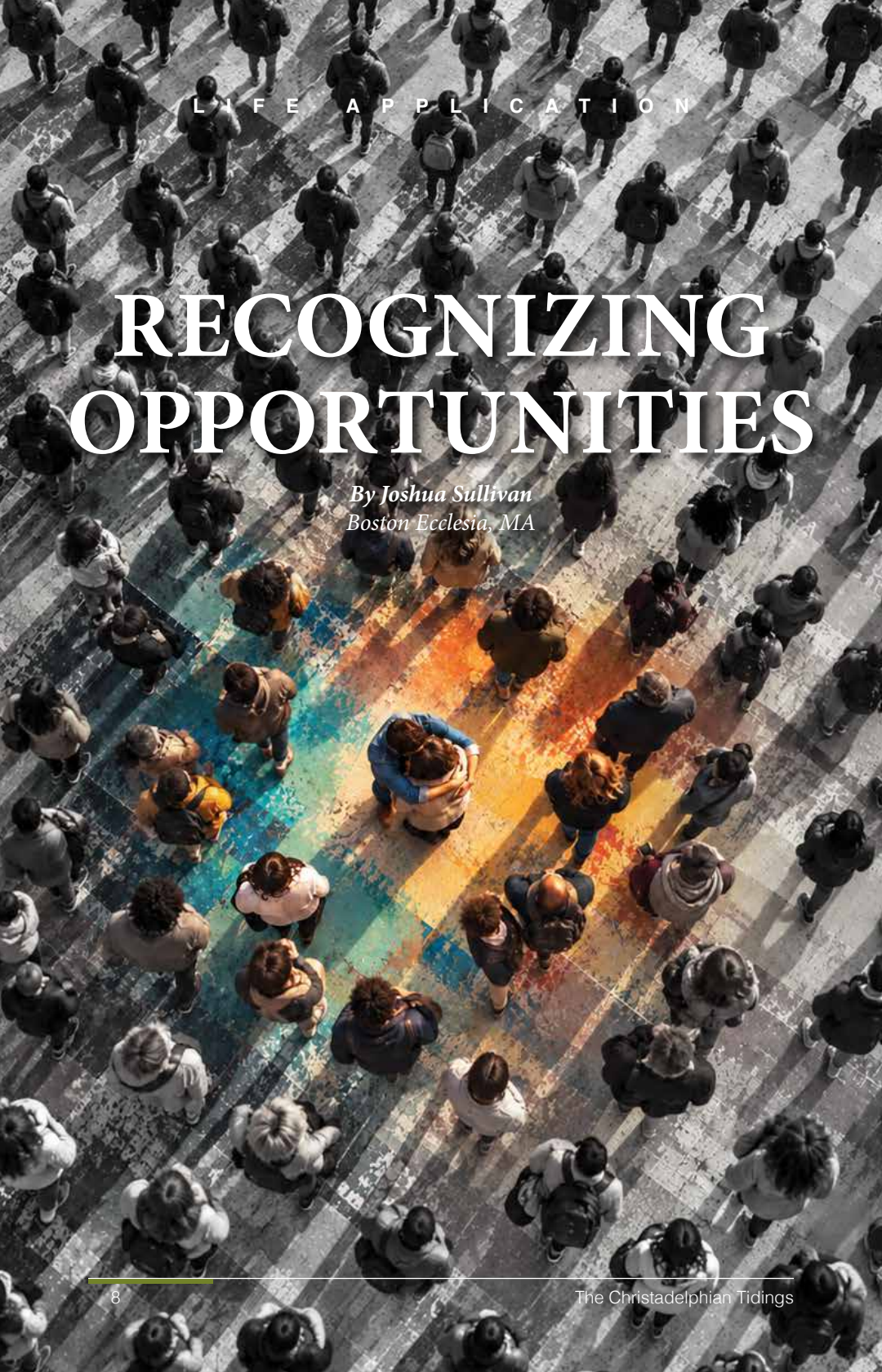
The word is in her respondent
heart.
Her very life is given in service to
her brothers, sisters
And most of all,
Christ.

Her light is soft and gentle.
Persistent and comforting.

Olivia Keene,
Brantford Ecclesia, ON

RECOGNIZING OPPORTUNITIES

By Joshua Sullivan
Boston Ecclesia, MA



THERE are many things in life that can keep us from being the disciples we want to be. Whether it be physical limitations, personal struggles, or insecurities. But one of the biggest things that keeps us from doing good is failing to recognize opportunities. From small kindnesses to large ones, we have a million opportunities to help one another or brighten someone else's day. Sometimes our call to action is obvious, as it was in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan are all presented with a clear opportunity to help the robbed and beaten man left on the side of the road. The priest and Levite, supposed to be that man's spiritual leaders, did nothing while the Samaritan, who had every reason not to bother, went above and beyond. We are all called to be like the Samaritan, but our opportunities to act are often subtler and easier to miss.

Not every opportunity just appears on the side of the road. We are called to reflect the character of Christ and spread the good news of God's love, not just to wait for those opportunities to present themselves. And we can only do that by being invested in others' well-being. Sometimes we can get so wrapped up in our own struggles that we fail to look up and see that everyone is struggling in their own way. Far from dividing us, that should be our call to be kind to one another. Jesus says in Matthew 25:

> *I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.* (vv. 35-40).

What Jesus offers here isn't a specific checklist of things you should care about; they are examples of the many ways we can care for one another. He's telling us to look for ways to love one another.

Trying to be a kind, reliable, and considerate person is something we all struggle with, though some aspects may come more naturally to some than to others. Whether it be the attentiveness to notice when others could use a hand, the diligence to not get distracted by our own concerns, or the understanding and care to actually have a relationship with others, or just to make sure people understand we are there for them, all of these require a dedication to others. And, perhaps most of all, not being so afraid of making a mistake that we fail to do anything.

I'll admit I get jealous sometimes of the people who just seem to know the right thing to say when someone is hurting, or who can see and prepare for how someone might need help before a problem even happens. They're not things I'm great at, but **everybody** struggles with them. We've all had a million times when we realize "after



the fact" that "Ah, I should have done something there," or that I should have handled that differently.

But the first step to doing good is to want to do good. We need to make it our goal, when we come to church, go to work, or go anywhere else, to make our first thought, "How can I show the same love to others that has been shown to me?" If we begin our day looking inward at ourselves and our own concerns, and don't keep our gaze up, looking for opportunities to do good, how can we ever see when someone else needs a hand? And even if our first thought of the day is positive and compassionate, we need it to remain in our minds as the day goes on, not get distracted, and not forget our purpose as representatives of our Lord.

That's much easier said than done, of course. The effort to change can be hard, but like anything else, it's about building a habit. Our basic instinct at birth is to care for ourselves. We are called to function all the time to become more than that. To work so that thoughtfulness becomes an ever-greater part of who we are. That purposeful training of our mind to become more like him is what our Lord expects of us. We learn by doing, and that mindfulness becomes more instinctual as we go.

Jesus expresses this mindset in the parable of the talents. The master in the parable gives his servants money according to their ability and tells them to go trading with it and earn more. What God is looking for from us, of course, isn't earthly currency but the proliferation of his Word and the care of his people. And so, I find the idea of using trading as a metaphor for our work in faith interesting because trading does not guarantee profit. Sometimes you lose money in trading if you're not careful or if something just goes wrong. The trader needs not only the willingness to earn money when

the opportunity arises but also to put real thought into what they're doing.

I'd always found this parable a little odd because it says the talents are given out according to people's ability. But of course, when trading, it's a lot easier to earn money when you have more money to start with. Both the servant who starts with five talents and the one who starts with two (double their amount) are welcomed into the joy of the Lord. So is the one who starts with five particularly more impressive? I think it's important that, by the end of the parable, the servant with five talents, who has earned his master five more, is now the servant with ten talents. The master hasn't taken those five talents he earned and spent them elsewhere; that servant is now responsible for those ten talents (and is then given one more). By the same logic, the servant who started with two talents is now the servant in charge of four talents, which may, from there, turn into eight talents or sixteen, and so on. It's about our growth in faith and responsibility. We start with what we can handle at that time, but it must grow from there. As it says in Mark 4:30:

> *What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.*

God has planted that seed of the Kingdom, of hope, grace, and love, in each of us, and it can grow and bear fruit beyond anything we could ever do with our own strength.

But the last servant hid his talent in the ground. Why didn't he, as the master says, put his talent in the bank if he was too afraid to trade with it? It seems like a blatantly obvious idea to anyone who puts any thought into it, but that's



the point. His failure to do the obvious bare minimum speaks to how little thought the servant actually put into it. The servant was so afraid of his own failure, or perhaps believed so little in his capacity to do a good job, that he didn't pause, think about it a little, and realize that he could **at least** put the money in the bank if nothing else, and instead buried the talent in a field and refused to think about it. Because he misunderstood who his master was. God is far more favorable to a servant who has tried their best and failed than to the one who refuses to try.

Because sometimes we will fail. We'll say the wrong thing, miss something we should have noticed, or just not know what the right thing to do is. But we can't let the fear of messing up overwhelm our ability to represent our Lord. We need to have faith in our capacity through Christ to do good. We have put on the body of Christ. Whether we think we are worthy of that title or not, we are God's chosen servants to enact his will. Because while I may have no power of my own, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* We can't deny our ability, through him, to do what is right with the opportunities we have been given. **Even if** our first step is just putting the money in the bank, we need to be thinking about and looking for that next opportunity to do God's will and to care for his children.

There are an endless number of ways we can show love when our eyes are sharp and on the lookout. Jesus lists several in Matthew 25. A few more ways we can find those opportunities and take advantage of them include:

We can't let the fear of messing up overwhelm our ability to represent our Lord. We need to have faith in our capacity through Christ to do good.

- Praying for Open Eyes: Ask God daily to help you notice the subtle opportunities you usually miss. We improve by being intentional and persistent.
- Focusing on One Area First: Instead of trying to be everything to everyone immediately, choose one avenue of service, focus on mastering it, and then build outward.
- Overcoming Hesitation: Work on avoiding procrastination, often the biggest barrier to kindness. We can get so wrapped up in thinking we're not the right person for the job that we allow the opportunities right in front of us to remain undone. The right person for the job is the one who actually does it. You'll usually find afterward that it wasn't as undoable as you thought.

- Keeping Practical Tools On Hand: Carry cash on you for immediate needs. Keep a box of blank cards and postage on a shelf at the hall so anyone can send a quick note of encouragement. Helping is far easier when we are already prepared for it.
- Being Ready to Preach: Prepare a quick "elevator speech" in your mind so you aren't caught flat-footed when an opportunity arises to offer help or share your faith.
- Taking Stock of Your Strengths: God gives different talents to everyone. Honest assessment of your personal strength lets you see good places where you can serve—whether that's having a car to give rides, computer repair, yard work, cooking, writing, babysitting, hospital visits, or simply being available for a phone conversation.
- Setting Up Ecclesial Resources: Work with your ecclesia to establish a small food pantry before a crisis hits, or set up a "Have/Need/Can Do" board in the hall so members can easily match skills with needs.
- Working Together: Ask a brother or sister to accompany you or keep you accountable; doing good together makes taking that first step far less intimidating.
- Asking: Sometimes the simplest answer is the right one. We get the most opportunity to do good when others know they can turn to us for help.

Of course, the greatest example of that for us is our Lord Jesus Christ—who went out of his way to show love to publicans, sinners, Samaritans, and all those who were reviled or forgotten, no matter what people thought of him for it. To heal the lame, the sick, and the unclean, and to guide the lost back to God. Jesus didn't just have the power to help people; he was always doing it. That profound compassion is a better exhortation than anything that can be argued with words.

We might not have the miraculous ability to cure the blind or heal the sick, but just as Jesus embodied his Father through his actions, we are to strive to embody him. To look for every opportunity to bring others closer to God. To be someone who people will run to when they need help.

True kindness and compassion come from the boundless love of our Lord and the sacrifice of his son for our sake. We don't ever want to make the mistake of allowing our own insecurities or beliefs about our limitations to block our ability to share the same compassion we have been given. Because: *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

Joshua Sullivan,
Boston Ecclesia, MA

NEVER TOO LATE

By Russell Li
Enfield Ecclesia, SA



THIS mid-September, I went back to China. Apart from visiting my parents in Beijing and the brothers and sisters there, I had an important mission to fulfill: to visit and baptize a contact with whom I have been in touch for a little over a year. I call her "Aunty Gong," and she is 87 years old.

Helping Aunty Gong to understand the gospel has been highly educational and encouraging to me; in many ways, I can see how our God has worked behind the scenes. I document what I have seen and learned from her story. You may find that some of her experiences resonate with you—maybe you're someone to whom the gospel was preached, or perhaps you also understand the struggles of a teacher and the elation when a student comes to know Christ.

The story of how we first came to know Aunty Gong in September 2024 is a fascinating testimony in itself. Quite a few people were involved, spanning different parts of the world and speaking various languages. Looking back, I feel amazed at how this group of believers—each from different walks of life and at different stages in their own journeys of faith—was brought together as a single team to help this one lady draw closer to God. Once again, we witnessed our Father's hand at work, showing that all things work together for good for those who love Him.

It began with a brother from a completely different part of the world. Born in Ukraine, this brother moved to Israel with his family seven years ago. Formerly a Jehovah's Witness, he came across Christadelphian teaching on Facebook and immediately recognized that the JW doctrine regarding the nature of Christ was incorrect. After leaving the Witnesses, he asked the group administrator, Brother Steven Cox, to connect him with Russian-speaking brothers and sisters. Sister Julia Downs reached out and helped him connect with believers in Russia, leading to his baptism in the Mediterranean Sea on July 16, 2024.

This brother had been actively preaching online to contacts across several countries, including Aunty Gong in China. Though he spoke only Ukrainian and Russian, he communicated with her using Google Translate. Realizing she needed local support, he sought Chinese-speaking brethren to guide her. Sister Julia Downs bridged the next gap by reaching out to Brother Andrew Wang in Australia, whose family she knew through mutual connections. Andrew had recently been baptized in Sydney, though his first contact with the truth was twenty years earlier in Beijing. Sister Jenny Jamieson, whose husband had met Andrew during a mission trip to Beijing in 2004, then introduced Andrew to us and passed along our brother's request for help.

Tracing back through this chain of connections—spanning Ukraine, Israel, Russia, Australia, and China—I am deeply moved by the mercy, love, and providence of our Father. In moments like these, we truly feel the presence of the Lord, who is calling out of all nations a people for His name.

When we first connected with Aunty Gong, we were immediately confronted with practical communication challenges. Yet looking back, starting our lessons was effortless. Her

strong desire to learn the truth of God was evident from day one, and her dedication has since become an inspiration to many. We did not need to break the ice; our discussions began naturally and smoothly. She already believed that the world was created by God and that the Bible is His word. However, having attended local churches, she shared that she had never been able to appreciate what was taught there. What she appreciated about our fellowship was that when we explained our beliefs, we opened the Bible for reference and provided reasons—not relying on our own opinions, but letting the Scriptures speak for themselves.

Meekness is essential when learning the ways of God. It holds true regardless of age, culture, or educational background: it is not what we think, but what the Bible teaches that matters.

Despite a promising start, we had to navigate several practical hurdles. Communication was the first major obstacle. While Aunty Gong had internet access, she was not comfortable using video platforms like Zoom. She also struggled with hearing impairment, making phone calls difficult. We adapted by using WeChat, a popular messaging app in China. Two or three times a week, we sent her messages explaining first principles. Sometimes she replied with thoughtful questions that allowed us to clarify specific points; other times, we expanded on themes we had previously studied. It was a deeply rewarding process—not only did we rejoice as her knowledge grew, but our own understanding deepened through the excellent questions she asked.

Before long, we encountered another challenge: while she was familiar with certain Bible characters and stories, she lacked a clear grasp of the overall biblical timeline and occasionally mixed up historical events. To help her establish a clear framework of the Bible's narrative, we sent her a copy of *Exploring the Bible*, a story-based introductory course originally in English, but now available in Chinese. This proved immensely helpful, as stories made the overarching timeline easier to remember and meditate upon.

She also mentioned that her old Bible, which she had used for decades, was falling apart and that the small print was becoming difficult to read. We purchased a new large-print Bible for her, along with colored pencils, to encourage her to mark key passages. She received it with great joy and loved the idea of marking the text to make it truly her own.

Because she was self-conscious about becoming forgetful with age, she took the initiative to transcribe every message we sent her into a notebook so as not to waste our efforts. Despite suffering from arthritis, she made up her mind to retain what she learned by taking notes, marking her Bible, and writing out key passages. When we finally met her in person, she showed us her notebook to reassure us that she had been working diligently. We were deeply moved to see a thick, 200-page notebook filled front and back; she told us she had already used up five pens and was starting her sixth.

Seeing such faith in action is a profound encouragement from our Father. Preaching is a deeply enriching experience: both the hearer and the teacher gain a richer understanding of

the Kingdom. In helping others, we are privileged to witness the seed sown in receptive hearts, to watch the Father grant the increase, and to rejoice when a student steps forward for baptism. In Aunty Gong, I saw a reflection of the wise virgins in Jesus' parable who prepared extra oil—her tireless efforts were a tangible expression of her dedication and genuine love for God's promises.

For her baptism, we booked a hotel room with a large bathtub. Before going into the water, we reviewed the core truths she had learned, giving her the opportunity to express her faith. Many brothers and sisters from mainland China joined via Zoom to hear her confession of faith, and all were moved by the sincerity and clarity of her answers.

Full of joy, she shared these words just before her immersion: "The gospel concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ is that we want to become children of God. We must be baptized, repent, confess our sins, follow the Lord Jesus Christ, and put on Christ. We die and are buried with Jesus and live as a new creation, taking on the character of God. My old self is dead; in me lives Jesus Christ." With those words, she became our sister in Christ. While by natural age she is the oldest Chinese sister, by spiritual birth she is the youngest.

We spent four days with our new sister before saying our goodbyes. Leaving her was emotional, and we were all in tears as we departed, though I promised to return with my family. We have also encouraged other local Chinese brethren to visit her nursing home to hear her inspiring story firsthand.

We remain in daily contact with her, answering her questions and listening to the insights she discovers during her personal reading. She has recently begun a new project: reading three to four chapters of Scripture each day and summarizing them in her own words, having already completed the Book of Exodus. It remains our constant prayer that our Father blesses her health and that her remaining walk is short as we await the return of our Lord.

Looking at Sister Gong's journey, I am reminded that God's hand is never shortened by distance, age, or circumstance. He moved believers across the globe to build a bridge to a quiet room in a nursing home in China, seeking out a humble heart ready to receive His truth. In an 87-year-old sister filling her sixth pen with ink and rising from the waters of baptism, we see that the grace of God knows no boundaries and that His calling is as vital today as it ever was. May her courage and devotion ignite our own faith, helping us see God's hand in our lives and moving us to continue seeking new ways to connect with Him and become like Jesus.

Russell Li,
Enfield Ecclesia, SA

THE GOD WHO SAW HAGAR

By Ruth Hensley
Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA



ONE of the things that continually strikes me about Genesis is its straightforward, raw honesty. If I were to write an account of the beginning of something huge and important, I'd probably focus on all the positive things that people did: bravely heroic acts, moments of beautiful kindness, stunning examples of success—that kind of thing. That's exactly what Genesis **doesn't** do, because Genesis is the story of God's love and mercy, not human bravery or kindness or success or anything else. Rather, Genesis recounts the lives of complex and complicated people whose lives are messy and who **don't** get things right much of the time—and yet in spite of all that, God still works with them, calling them to be part of His family.

Genesis is also a story that unfolds on multiple levels: it is full of symbolism and allegory and sets themes that weave throughout all of Scripture. It is also the story of two paths: the path of life and the path of death. And finally, it is the story of **individuals**: God working with people as individuals, calling each one to Himself. And on that level, it's also the story of choices: amid all the good and bad actions we see among the characters of Genesis, each one has a choice. Do they turn to God or away from Him? Do they repent and accept His forgiveness, or do they go their own way? Each person must decide how they will respond to God.

Every man and woman in Scripture has their own story, but a theme that winds through them all ties them together: a greater story of God working with each one, because of His love for His creation. We see this in the life of a woman who appears in the Genesis narrative for only a short time, yet whose role changes history even today.

Hagar enters the account of Abram and Sarai in Genesis 16, when we're first introduced to her as an Egyptian slave. We're not told her backstory, but from those few details we know that, in terms of societal standing, she's the lowest of the low. She's a slave, a woman, and a foreigner—a combination of factors that give her no status or rights. But suddenly she emerges on the scene in chapter 16 as a major player in the story, as Sarai takes the fulfillment of God's promises into her own hands and initiates a plan for Abram to have children nominally for her through Hagar. All goes according to plan at first: Abram goes along with Sarai's suggestion; Hagar gets pregnant. But then the direction of the story shifts. Hagar's relationship with Sarai, whatever it was before, is now quite bad. Genesis 16:4 tells us that Sarai now *"was despised in her eyes."*[1] The word *"despised"* is most often translated as *"cursed."* Hagar was cursing Sarai, and in response, Sarai treated Hagar undeniably badly. The Hebrew word for *"dealt harshly"* is elsewhere translated as *"afflicted"* and used many times to describe the Egyptians' treatment of the Hebrew slaves (definitely not a good thing to be associated with!). So now Hagar is even more vulnerable than ever before: in addition to being a slave, a woman, and a foreigner, she is pregnant by her master and afflicted by her mistress.

At this point, no one's handling anything very well. Hagar is cursing Sarai, Sarai is afflicting Hagar, and all of this is in an effort to do what, again?

Oh, that's right. Have a son for Abram so God's promises can be fulfilled.

It's not going very well so far.

Hagar responds to Sarai's treatment by running away. But in the midst of this mess, God is loving and merciful—and He is working with Hagar in her most vulnerable, lonely moment, calling her to Himself, calling her to be more than what society sees her as. He's working to show her that His plans are greater than she could ever imagine. And He's working with her to shape her and bring her into His family.

God sends an angel to find Hagar in the wilderness. The angel talks with her and tells her what to do next (which is to return to Sarai—probably not what she wanted to hear!). And not only that: the angel gives her a promise as well. To many, Hagar would've been below their notice—but not to God. Just as God told Abram that his descendants would be innumerable, He has now given His angel a message to pass on to Hagar: *"I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude."* (16:10). She will indeed have a son, and God names him: Ishmael, "God will hear"—for God has heard Hagar. It wasn't going to be an easy road for Hagar or her son: the angel goes on to tell Hagar that this Ishmael of hers would be *"a wild donkey of a man"* whose hand will be *"against everyone."* (16:12). And yet, Hagar responds with a declaration of her faith: *"You are a God of seeing… truly I have seen him who looks after me."* (16:13). God has seen and heard Hagar, the slave from the land of Egypt, and has called her to be part of His family. In response, she praises Him for looking after her. As instructed, Hagar returns to Abram and Sarai, and there Ishmael is born.



Years pass as Ishmael grows up, and we hear no more of Hagar until after the birth of Isaac, when Ishmael is fourteen years old. When Isaac is weaned, Hagar and her son reenter the story: at a feast celebrating Isaac, Ishmael mocks his young half-brother. Sarah asks for Hagar to be sent away, and although Abraham hesitates, God instructs him to allow it. And so Abraham sends Hagar and Ishmael off.

Hagar and Ishmael travel in the parched wilderness until their supply of water runs out, and Hagar fears the death of her son. For the second time in the record, God sends an angel to Hagar to encourage her and give her strength for the journey, reminding her, *"I will make him into a great nation."* He shows her a water source, alleviating her fear of death. From there, the mother and son live in the wilderness until the time comes for him to marry. At this point, there's so much reason for hope: God has twice sent an angel to rescue and comfort Hagar, and Genesis 21:20 tells us *"God was with the boy."* Ishmael is Abraham's son, and God has made promises about him. And yet the following verse is the only direct indication we're given of what path Hagar ultimately chooses for herself and her son of promise: *"His mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt."* (Genesis 21:21). In choosing an Egyptian wife for him, she tied him to her Egyptian roots, to the rejection of the God of Abraham.

> Hagar and Sarah are an allegory of something much bigger than either of them as individuals: they represent slavery and freedom; the law of Moses versus the grace we have in Christ.

That's the last we hear of Hagar in Genesis, but her story's not over. As with so much of the book of Genesis, the story of Hagar plays out on multiple levels:

- There's the big-picture story of two family lines at their very beginnings. These two family lines, from Ishmael and from Isaac, will play out throughout all of history—even today and until Christ's return.
- There's the allegorical aspect of her story: the two family lines of Ishmael and Isaac represent slavery and freedom.
- Finally, there's the personal level: God was at work with Hagar as an individual, calling her to be a part of His family.

Let's dive into each of these ideas.

Two Family Lines

When Sarah wanted Abraham to cast out Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis 21, God told Abraham that while *"through Isaac shall your offspring be named,"* He wasn't going to forget Ishmael: *"I will name a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring."* (Genesis 21:12-13). The line of Ishmael and the line of Isaac would both grow into great numbers, and the sons of Isaac, Jacob and Esau,

would continue the division: Esau would marry into Ishmael's family line, whereas Jacob would continue the line of the promises to Abraham and Isaac. Eventually, the enmity that began between Ishmael and Isaac would grow into the hostility we still see today between their descendants.

The Allegory

Hagar and Sarah are an allegory of something much bigger than either of them as individuals: they represent slavery and freedom; the law of Moses versus the grace we have in Christ. This is laid out for us in Galatians 4:

> *For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.* (Galatians 4:22-25).

In writing to the Galatians, Paul expanded the idea of these two family lines beyond natural descendants and into something symbolic: it's the story that's been playing out since the very beginning, one of life or death, freedom in Christ or bondage.

God Works on a Personal Level

But finally, there's another layer to this story. Ultimately, this isn't a story about Hagar, the slave. **It's a story about God.** God's angel appeared twice to Hagar, encouraging her and supporting her—and correcting her, too—because God shows His love for us by correcting, redirecting, and guiding us. Throughout the Genesis record of her life, we see God working with Hagar as an individual, calling her to be part of His family. God works with human choices and actions—some motivated by faith; some not—to shape the events of thousands of years, and to teach countless generations the lessons of spiritual freedom and slavery through the allegory of Hagar's life—and yet He also works with us as **individuals**, as He did with a single Egyptian slave woman alone in the desert, far from home. To God, Hagar was more than a player in the grand story of these two family lines that would shape history and stand as a symbol of life or death. Hagar was someone to whom God sent an angel, made promises, protected, and encouraged. And more than anything else, this tells us about God:

God works with human choices and actions—some motivated by faith; some not—to shape the events of thousands of years, and to teach countless generations the lessons of spiritual freedom and slavery through the allegory of Hagar's life

He is a God of love and mercy, and He is working in people's lives.

But what of Hagar? It's hard closing her story without a happy ending. The last time we see her in Genesis, she's chosen a wife for Ishmael. She's gone back to Egypt—away from the family of faith. As far as we can tell, she rejected God's efforts to reach out to her, to bring her to Him—and instead chose to return to the land of her ancestry, away from the God who saw her and heard her and called her to Him.

More than anything else, we learn from the story of Hagar that God is working on so many levels at the same time. He is always working for His eternal purpose and divine plan. And yet He is a God who is near to those whom He calls. As Hagar learned in the wilderness, He is a God who sees.

The story of Hagar, then, is bigger than just one person. It's not just the story of Hagar, just as no story in the book of Genesis is solely about the complex and messy lives of the people in it. It's about God. It's the story of who God is, a story that we see repeated over and over again throughout all of Scripture and in our own lives as well: **our God is a God of mercy and love.**

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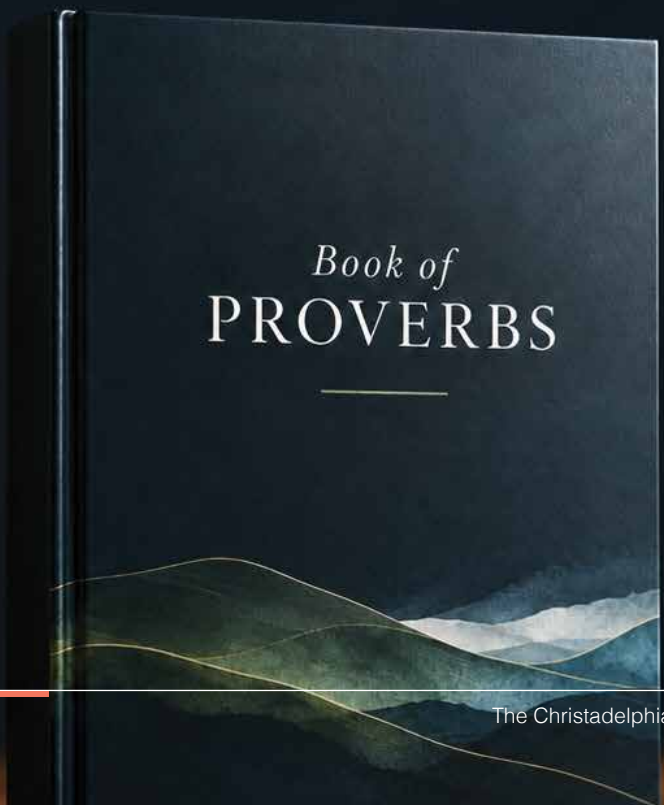
1 All quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the *English Standard Version.*



COINS IN THE POCKET

How a Little Knowledge of How the Bible is Written Helps Make the Proverbs Come Alive

By Mark Vincent
Lapworth Ecclesia, UK



HERE is some advice. "As you go through life, it is effective to think beforehand about possible situations that could arise, so that you can take preventative steps, and then, if such a situation does arise, you will be prepared and able to avoid potential negative consequences."

That is perfectly sound counsel. It is also completely unmemorable. Nobody will ever quote it. What I was trying to say was: "prevention is better than cure." Five words; far more powerful!

That is what a proverb is for: to be appreciated, memorized, and **used**. It is not an essay. It is a small piece of literature, cut down until nothing can be removed, so that it can be carried about in the pocket and spent when the moment comes—a bit like a coin (this was originally scholar Michael V. Fox's analogy), conveniently carried and then spent.

The trouble is that when we read the Book of Proverbs in English, some of the proverbs seem too obvious to have needed saying at all, and others seem so cryptic that we cannot see what they are getting at. Both problems very often dissolve once you know a little about how the Hebrew works. Not the language itself—you do not need that—but simply how short the lines are, and how their parts are arranged.

How Short is Short?

Take a familiar example which I think Robert Alter discusses in one of his books, Proverbs 13:24. Word for word, the Hebrew says:

Sparer-of his-rod—hater-of his-son;

but-his-lover—seeks/applies-him-early discipline.

The hyphens connect English words to show that they form a single word in Hebrew; the long dashes indicate where we might insert a verb or connector, but Hebrew doesn't require one. So we have merely four words in the first line, and three in the second in the original. As a rule of thumb, what takes three or four words in English takes one in Hebrew. This means that if a proverb feels wordy or flabby in translation, it is likely not that way in Hebrew. If it feels over-obvious, perhaps, when spelled out in the many words English may require, it will be expressed much more compactly (and therefore more effectively and memorably) in the original.

Now let's return to the proverb and examine what the two lines do. There is a straight contrast running crosswise: the man who spares the rod is, paradoxically, the one who **hates** rather than the one who loves. The man who **loves** is the one who disciplines. That can offer a challenge for any parent of young children (remembering to discipline, and then being consistent and proportionate while doing so, is hard work, but a responsibility that must be faced).

How would you translate the proverb? One respected commentator offers something along the lines of: *"He who will not punish* [or discipline] *his son shows no love for him, for if he loves him he will be concerned to discipline him."* That is a fairly accurate account of the meaning, but it is dead on the page—my lumbering paragraph about prevention all over again. At the other extreme, "spare the rod and spoil the child," originating in a 17th-century poem, has entered common use. It has all the snap you could want, but it is not quite what the verse says either; the proverb is not talking about spoiling

but about love and hate, which is a far sharper contrast.

The AV, as it happens, does rather well here: *"He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes."* That last word is worth pausing over. The Hebrew verb comes from a root meaning to seek diligently or to seek early, even at dawn—the loving father prioritizes discipline and is diligent in his responsibilities.

Of course, there is a flipside risk: the overbearing father, always critical, always angry or disappointed in his children's poor performance. That will soon drive a child to frustration or worse, and other Scriptures speak of not provoking children to anger and seeking the "debts" of others when we are unable to pay our own. But this proverb is not about that—it is simply about the importance of discipline (not its risks when taken too far). It is a parent's duty not to neglect it. This is also an important point about proverbs—they should not be "over-read" or inappropriately globalized. They make a certain point, and they make it memorably and powerfully. But they do not necessarily cover every aspect of a subject or say everything that might need to be said about it. We should not expect them to, and we should not impose on them a level of comprehensiveness they were not intended to bear. They say a lot in seven or eight words, but they cannot say everything!

Reading Across, Down, and Diagonally

Because most proverbs are composed of two short lines, the elements in those lines can be aligned and compared. Usually there are four elements, and the useful trick is to read them not only in parallel but crosswise, in an X.

Thus, Proverbs 12:4, word for word:

A-woman-of worth—crown-of her-husband;

but-like-rot in-his-bones—one-causing-shame.

Read straight across, husband goes with wife, worth goes with crown (the first line), rot goes with shame (the second). Read vertically, now, and worth contrasts with rot, and crown contrasts with shame. But read the X (diagonally) and something else appears: worth contrasts with shame, but crown is set against *"rot in the bones."* That particular contrast merits more thought. A crown is put **on** you from outside. It is external to you, adorning you and completing you. Perhaps it is a man's most prized possession, the ultimate symbol of kingship, and a worthy or virtuous wife makes him feel like one! Yet a crown is not part of him; it is an extra, a bonus, a finisher, visible to others. Rot in the bones is the opposite. It gnaws away on the inside, and it works away unseen, demoralizing and debilitating. How a wife speaks to and treats her husband is very important to his inner wellbeing.

Notice, too, the contrast in the description of the two wives. The one is described by what she is in herself—a woman of worth. The other is described by what she does to somebody else: shaming them, making them feel smaller, taking away, and belittling them. The remedy the proverb implies is not that a wife should manufacture praise for a husband who has not earned it. It is simply that she should be worthy herself.

A Paired Example

Proverbs 26:15-16 can be read as two separate proverbs, but they also form an interesting interacting pair. The first is literally:

Buries sluggard his-hand in-the-dish

he-is-too-weary to-return-it to-his-mouth

The return journey of bringing his hand back to his mouth is just too much for him; he is too weary and lethargic to even attend to his basic needs.

The proverb carries further interest when paired with its successor:

Wise(r) sluggard in-his-own-eyes

than-seven answering/returning discernment

Both proverbs are about sluggards — but there are more subtle connections. The word *"answering"* is a form of the verb "to return" used in the previous proverb. The fool cannot return his hand to his mouth, yet thinks himself wiser than seven who return judgment, discretion, or discernment. There is a sound play between "seven" and "answer" (*mishiv'ah meshive*), and the fool thinks himself better than seven-fold wisdom (perfection or completeness!). We know differently, of course, because we have seen him too senseless to even return food to his mouth, let alone return wisdom.

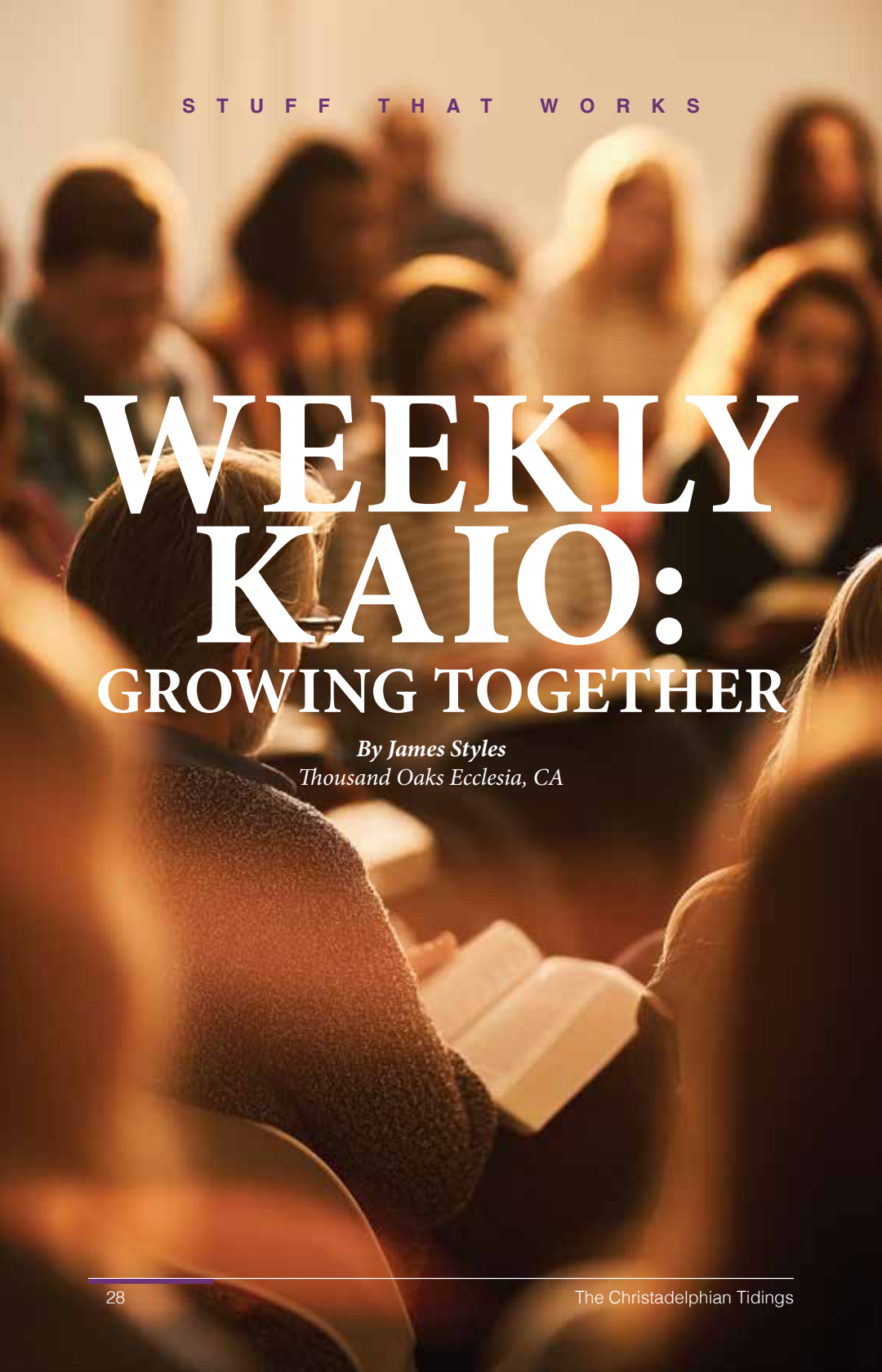
There is a further wordplay also. That word, discernment or judgment, can also carry the meaning "taste," connecting up with the fool's refusal to taste because he can't be bothered to bring his hand to his mouth. Wisdom is a thing of great taste, derived from God, but it is all too easy to be like a fool, deluding ourselves into thinking that we know better, and ending up starving ourselves in the process.

A Reminder

As we hinted earlier, each proverb is a snapshot, an aspect of a thing seen from one angle. Look from another angle and another proverb may show a different perspective. That is why Proverbs 26 can say, in one verse, *"Answer not a fool according to his folly,"* (v. 4) and in the very next, *"Answer a fool according to his folly."* (v. 5). Neither proverb is universally applicable; there are times to answer in kind, and times to contradict or rebuke. By deliberately juxtaposing these two seemingly contradictory verses, inspired Scripture shows us two angles and leaves us with a task: to work out which moment we are in.

Which is exactly what the book told us at the outset it was for— *"To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings."* (Proverbs 1:6). It takes practice. And the first step is simply to slow down, one verse at a time, and look at what is set against what, carefully unpacking the puzzle. Even with no knowledge of Hebrew, an interlinear Hebrew-English Bible (or suitable Bible software) that presents the literal structure of what the Hebrew says in English can help us recover the compact nature of the original and look for connections among the various elements from which the proverbs are built.

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WEEKLY KAIO: GROWING TOGETHER

By James Styles
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THE Thousand Oaks Ecclesia had its first ecclesial Kaio weekend in early 2018. Bro. Tim and Sis. Sarah Osborn from Okanagan Central in British Columbia came down for the weekend to participate and help things run smoothly, since they had helped start the Kaio movement. We rented a retreat center, and a good portion of our ecclesia came out to participate.

Initially, it felt like a pretty foreign concept: how do you come together as a group to do personal Bible study? But after experiencing the excitement, conversations, and fellowship that grew out of that personal study, we were hooked.

Shortly after we returned from the weekend, many members of our ecclesia began asking how we could do this more often. Sis. Kristen and I thought we could easily have a weekly Kaio at our home. At the time, we had two young daughters, so selfishly, this worked really well for us. We could stay home, get the kids settled for bed, and still have everyone over to study together.

We also wanted to keep things pretty informal. We would provide some snacks (which always seems to bring more Christadelphians around!), and then everyone would settle down for about an hour to do their own personal studies. Once we were done, I would let everyone know that the "official" Kaio session was over and that people could feel free to keep talking or keep studying if they wanted a little more time.

What was especially powerful was what happened after that hour of personal study. People would start talking about what they had been looking into. Someone would ask a question about something they were stuck on, or share an exciting point they had just discovered. Often, those discussions would last another hour as we shared our studies with one another. It was incredibly fulfilling.

Over time, we began developing the relationships with our brothers and sisters that are really difficult to develop on a Sunday morning or at a normal Bible class. The evenings often lasted two or three hours, sometimes turning into games or just continued fellowship as we talked about other parts of our lives.

One of the biggest things Kaio has done for our ecclesia is to make talking about our spiritual lives feel normal.

One of the biggest things Kaio has done for our ecclesia is to make talking about our spiritual lives feel normal. Felicity, a regular attendee of our weekly Kaios, described this as one of the best things about the weekly meetings: "My favorite thing about Kaio is how normal it has become to talk about our spiritual lives—what we're studying, what we're learning, and even what we're struggling with."

I think that has been a huge part of our experience. Kaio gives us a reason to talk about what really matters. Because everyone is doing the same thing,

Personal Bible study can sometimes feel like something we are supposed to do on our own, while ecclesial fellowship can sometimes become primarily social. Kaio has helped bring those two things together.

it feels like we are all in it together. We aren't just listening to someone talk about the Bible; we are actually studying it and then sharing what we are finding with each other.

We also talked about how Kaio has changed the kind of friendships we want to cultivate. Felicity specifically mentioned to me that watching our ecclesia grow together over God's Word has been inspiring, and that her friendships have become deeper and more meaningful because of it. I think we have seen that repeatedly. Kaio has helped break through some of those surface-level relationships that can naturally happen in an ecclesia. We know each other better because we have spent time together talking about God's Word, and those conversations have also opened the door to talking about the rest of our lives.

Another thing that has happened over the years is that Kaio has become less of an "event" and more of a normal part of our ecclesial life. Seth, another regular attendee of the weekly sessions, described one of the benefits this way: "Another key benefit is that it normalizes the study of God's Word. It is now normal for us to be at various ecclesial events or activities and have Kaio sessions included in the schedule."

I think that is really important. Personal Bible study can sometimes feel like something we are supposed to do on our own, while ecclesial fellowship can sometimes become primarily social. Kaio has helped bring those two things together. Seth described it this way: "Kaio is amazing because it combines two incredibly important aspects of life in the Truth: engrossing yourself in God's Word, and then fellowshipping with brothers and sisters in a way that is focused on those studies."

That is really what we have experienced. We aren't getting together just to have another social night, and we aren't getting together just to sit quietly in a room and study by ourselves. We are doing both. We spend time in God's Word, and then we have the opportunity to encourage each other and talk about what we are learning.

I think that has also impacted our kids. They have grown up seeing Bible study and spiritual conversations as a normal part of life. Felicity mentioned how her kids will ask, "Can we go to Kaio?" or "I want to Kaio!" That is something I am really grateful for.

I love that our kids are seeing people get excited about studying the Bible. They see adults and young people coming together, bringing their Bibles, talking

about what they have found, asking questions, and genuinely enjoying it. Hopefully, they will grow up seeing that as a normal and enjoyable part of being a believer.

And I think that is one of the most encouraging things we have seen in Thousand Oaks. What started in 2018 as a somewhat foreign concept has become something people genuinely look forward to. We have seen that spirit spread throughout the ecclesia, and we have seen people get excited not only about Kaio nights, but about the Kaio camp, Bible study, and spending time together around God's Word.

That really sums up what has been so encouraging to us.

Kaio has given us a regular opportunity to put aside the anxieties, stresses, conflicts, and competition that can sometimes come with everyday life and simply focus on God's Word together. For that hour, everyone is doing the same thing. And we leave feeling encouraged, inspired, and usually a little lighter than when we came.

Ultimately, I think that is what we want our ecclesial life to look like. As Seth said, it is about "filling our minds with God's Word so that it might change us, and encouraging our brothers and sisters to do the same."

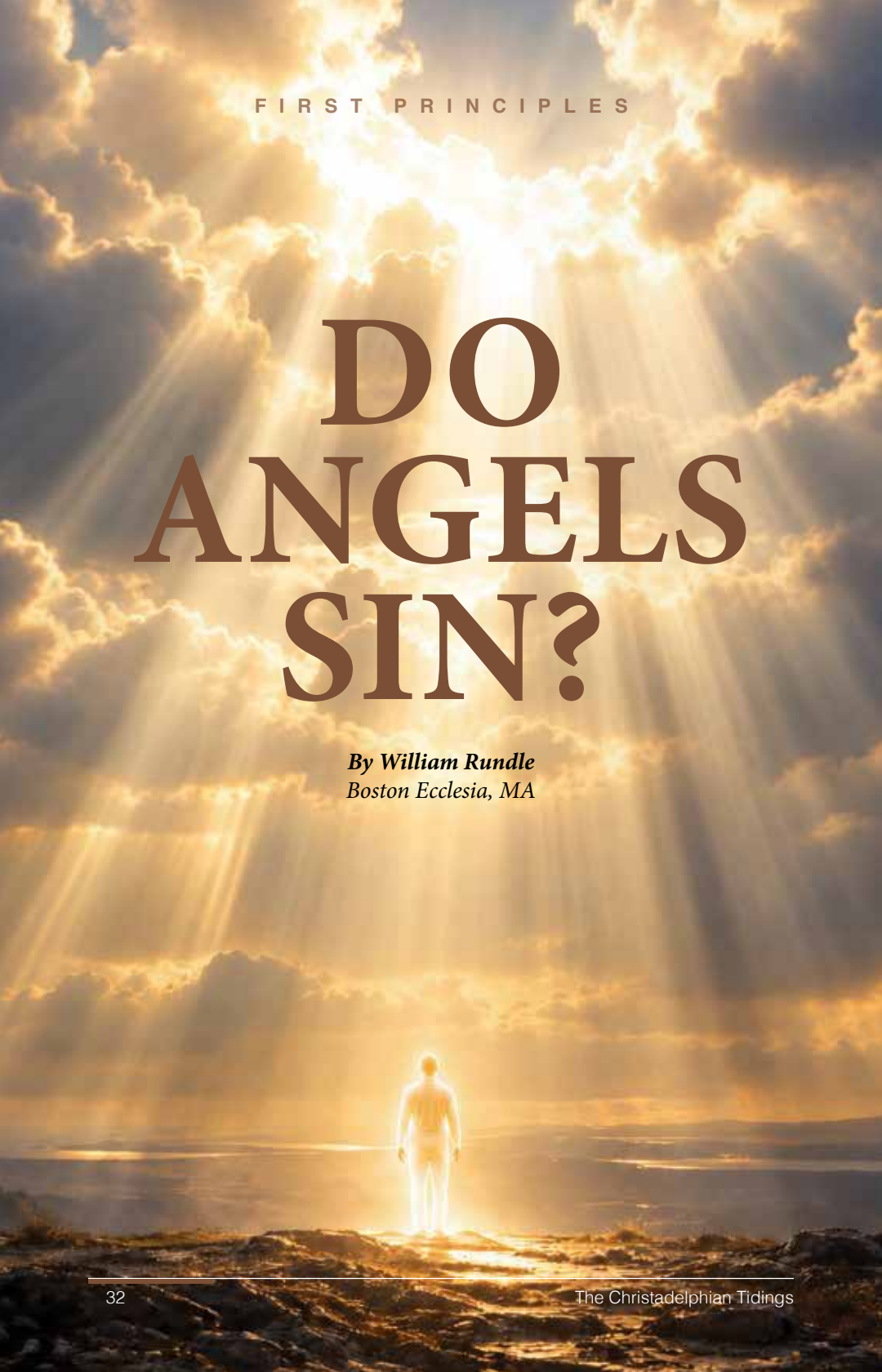
For us, that has been Kaio's real value.

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DO ANGELS SIN?

By William Rundle
Boston Ecclesia, MA



MANY within mainstream Christianity believe angels are flawed beings who can sin. This idea is used to support the doctrine of a personal devil. He is believed to have been an angel who sinned and was consequently cast out of heaven, becoming God's adversary ever since. This teaching, however, is not at all supported by the Bible.

Angels do not sin. We're told in Scripture that *"The wages of sin is death."* (Romans 6:23). We're also told that angels cannot die: *"Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection."* (Luke 20:36). If angels do not die, then they also do not sin because sin brings forth death. Also, since this verse in Luke 20 refers to the humans who will be accepted into the Kingdom at Christ's return, does this mean that in the Kingdom the saints will still possess a sinful nature, since they'll be made *"equal unto the angels"*? Of course not. There will be no sin in the saints in the Kingdom, as shown in Isaiah 11:9, Isaiah 35:8, Zechariah 14:20-21, Revelation 21:27, Revelation 22:3, etc. This concept further proves that angels do not sin.

Angels are also God's messengers who can take on His name. This is shown in Exodus 23 when God is delivering a message to the Israelites: *"Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him."* (Exodus 23:20-21).

Another example that proves angels can take on the name of God is found in Judges chapter 6, where an angel of the LORD delivers God's message to Gideon:

> *And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour. And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites. And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?* (Judges 6:12-14).

In this passage, when the angel looks upon Gideon and speaks to him, it's equated to God looking upon Gideon and speaking to him.

Even in the first verse of the Bible we can see angels taking on God's name and carrying out His commands: *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."* (Genesis 1:1) The Hebrew word translated as *"God"* in Genesis 1:1 is *elohim*, which is a plural word meaning "mighty ones." This clearly refers to the multitudinous company of angels active in creation.

If angels could sin, why would God allow them to take on His name? Surely, no sinner would be worthy of such an honor. So where did the idea of a fallen angel originate? Perhaps the most commonly referenced chapter

used to support the idea of a fallen angel is Isaiah chapter 14. Starting in verse 12, we read:

> *How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.* (Isaiah 14:12-15).

These verses are often cherry-picked and misinterpreted to mean that there was an angel named Lucifer who selfishly sought to exalt himself above God and was stripped of his heavenly position as a result. This is incredibly incorrect. First of all, the word *Lucifer* should not actually appear in the text. The Hebrew word translated as *Lucifer* is *helel*, which means "morning star." It appears as *Lucifer* in some translations because, around AD 405, Jerome of Stridon translated the Bible into Latin and used the Latin word *lucifer*, which also means "morning star." Later, the word *Lucifer* became treated as a name and was further applied to the idea of a fallen angel.

The Bible must be read in context, and when Isaiah 14 is read that way, it becomes clear this passage refers to the king of Babylon, not an angel. In fact, the words angel, devil, and Satan do not appear once in the entire chapter. Earlier in the chapter, we read:

> *And it shall come to pass in the day that the LORD shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve, that thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased!* (Isaiah 14:3-4).



The king of Babylon Isaiah 14 refers to is Nebuchadnezzar II, who, as we read in Daniel chapters 1-4, tried to exalt himself above God and was humbled as a result. The astronomical language describes Nebuchadnezzar's humbling from his exalted status. Stars are often used as symbols of authority in Scripture (Genesis 37:9-10, Numbers 24:17, Daniel 8:10, Matthew 24:29). The planet Venus is often called the Morning Star because it appears before sunrise but then disappears once the sun rises and overwhelms its brightness. Nebuchadnezzar is compared to Venus, whose glory God (the sun) took away.

Two passages in the New Testament are often cited as clear proof that angels can sin. They're found in the books of 2 Peter and Jude:

> *For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.* (2 Peter 2:4).
>
> *And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.* (Jude 6).

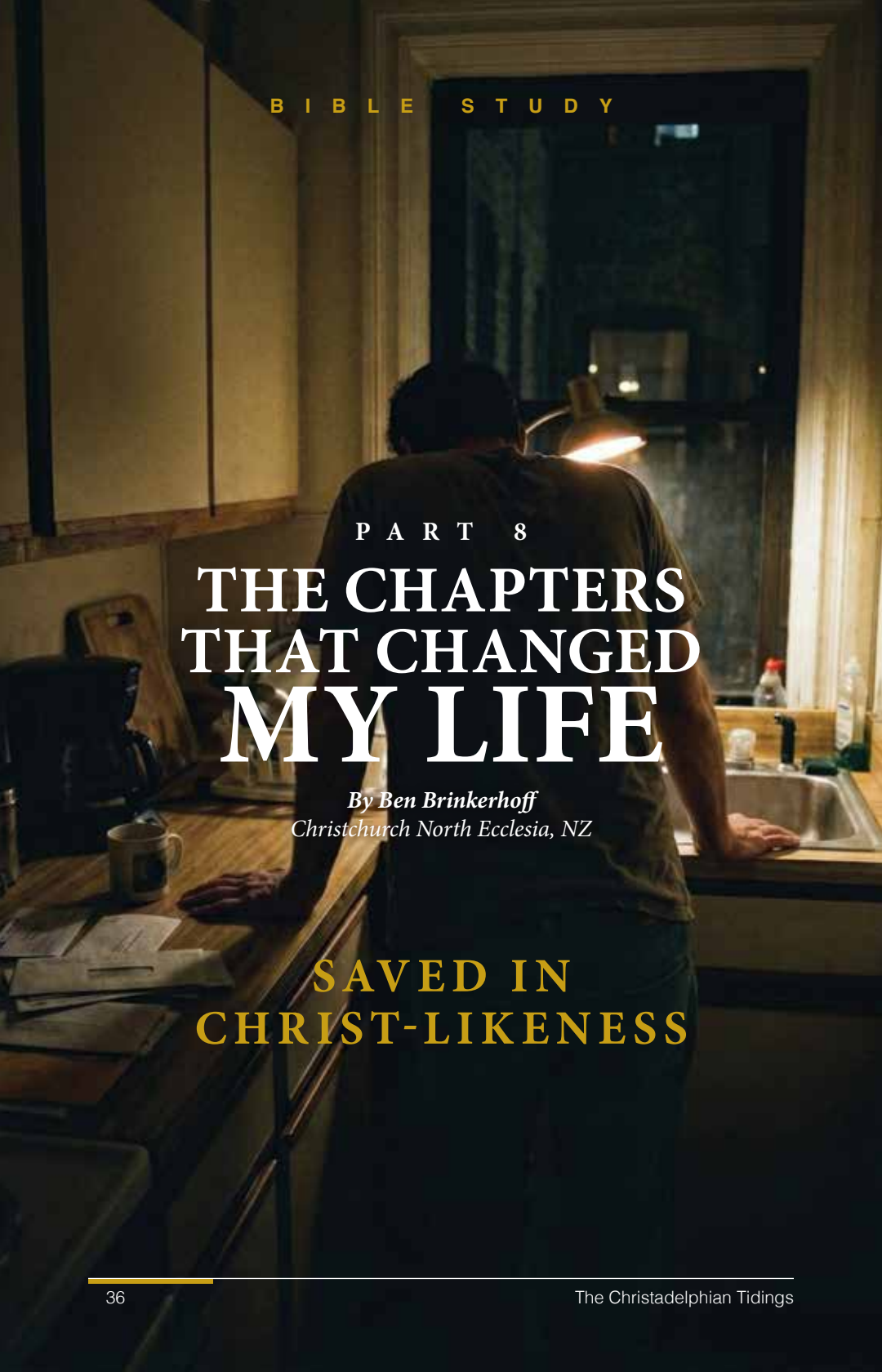
These passages can seem confusing and contradictory at first read, and they've even led some to suggest that they refer to a pre-Adamic creation. But when we really break down the text, the pieces come together effectively.

A critical fact to understand regarding these passages is the meaning of the word "*angels*." The Greek word translated as "*angels*" in these verses is *aggelos*, which means "messenger." The word aggelos usually refers to heavenly, immortal angels, but it can also refer to human messengers of God. For example, John the Baptist is called an *aggelos*: *"As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger [aggelos] before thy face, Which shall prepare thy way before thee."* (Mark 1:2).

So the way we can tell whether *aggelos* refers to heavenly, immortal angels or human messengers of God is based on the context of the passage. Since we've already established that angels do not sin, these verses in 2 Peter and Jude must be referring to human messengers of God. These verses say that certain human followers of the LORD failed to endure to the end, turned to the sinful ways of the world, died, and now await the coming judgment after the resurrection of the responsible.

Angels do not sin; they have absolutely no desire to. We humans, on the other hand, are constantly tempted and fall into sin. This sinful nature we possess comes from within us (Mark 7:21-23), not from some outside force. Believing in a supernatural creature who tempts us to sin is enticing for many, since it places the blame on something or someone else for their own personal errors. Despite the fleshly inclinations we possess, we can be assured that if we endure to the end in faithful obedience, our nature will be changed from corruptible to incorruptible (1 Corinthians 15:50-54) and thus we will be made *"equal unto the angels."* (Luke 20:36).

William Rundle,
Boston Ecclesia, MA



BIBLE STUDY

PART 8

THE CHAPTERS THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

By Ben Brinkerhoff
Christchurch North Ecclesia, NZ

SAVED IN CHRIST-LIKENESS

In our last article, we finished with a question: "How?" As in, how did Christ condemn sin in the flesh? I admit it was an awkward point to stop an article. But it is not always easy to summarize a whole stream of thought in 1,500 words.

So, let's jump right back in. How did Christ condemn sin in the flesh? The answer is simple, really: through Jesus's resurrection.

What do I mean?

Think about it. When Jesus rose from the dead, did he have sinful flesh? In other words, did he desire to sinfully rebel against his Father? Did he desire to oppose his Father's will? Did he struggle with his nature any longer?

No, he didn't. Yet, he was alive.

Now you tell me; given his resurrection, was Jesus condemned or was sinful desire condemned? In other words, was Jesus destroyed or was the desire to sin within him destroyed?

Where was the desire to sin destroyed then? The answer is in Christ's flesh which he shared in common with us all, which is why he had to come in the same sinful nature we all have.

While Jesus death was how sin's nature was condemned, his resurrection makes clear that God condemned the body of sin and not the sinless Lord. Why? Because the sinless Lord was resurrected to life, but sin as represented by his rebellious bodily nature stayed in the grave.

Clearly his resurrection shows that sin, not Jesus, was condemned.

Scripture presents this idea in many ways. For example, the body of sin was destroyed (Romans 6:6); that which has the power of death, the devil, was destroyed (Hebrews 2:14). The old man was put off so the new man might live (Colossians 3:9-10). They're all different ways of saying the same thing.

But why was Jesus resurrected? For two reasons, really:

1. He didn't sin, so the grave couldn't hold him (Acts 2:24).
2. He alone perfectly declared that God was righteous (Romans 3:25), because he put to death the nature that asserted its own will over God's (Romans 6:3-6).

Sin isn't simply just acting against the will of God. Sin is trying to usurp God.

It's the second of those two points I would like to dwell on for a moment. Ask yourself: what was the first temptation, the first sin? Let's turn to Genesis 3:4-5: *"And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."*

You see, sin isn't simply just acting against the will of God. Sin, as revealed in this passage, is trying to usurp God. One of the clear qualities of a supreme Sovereign is the ability to distinguish good from evil. When we rebelliously sin, we declare that God's judgment of what is good and what is evil is wrong. We'd rather obey the good and evil of

our own choosing, hence being *"gods, knowing good and evil."*

According to the serpent, there is no real consequence for asserting equality with God in this way because *"You shall not surely die."* So, by this serpentine logic, we all become our own god and the judge of our own version of righteousness (good and evil), without consequence.

In other words, the serpent invented humanism. It is a very old idea.

So, what is God supposed to do with serpent logic exactly? Is God right or are we right? Who is sovereign? Will God allow an eternal challenge to his supremacy and oneness?

He will not. He cannot. So, he acted to destroy that challenge with death.

How so? In the garden, Adam and Eve wanted to be like God, thinking, *"You shall not surely die."* By dying contrary to his own will, Jesus showed conclusively that he was obedient only to God. (Perhaps you can see the irony of this demonstration to the Trinity-believing Christian).

With this in mind, let us read Romans 3:25-26 from the NET version.

> *God publicly displayed* [Jesus] *at his death as the mercy seat accessible through faith. This was to demonstrate* [God's] *righteousness, because God in his forbearance had passed over the sins previously committed. This was also to demonstrate* [God's] *righteousness in the present time, so that* [God] *would be just and the justifier of the one who lives because of Jesus' faithfulness.*

Can God forgive the self-righteous person? Forgive what? By definition, the self-righteous person is right, not God.

Yet, inside, we have that *"knowledge of good and evil."* We think we know right and wrong and, as a result, rebel against God's will.

The rebellion and willfulness that Jesus had to destroy in his own body are expressed perfectly in Mark 14:36, *"not what I will, but what thou wilt."*

It was Jesus' contradictory will that had to go to the cross and die.

And by destroying the will that opposes God (which we all share), he showed that only God was righteous. In this act, he reversed that first sin in the garden.

Brothers and sisters, young people, we are saved through God's righteousness. Romans 3 says plainly that Jesus's death demonstrated his righteousness. Further, it states that God was first just and then the justifier of the one who lives because of Jesus' faithfulness.

Is there an alternative to God saving on the basis of His righteousness? What would be the alternative basis? For example, can God save based on your

version of good and evil? Can you be saved if you want to be the just one?

Just imagine it. You are standing before God and pleading, "God, please forgive me, although I really think I was right the whole time."

Can God forgive the self-righteous person? Forgive what? By definition, the self-righteous person is right, not God.

God can't forgive without the unreserved declaration of His righteousness. This Jesus declared by doing what we could not do. He took his bodily nature that rebelled against God, the "body of sin," and destroyed it, **while he himself was a sinless man**, so that God would be unrivaled. In doing this, he declared that God alone is righteous. Yet by doing this as a sinless man, the grave could not hold him. God was righteous to resurrect him, while leaving his sinful nature condemned in the grave.

God accepted this as a perfect sacrifice; this sacrifice was something an animal could not be.

According to Paul in Romans 8:3-4, Jesus fulfilled the righteous requirement of the Law. What was that?

I'd suggest that Philippians 2 helps us see that the righteous requirement of the Law was obedience. Notice how Paul pulls all these things together in Philippians 2:6-8 while contrasting Jesus with Adam:

> *Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.* (RSV).

The point, of course, is to contrast Jesus with Adam and Eve. When Eve listened to the serpent, she did count equality with God as something that could be grasped by man. This, Christ did not do. He instead bore our likeness, the likeness of sinful flesh, the "likeness of men" (considered in our last article), and he emptied himself, and became obedient unto death.

This was the righteous requirement of the Law: total, humble obedience.

Okay… but how does any of this affect us? Well, that depends. Would you like to join with Christ?

It's your choice. But as Paul explains it, the options are: be in Christ or perish.

I can hear someone say, "Well, why not? It almost sounds easy. Christ died for me. Great! Hey, once saved, always saved, right?"

But here is the principle. Christ did put sin to death in his death. But that act, as courageous as it was, meant nothing if Christ didn't rise again from the dead.

And so the same goes for us. If we symbolically take on Christ's death in baptism, then we **must** symbolically take on Christ's life and the life Christ lives to God. This is the point Paul makes in Romans 6:10-11 (NKJV). *"For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be* ***dead indeed to sin, but alive to God*** *in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

If we take on his death, we must take on his life. The Old Testament is full of examples of Jews taking on death as a symbol through animal sacrifice, but not taking on the life.

For example, in Psalm 40:6-8: *"Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require. Then I said, 'Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart.'"* (NKJV).

Death by animal sacrifice, even of a perfect, unblemished animal, has no meaning without the life of delighting in God's will.

It takes one to get the other. You cannot symbolically take on the death of Christ unless you symbolically take on the life of Christ. You cannot simply destroy death unless you embrace life.

But how do you embrace life? How do you live a resurrected life?

It would be great to have the freedom but not the responsibility, but that is not a life in Christ. And this is the confusion of many who believe grace cures all. Does God want a horde of saved yet unrepentant sinners? What He desires is those who are like Christ. Thus, Paul says in Romans 8:4: *"That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who* [this is a big "who"] *do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."* (NKJV).

So, ultimately, you and I are saved **in** Christ and by being **like** Christ. In fact, all God will save is that which is like Christ and is conformed to his image. He will not save your fallen nature.

It is in that confidence that we can say there is no condemnation for those who are **in Christ Jesus**, because we understand and believe in what it means to be in Christ Jesus and to walk according to the spirit, not according to the flesh.

It means you crucify your flesh and your desires and, like Christ, declare God's righteousness.

You do this imperfectly, of course, but you faithfully continue because you know that, despite your weakness, failings, and struggles, there is no condemnation for you in Christ Jesus. Sin has been destroyed in Christ's flesh, and it will be in yours. Death will be no more. Christ's death doesn't become a license to sin; it becomes motivation to persevere.

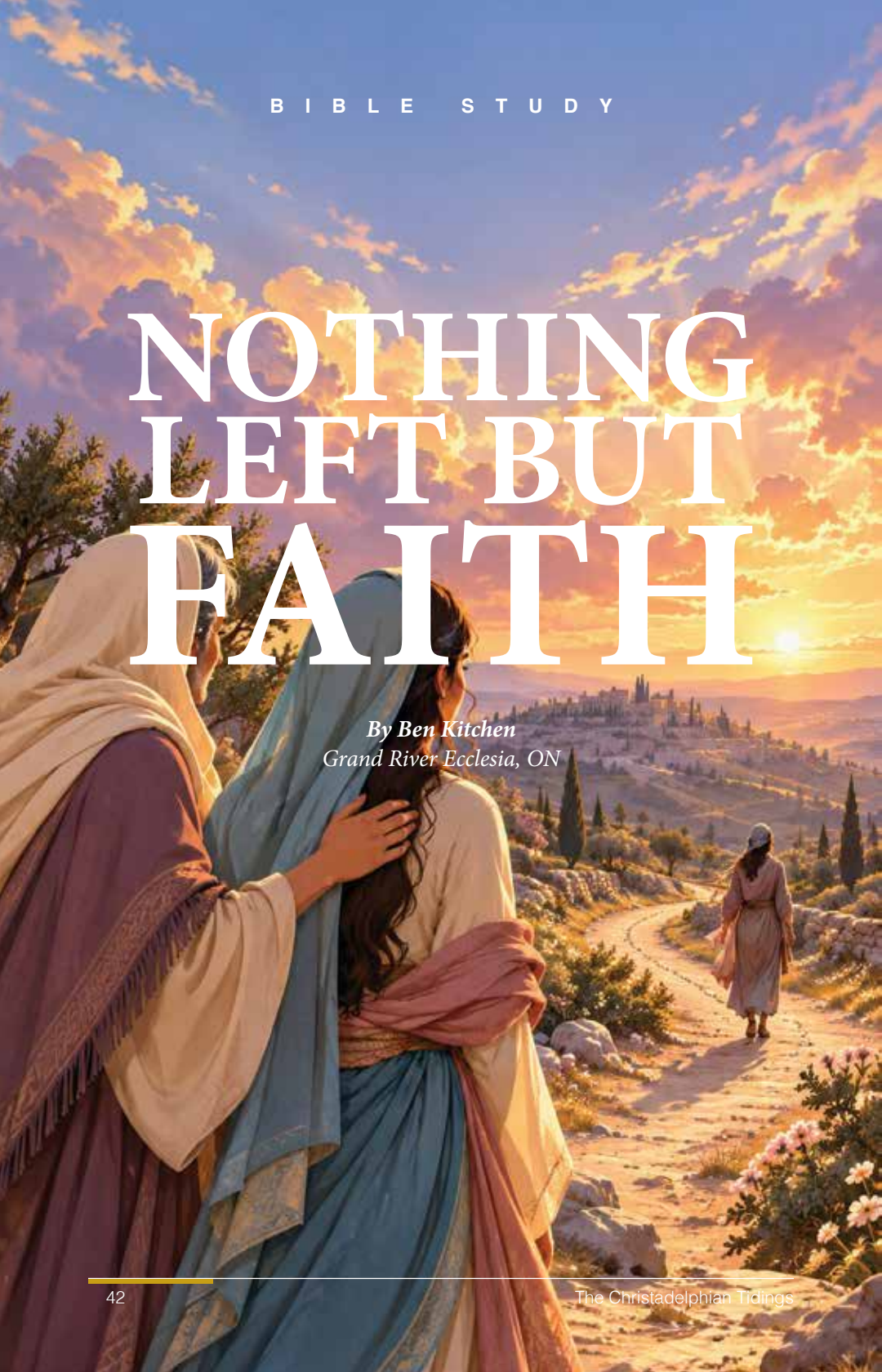
But how do I do that? Now that I'm in Christ, how do I live like him? How do I walk according to the spirit? Good question. We will take that up in our next article.

Ben Brinkerhoff,
Christchurch North Ecclesia, NZ



NOTHING LEFT BUT FAITH

By Ben Kitchen
Grand River Ecclesia, ON



RUTH 4 has always puzzled me to some extent. I had all sorts of questions, mainly about what I was supposed to take from it for my own life. Then, as part of a Bible Class series, I took a deep dive into the idea of redemption.

While I have explored all kinds of ideas and hypotheses, I've found they all come back to one fundamental principle: redemption is an act of mercy and loving kindness, not something the redeemed necessarily "earns" from a legal perspective.

That has clear ramifications for ourselves as we look to our Redeemer. But I'm getting ahead of myself. This is the first of three articles examining Boaz as the redeemer for Ruth **and** Naomi **and** Elimelech. First, we'll identify the utterly hopeless situation that Naomi and Ruth found themselves in.

Naomi and Ruth's Return

On the road back to Bethlehem from Moab, Naomi turns to her two daughters-in-law. *"Go,"* she says, *"return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!"* (Ruth 1:8-9)[1].

Much has been made of Naomi's spirituality at this particular moment. Most commentators tend to judge her harshly. I, however, feel we need a touch more compassion. Naomi is not rejecting God. Although she is trying to send her daughters away—and she does want them to go— this isn't some kind of test; she entrusts them to God's care.

I believe that not much time has been devoted to "why." Why would Naomi send them away? They had come that far with her. What did Naomi stand to gain from it? The answer is, nothing. She must have genuinely felt that returning to Moab was the best possible option for these two women she loved so much. Whether that was right or wrong can be debated endlessly, but the raw emotion is clear. And it is raw emotion we all share, whether worn on our sleeves or hidden away deep inside our hearts.

Naomi defines the bottom line of her grief in verses 11-13:

> *Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me.*

"For your sake." Naomi's concern is for them.

In modern English, we use the word "bitter" to refer to a sort of malicious, resentful, snappy anger. The Hebrew is a bit more literal. It's *"bitter,"* as in, "not sweet," something you want to throw up and get out of your body. That's why it's so closely related to the word for grief, which evokes the same emotions and is itself sometimes translated as "grievous" or similar.

The hand of the LORD also did indeed go out against her. God fought her plans and the plans of her husband and sons—and, of course, prevailed. This left her in the depths of despair and grief.

As we shall now see, the root of the problem here is that they have nothing to go back to. Anything Elimelech, Mahlon, or Chilion may have owned does not belong to Naomi—at least not permanently.

The Name is Tied to the Land

Naomi is facing the end of Elimelech's line, when his name will be *"blotted out in Israel"* (Deuteronomy 25:6) and *"cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place."* (Ruth 4:10). This is far deeper than it at first seems. It certainly incorporates the idea of the genealogy coming to an end and there being no son to "bear the name," with potential dishonor tied to losing one's future family, but that's not the full picture.

If Boaz's only reason for marrying Ruth was to "perpetuate the name of the dead," then why is Obed not listed as Elimelech's son? No. He is Boaz's. In the genealogies, he is not Elimelech's "pretend" or "adopted" son. The line to David comes through Boaz and Boaz's ancestry, which continues in Christ's genealogy. (The same is true of Judah's sons Zerah and Pharez, through Tamar, who are listed as his sons, not his "adopted" or "pretend" grandsons).

It's more than *"perpetuating the name of the dead,"* then. We have the full quote in Ruth 4:10, where Boaz describes what he's doing. He redeems the field and takes Ruth as his wife to *"perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place."*

In Genesis 48:5-6, we also see what this continuance of a man's *"name"* means.

> *And now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are. And the children that you fathered after them shall be yours. They shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance.*

Jacob, in a sense, "adopts" them as sons, since each gets a share of the inheritance. But they are still the sons of Joseph (v. 5, *"your two sons"*), and no genealogy ever claims that Ephraim and Manasseh are **literally** Jacob's direct sons, even though they receive the inheritance.

If Boaz's only reason for marrying Ruth was to "perpetuate the name of the dead," then why is Obed not listed as Elimelech's son?



This idea of the name is beautifully interwoven with inheritance rights in the land. Naomi and Ruth's problem isn't just the end of Elimelech's line, but the loss of someone to inherit and own the land and, specifically, to fulfill Elimelech's civic duties ("his place in the gate").

These give Naomi, and by extension Ruth, a legal place in the land beyond being homeless widows resorting to perpetual begging and gleaning. Without it, they are simply waiting for time and chance to catch up with them. For instance, if Ruth were to injure herself badly, she would no longer be able to glean, and without gleaning, there would be no more food.

If Naomi had been able to have more sons, there may have been a glimmer of hope.

Levirate Marriage

Levirate marriage (so-called) is the process of the brother of a dead man marrying his dead brother's wife if she had no children. It's the basic principle behind what happens with Judah and Tamar, and it's described in Deuteronomy 25.

Levirate marriage was not a custom unique to ancient Israel, much like the inheritance laws discussed above. Surrounding nations had similar laws, although they weren't quite the same as Israel's. Israel's was all about God.

The process is described in Deuteronomy 25:5-10:

> *If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother*

shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. And if the man does not wish to take his brother's wife, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate to the elders and say, "My husband's brother refuses to perpetuate his brother's name in Israel; he will not perform the duty of a husband's brother to me." Then the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him, and if he persists, saying, "I do not wish to take her," then his brother's wife shall go up to him in the presence of the elders and pull his sandal off his foot and spit in his face. And she shall answer and say, "So shall it be done to the man who does not build up his brother's house." And the name of his house shall be called in Israel, "The house of him who had his sandal pulled off."

So, Levirate marriage was a legal marriage between the surviving brother and the widow. The firstborn son of this marriage would become the heir of the dead brother's estate—he would "succeed to the name" of the dead brother and, we can probably assume, would not inherit anything from his **actual** father.

Once again, it's not that the genealogical records then have to **pretend** that half of this son's DNA comes from the dead brother. It doesn't, and the genealogies never do take that approach. But this son would become, in essence, the **legal** heir to everything belonging to the dead man, retaining the name and the inheritance within the tribe (see Numbers 36).

Purely theoretically, Elimelech's brother might have married Naomi. The firstborn son of that marriage would become the heir of Elimelech's estate. Ruth would marry that son, and both Ruth and Naomi would be "redeemed," in a sense, from their hopeless situation. Through this theoretical child, they would have a legal right to Elimelech's estate.

Alternatively, since Naomi seems to have no more children, Elimelech's brother could have married Ruth. Their firstborn son would then inherit Elimelech's estate and, as that child's mother and grandmother, Naomi and Ruth would also find themselves redeemed.

Unfortunately, though, Elimelech's brothers are never mentioned, and either never existed, had died, or were too poor to be relevant, and, in any case, Levirate marriage came with a string of legal complexities and opt-outs that made the law all but negligible to Naomi and Ruth's situation.

At the gate, Boaz tells the near-kinsman that he **must** marry Ruth, which ultimately makes the other man walk away. Most commentators take that to mean the job of a redeemer had expanded to also include Levirate marriage. There is no evidence to support that theory, apart from trying to interpret the specifics of what's going on here in Ruth 4.

Interestingly, the Levirate marriage law described in Deuteronomy 25 comes with conditions. It only applies to *"brothers"* who are *"living together."*

After the death of one brother, the other is also given the full legal right to opt out. He will be publicly shamed (because he refuses to *"build up his brother's house"* and, in essence, leaves the widow to fend for herself), but he is not **legally obligated** to marry her.

In other words, nobody is legally obligated to marry Ruth based on the law of Levirate marriage. In fact, it seems that Levirate marriage as a legally binding rule didn't apply to her at all, because Mahlon's brother was dead, and her father-in-law apparently had no brothers either. Even if he did, they certainly weren't *"dwell*[ing] *together."*

Unfortunately, Naomi seems to have no way to secure this. She genuinely believes Moab is the more sensible choice for her daughters-in-law's future. From a natural perspective, she was completely right. Moab offered them a future and an inheritance; she and the land of Israel simply could not.

Ruth's Choice: Hopelessness, but Faith

Thus, Naomi reinforces her earlier push for them to go back to Moab. As we know, Orpah returns *"to her people and to her gods."* (1:15). But Ruth refuses to leave. "*Where you are, I am,*" she says (in the present tense), and I can imagine her arms folded tightly in this moment: *"and where you lodge, I lodge; your people is my people, and your God my God."* (v. 16 YLT).

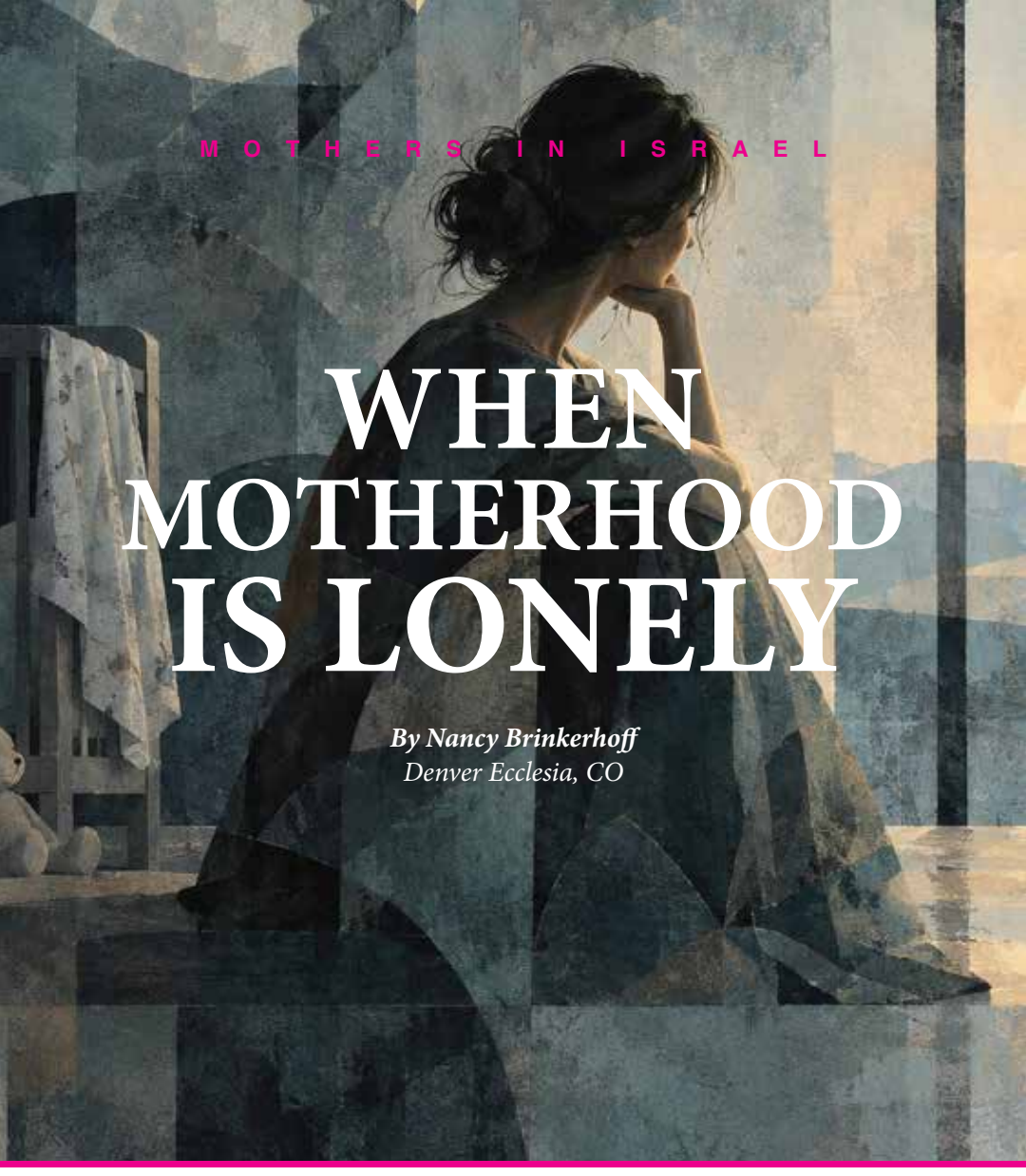
Even though Bethlehem holds no future for her, Ruth's love and care for Naomi means she goes anyway. Her commitment to following her mother-in-law makes no sense (naturally speaking), and is based purely on just that. **Commitment**. It is a humanly illogical decision of faith to continue with her. In fact, Ruth's conviction appears to stem from long before Naomi asks them to turn back.

Thus Orpah turns back to *"her people and her gods,"* and Ruth refuses. And Naomi and Ruth survive the long, arduous, no doubt extremely dangerous road from Moab back to Bethlehem. But although they're home, their situation is utterly bleak. The law makes provisions for the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, and here we essentially have all three wrapped into one. Yet it appears that there is no way for them to escape the poverty.

In the next article, we'll delve a little deeper into who owns Elimelech's estate, and why that matters for both Naomi's and Ruth's futures.

Ben Kitchen,
Grand River Ecclesia, ON

1 All quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the *English Standard Version.*



WHEN MOTHERHOOD IS LONELY

By Nancy Brinkerhoff
Denver Ecclesia, CO

WHEN God declared, *"It is not good that the man* [or "the person"] *should be alone"* (Genesis 2:18), it was the first thing described as *"not good"* in a world full of *"good"* and *"very good."* The contrast is striking. And, perhaps, it should have warned us to take loneliness more seriously than we do.

Loneliness was not something either believers or society at large discussed much in the past. Long-term studies from the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st show single-digit rates of reported loneliness across most groups, rates that in fact seemed to be declining. Predictably, this changed with the onset of the

COVID-19 pandemic. In various surveys conducted in 2020 and 2021, up to 25% of the population of the US reported feeling lonely. Suddenly, the issue of loneliness was a major news story.

Public health officials were already using the phrase "loneliness epidemic" before Covid. But in the years since, individuals and groups in various fields have latched on to this new way of framing the problem. Ironically, loneliness may not just be an individual experience, but a society-wide public-health problem. Now conversations are not just about how shy people should make more friends, but about the larger structural problems in our communities.

Unsurprisingly, the issue of loneliness came up frequently in the 2024 *Tidings* "Christadelphian Moms' Survey." The survey did not ask directly whether moms felt lonely, but the problem was constantly listed as a major challenge. New moms, single moms, moms whose husbands travel a lot, moms in small ecclesias or without much support—motherhood is so frequently lonely.

In our survey data, around 80% of moms reported having supportive people in their life that they could talk to about parenting challenges. While this is an encouragingly high number, that still leaves around 20% lonely—a statistic that tracks with population-wide figures noted above.

There are no easy answers to the problem of maternal loneliness. Relationships are complicated to create and maintain. But there is still a lot that individuals and communities can do. Some ecclesias offer ongoing moms' groups, sisters' classes, or homeschool co-ops or meet-ups. Individual sisters find groups to join through schools, community centers or local churches. And many others quietly find support with other moms or older sisters because someone prayerfully took the initiative to reach out.

Another option that has become more viable in recent years is a virtual moms' group, meeting online through Zoom or another platform. This is something that individual ecclesias could set up for their members, in addition to or in place of traditional sisters' classes. For moms in smaller ecclesias or without local peers, there is an ongoing weekly Zoom meet-up and WhatsApp group that have become a valuable means of support. Moms in the North American time zones who are home weekdays can contact this author through the Tidings for more information about this particular group.

For moms—and all of us—the problem of loneliness will never go away. But if even non-believers recognize that loneliness is an issue for society to face, we too can choose to take it seriously. However we manage to do this, we can all be more intentional about building the kind of community that takes to heart God's first warning for us: *"It is not good that the person should be alone."*

Nancy Brinkerhoff,
Denver Ecclesia, CO

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Regarding "Jesus Christ, The Manifestation of God":

Fantastic article covering some very important fundamentals about Jesus Christ and their implications.

Daniel Schipper,
Tea Tree Gully Ecclesia, SA

Regarding "Bible Weekend in Greece":

Thanks for your *Tidings* article, it seems you all travel back in time when you journey in the footsteps of Paul! Good job! Hopefully the brethren and sisters are keeping in touch; I know you do your best to keep them in the loop! And there's no way anyone can convince me that they did not speak Greek throughout Israel and the whole Empire! Aramaic? There's never one good thing said about it throughout Scripture. It's good for the brethren to initiate this effort to keep faraway members in the loop. A lot of work for a weekend but well worth it. God bless you all!

Peter Wisniowski,
Brampton Ecclesia, ON

Regarding "Nassib's Story":

What a beautiful story of your father's faith journey and his impact on you and others. Thank you for sharing this with us, Abigail. We all miss him (and our other loved ones) and look forward to seeing him again in that glorious day.

Alison deCaussin,
Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA

Not Regarding Any Article in Particular:

My wife and I have been married for 9 years now and have been faithfully trying to do the readings every day but failed to do so at times. Thanks to subscribing to the Tidings, my wife and I wake up in the morning and listen to the Tidings in bed and this is awesome. We learn so much more from listening rather than reading. So thank you so very much for that.

Joseph Larry LeBlanc,
North Battleford Ecclesia, SK

BAPTISM IN PALENQUE

By Jim and Jean Hunter,
CBMA Links

HERE is a picture of the baptism/breaking of bread with our new brother, Pascual Marquez, in Palenque, Mexico. Bro. Pascual has been studying for years with sis. Damaris Cuevas (the lady in the striped dress) and attends the breaking of bread via ZOOM in Los Angeles. Bro. Herbert Carrillo flew there from San Salvador to do the baptism and the meeting on September 27th. Bro. Herbert is the grandson of the very first sister baptized in El Salvador, back in 1974!

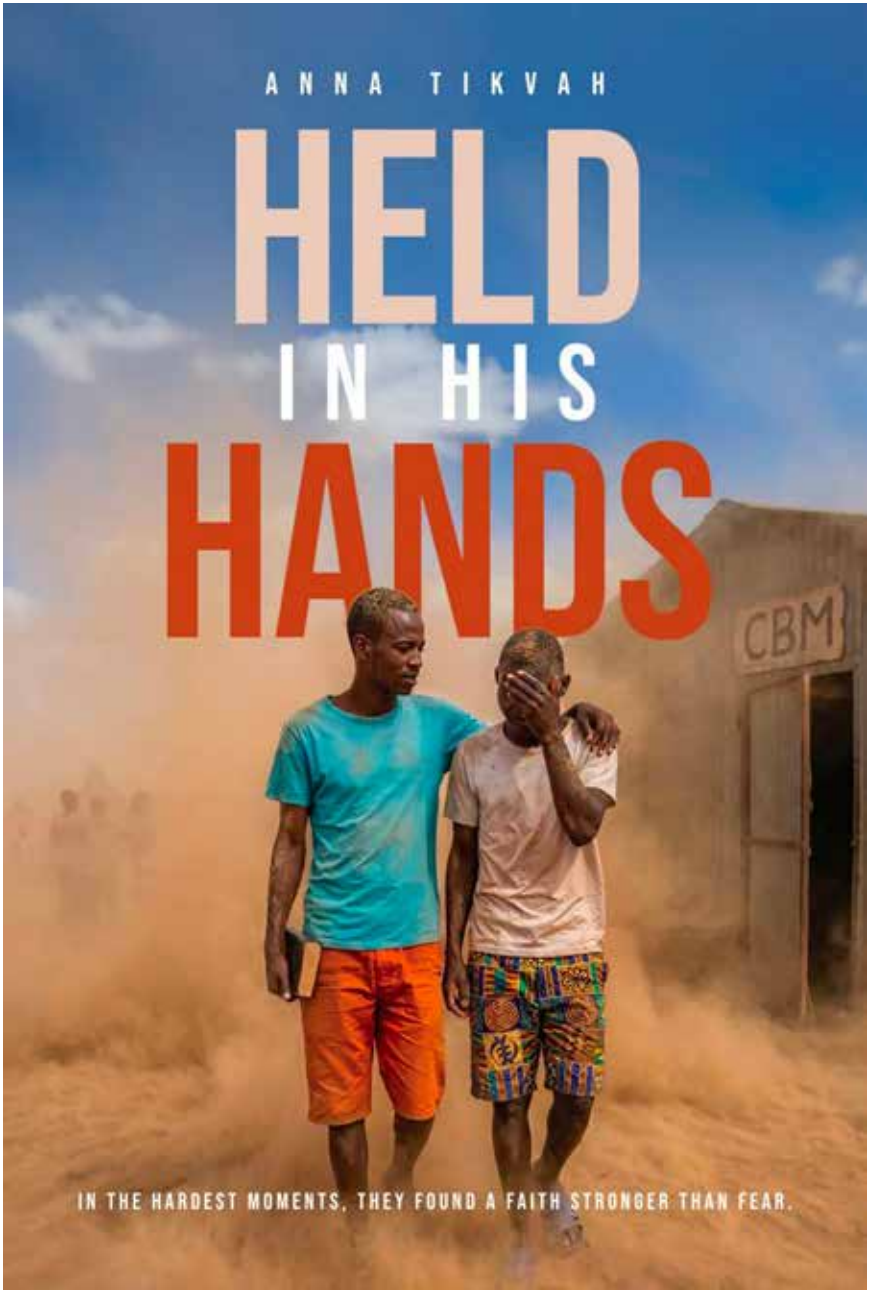
Also in the picture, on the left, is a friend of Sis. Damaris, Bro. Pascual's wife, and another relative of the family.

Afterwards, Bro. Pascual said how happy he was to be part of the "Family in the Faith."

May God be with our new brother and keep him until the return of the Lord Jesus and the Kingdom.

Jim and Jean Hunter,
CBMA Links




ANNA TIKVAH
HELD
IN HIS
HANDS
CBM
IN THE HARDEST MOMENTS, THEY FOUND A FAITH STRONGER THAN FEAR.

CHAPTER 3

Kya's Story, The Scary Night

It was a hot, muggy night. Crickets and cicadas were trying their hardest to provide a soothing melody, but two young boys were tossing fitfully on a thin mat and couldn't sleep. Gunshots had rung out several times in the last hour, and the sound was getting closer.

Housed in a small mud-brick hut in the eastern part of the DRC, Kya was fearful. Rebels often came into the village at night to terrify everyone so that they could steal livestock and the few possessions that people owned. Occasionally, they killed those who got in their way. Kya knew his own parents had died when he was only two years old. He knew that sometimes people had even been locked into their homes and burnt inside the walls. A mass grave lay nearby in the countryside. When shots rang out, Kya knew that they weren't safe. He had a vivid imagination, and the scenarios playing out in his young mind were terrifying!

Loud gunshots suddenly blasted the dark night very close by, and both boys cried out in fear. Boazi put his arm around Kya, and they huddled close.

"Come, my boys," Ann Marie called out anxiously from the next room. "Come in here with me."

Thankful for her call, the young lads ran in as quickly as they could. Kya was ten, and Boazi had just turned eleven. Widowed and aged, Ann Marie had taken them in as orphaned toddlers, and now she was everything they had.

Wrapping her arms around their hot, sweaty bodies, she pulled them close. More gunshots rang out, then screams, a loud shout, and a horrible thud.

"Let's pray," Ann Marie cried anxiously. A devout Catholic, Ann Marie prayed often. "Lord Jesus Christ, please help us," she begged. "See us here in this mud house with no one to protect us but You. Please stop these rebels from hurting us or anyone else in this village. You can stop them, Father. Jesus, you can stop them. Please give us strength to not be afraid but to put our trust in You. Mary, Queen of Heaven, please look down and have compassion on us with all your heart. See these small boys in my care and protect us, please protect us from harm…"

As she prayed, seeking divine protection from many patrons above, the gunshots seemed to fade a little further away. Safe in her arms, Kya and Boazi listened carefully to every word she said. She kept praying until their small bodies relaxed against her large frame and their hearts stopped beating so wildly.

"Kya, pray for us," she encouraged.

"Father, please look down and see us," Kya pleaded as tears welled up in his eyes and slid down his cheeks. "Please make these bad men go away from our house. Please don't let them get into our house and hurt us. Please scare them and make them run the other way. Please don't leave us alone with these killers… and please keep everyone in our village safe!"

Then Boazi took his turn, and then Ann Marie again. They kept praying until the fearful noises faded away. Soon the commotion was no louder than the army of crickets and cicadas surrounding their home.

Kya yawned.

"Are you alright, my sons?" the older woman asked kindly.

Sleepy now and weary from the fearful hours they had spent awake, Kya and Boazi nodded.

"Stay here in my room," she offered. The boys were very happy to drag their thin mats in next to her, and curl up close to her bed.

Kya never forgot that night, and while he fell asleep before thanking God for the safety He had brought to their little home, it was a moment that deeply impressed upon his heart that divine help came from Heaven, and prayers were effective.

Sadly, Ann Marie's prayers didn't stop all the suffering in the villages. Rebels continued to invade from time to time. Early deaths and funerals were a common occurrence. Even so, the boys developed confidence that God was looking out for them, as Ann Marie was frequently down on her knees, appealing for everyone above to provide divine protection.

Although they were orphans and life was so uncertain, Kya and Boazi had a happy home with Ann Marie in the fertile region of Fizi. Strong and hard-working, Ann Marie loved her adopted boys like they were her own children. Their village of Mukwezi was a beautiful, lush region along the shores of Lake Tanganyika, where palm trees grew straight and tall. Avocado and mango groves were abundant. Even orange and lemon trees grew in the fields, next to guava and pawpaw. In the compound where Ann Marie resided, there were also pineapples and many other plants. It was a beautiful location.

Every day the boys attended a school where the studies were done in French. They were very thankful that Ann Marie walked with them to their classes and worked hard to provide them with the essentials they needed.

Kya loved Ann Marie's little saying in their native dialect of Kibembe. When she wanted them to wait patiently for something that they couldn't have immediately, she would say, "*Wakyebelela alile atembo, na waunahuna alile suna.*" This meant that those who have patience to wait for the plant to grow and the flour to be made get to enjoy the good results of eating the delicious fufu. Or simply put, "He who has patience benefits, and he who lacks patience, suffers."

On Sundays, they always attended the Catholic Church, where Ann Marie worshipped faithfully. But one sad day in 2011, this tenuous but happy existence changed forever. Advanced in years, Ann Marie died.

Devastated, the boys weren't old enough to fend for themselves. Kya was only eleven. Boazi was twelve. They grieved her loss greatly, as she had been their best friend and the only mama they remembered.

Thankfully, Ann Marie had a son whom the boys called Uncle Demule, who took them in. Having recently married, Uncle Demule hoped he could get the inheritance of land that his father had left for him and begin a family of his own. Taking the boys along with him, Uncle Demule walked the seven miles to where his Uncle Kakozi lived. It was a beautiful area with rolling hills and many fruit trees.

Weary from the hot sun, the boys followed Uncle Demule up to the mud-brick home on the hill. They looked around excitedly, thinking how wonderful it would be to live on Uncle Demule's inheritance. They could see far across the lush valley. Kya imagined the prosperous farm they would develop, with so many fruit trees and flowers.

"Maybe we'll get a cow," Boazi suggested. "If we have milk, we can make yoguru."

"A cow would be amazing!" Kya agreed. "And look at that orange tree," he pointed. "It's loaded! We could sit out there and eat oranges all day long."

"And there are mango trees!" Boazi almost shouted. "Look, I see two huge ones over there."

Following his brother's gaze, Kya marvelled at their height. "We're going to love living here!" he exclaimed. "We'll have so much food! Maybe we will even be able to sell some in the village…"

Suddenly, they were aware that Uncle Demule was having a very difficult conversation with his uncle.

"There's nothing on paper," Uncle Kakozi was saying sternly. "You may think that this is your inheritance, but I think otherwise. You can't prove anything! I've been farming this land for the last ten years, and what you see all around you is the result of my hard labour—not your father's."

"Now listen here," Uncle Demule argued. "You got your fair share of this good land. You have more than enough for your family. Honour your brother and give his son a portion like you know he promised me before he died."

"I don't remember any such promise!"

Kya and Boazi shared anxious glances. This did not sound good.

"You were right there when he said it. You know he did." "You're dreaming. There was no promise."

"Well, I'll be back in a week," Uncle Demule said firmly. "I now have two boys to care for, and we need this land to provide food for everyone. I'm happy to move into a tent until we can get a house built for ourselves, but we're coming. We'll be here, and we expect to help you farm this land."

Uncle Kakozi spat on the ground. "You're not welcome," he replied firmly. "If you come here, you'll put your whole family in danger."

"Are you threatening me?"

"No, I'm warning you!" Uncle Kakozi scowled fiercely. The young lads cowered and moved back a few steps.

"I won't be coming alone," Uncle Demule retorted, giving a mild warning of his own.

"You'll regret it!" Uncle Kakozi yelled. "Now get off my land!"

Turning around angrily, Uncle Demule took the boys' hands and marched off, fuming. "My father would be so angry if he were here," he told them. "He would be angry and disappointed, and he would return with the whole village to see that justice was done!"

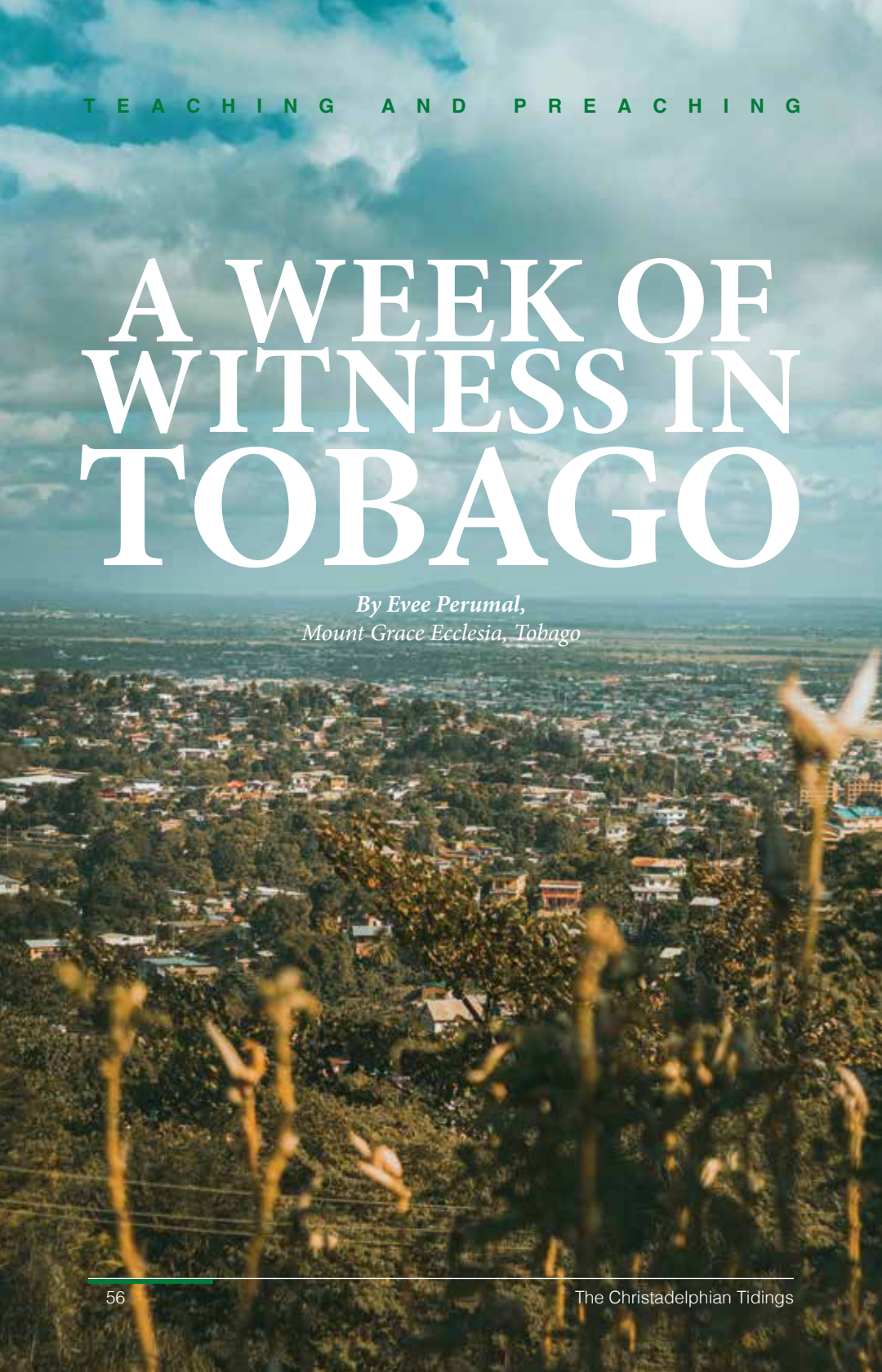
It was a much quicker trip on the way home. In fact, it was very difficult to keep up to Uncle Demule. He was walking at a very fast speed that their short legs found challenging.

The dream that they had been holding on to seemed like it might come at a very high price. Would they have to fight for it?

Anna Tikvah

A WEEK OF WITNESS IN TOBAGO

By Evee Perumal,
Mount Grace Ecclesia, Tobago



THE Christadelphian Preaching Campaign at Tobago was held at the cozy and charming Kam's Resort in Lowlands, Tobago, from August 1 to 8, 2026. Everyone was warm and welcoming, with kind gestures and accommodations.

Each day we started with morning devotions, reading and discussing the daily readings. After that, the wonderful Tobagonian sisters provided breakfast and ensured we were well fed throughout the week.

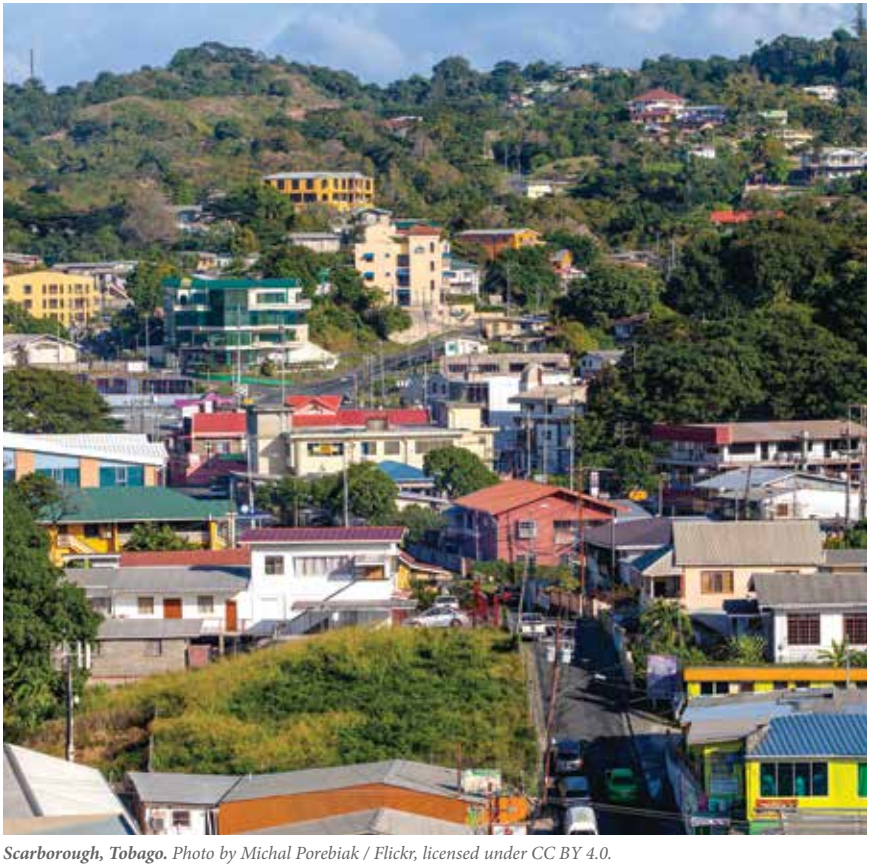
This preaching effort was the first of its kind held in Tobago and, God willing, the start of many more. Campaigners from all over the Caribbean (Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, and of course Trinidad and Tobago) and the US (New York and Atlanta) banded together to evangelize and spread the good news to the locals on this small island.

The first three days of the Bible Exhibition, Monday to Wednesday, were spent at the Lowlands Mall. The campaigners' effort was tremendous! The brethren were spread out covering all entrances and exits of the mall, while more seasoned preachers stayed at the booth itself to give thorough explanations. We were all grateful to see people stop by the booth and show genuine interest in the good news.

The young adults were especially helpful, spreading out in various places—even going to a distant supermarket—to inform people about the exhibition by the Christadelphians in the mall. While many people were in a rush, many Tobagonians were intrigued by our mission, especially those who had never heard of CBMAC (Christadelphian Bible Mission of the Americas and Caribbean) before.



The Bible Exhibition at the Lowlands Mall in Tobago



Scarborough, Tobago. *Photo by Michal Porebiak / Flickr, licensed under CC BY 4.0.*

The youngsters also helped the mission's progression. The children's hymn cheers really helped pull people forward. Lots of people passing by were pleased to hear songs they had not heard for so long, ultimately bringing them to the booth with further questions. We did manage to get away for lunch at one of the nearby food courts in the mall.

On Thursday, we all enjoyed a day at Pigeon Point Beach. We sailed on a glass-bottom boat with three stops: Buccoo Reef, the Nylon Pool, and No Man's Land. During our beach day, we enjoyed watching the sea life, snorkeling, taking a dip in the Nylon Pool, and visiting No Man's Land.

The final two days of the campaign took place in the capital city, Scarborough, Tobago's primary port. The Bible Exhibition was set up on the first floor of Port Mall by the main entrance, with participants positioned throughout the facility to distribute literature. On Friday afternoon, a group of campaigners, primarily children, made a commendable visit to the local library. Public reception was overwhelmingly positive and supportive of the mission. The initiative successfully distributed over two thousand invitations and secured numerous contact numbers for future correspondence and resource sharing.

Friday evening brought a bittersweet feeling as reality began to creep back

in. We cherished our last moments together before everyone started departing the next day. Following our outreach at Port Mall, we stopped by the "I Love Tobago" sign for group photos and took some time to scout around Tobago's Esplanade. Afterward, our evaluation session provided excellent insight through everyone's suggestions and perspectives.

Saturday was the last day, and as campaigners slowly trickled down, the preaching effort continued. The rest of the team went out and continued evangelizing in the mall. During their talks throughout the week, Brother Clement, Brother Ben, Brother Patrick, and Brother Sam successfully engaged people on the streets, who took the time to stop and listen to our message, which was truly pleasing. A sister who held an umbrella over Brother Ben may seem to some like one who performed a small act, but her example beautifully illustrates 1 Corinthians 12:25: "*That the members should have the same care for one another.*" Just as every part of the body is necessary, every brother and sister has something valuable to contribute. Her simple act of kindness showed care for another member of the body of Christ.

Looking back, the fellowship was a delight. The entire campaign was a deeply rewarding experience that effectively shared the good news with the community. We thank Brother Clement Williams and the Tobagonian brethren for hosting this event, the CCYCC for putting it together, and the CBMC for enabling this effort.

Each evening after dinner, we gathered to evaluate the previous day and discuss what could have been done better, which helped further improve the spreading of the gospel. The work we do here can make a lasting impact on those searching for the Truth. By helping instill faith, we hope to welcome more individuals into God's Kingdom—our ultimate goal.

Evee Perumal,
Mount Grace Ecclesia, Tobago





I AM PETER

By George Booker
Austin Leander Ecclesia, TX

MY name is Peter. I have had other names, Simeon (or Simon) and Cephas, but these earlier names mean little to me now—they are part of an earlier life that I have left behind or outgrown, like a child maturing into adulthood. Nevertheless, I should tell you something about what I was in the beginning before I can tell you who I have become.

As you can imagine when you see me now in my later years, I was a big, strong man when I was young and when the Lord Jesus Christ called me. Some men would be proud of such strength, and I must say that I was very proud of myself at that time. I could lift heavier nets of fish than any other fisherman. I could defeat any man in a wrestling match, and I did, sometimes with little or no provocation. I was loud, boisterous, and prone to losing my temper—who was going to stand up to me when I did? If pushed or cornered, I could unloose a string of curses that would make men blush or hide. Who would say "No" to me?

Some of these traits made me a natural leader among the other fishermen in Bethsaida. But I am sorry to say that I was not a good leader in those early days. Good leaders do not boast; they do not rush to conclusions. Good leaders do not make foolish choices based on whims. Instead, good leaders are calm and thoughtful; they consider their actions before making a decision; and they think of their followers before they think of themselves. Finally, after a number of years, I have learned from my great Teacher something of what it means to be a leader.

I was boastful. I leaped to wrong conclusions. And I made foolish choices which even now, many years later, cause me shame.

Then my brother Andrew came to me one day. We had been listening to John the Baptist, the preacher at the Jordan River. He had called all men and women to repent, and he had prophesied that the day of the LORD was coming, and coming soon. Andrew said to me, "*We have found the Messiah*"—that is, the Christ, the Son of God.

So I went with Andrew, and he took me straight to Jesus, who had been baptized earlier by John the Baptist, and had now returned from his long sojourn in the desert. When we arrived, he was talking to a group of men and women near the Sea of Galilee. This Jesus looked for all the world like a very ordinary man. But as he saw me approaching, he turned from his audience and spoke directly to me. He was very casual, I thought, as though it took him only a moment to evaluate me: "*You are Simon son of John…* "—that was my regular, everyday name—but he didn't stop there. He added: *"Now you will be called Peter."*

This name meant "rock" or "stone". First I thought he was referring to my size and strength, like a rock. But I learned that my new name meant a lot more than that. It just took me quite a while to understand what this wonderful man had in mind for me. Quite a while, and quite a number of foolish thoughts, foolish words, and foolish actions. And I may not be finished with that foolishness, even now.

You see, I grew up thinking I was special. I was bigger and stronger

I know where my true strength may be found—not in my arms and my legs, but in my heart, where Jesus is king. In my own weakness, and my recognition and acceptance of that weakness, I will become strong in my Lord, the Messiah.

than the other boys, and I took my superiority and leadership for granted. Then I met Jesus, a man the likes of whom I had never met before. I had never imagined that such a man could even exist among other people. His strength, unlike mine, was in his heart, his eyes, and his words. And his strength was manifested in a supreme love without pretense, a love that had no bounds and would pay any price and make any sacrifice to help others.

I wanted to impress him so much. But I made the ridiculous mistake of trying to show him how special I was. Time after time, I tried to impress him, and time after time I stumbled and fell. My failures came regularly, often after what seemed to be a success. Several years afterward, this up-and-down discipleship came to a final low point, when I found myself lying on the cold ground in a dark garden, crying like a baby and thinking that I had lost everything, including my own soul.

Only then, after dismal days and tortured nights, during which I contemplated ending my miserable existence—only then did a risen Jesus send for me and show me the light of a new day, a new world, and a new existence.

This new world required a new Peter. I had seen my Master perform more miracles than I could count—wonders such as the feeding of thousands with a loaf or two, the transfiguration with Moses and Elijah, and the raising of Lazarus. But the greatest miracle, from my perspective, was this: When the old man who was myself died a painful death in Gethsemane, then my new man was born out of what remained, raised from the valley of death's shadow by the loving hands of Jesus. The new man knew less than the old man **thought** he knew! The new man was not nearly as strong as the old man **thought** himself to be! But the new man who is "Peter" belongs to Jesus Christ and is in the process of being recreated as his devoted servant. And now the new Peter is "strong" only in the sense that I know where my true strength may be found—not in my arms and my legs, but in my heart, where Jesus is king. In my own weakness, and my recognition and acceptance of that weakness, I will become strong in my Lord, the Messiah.

Oh, what a journey I have had so far, and there may be rough spots yet to come. When Jesus walked on the waters of Galilee and came toward our boat, I decided it would be a good idea for me to walk on the water too. I tried and failed, and I only looked presumptuous and ultimately foolish. Why did I do such a thing? Perhaps to

elevate myself above the others, which was ridiculous considering Jesus's teachings. In any case, Jesus saved me at the last moment, and I felt even more foolish, but I did not learn my lesson.

Another time, Jesus asked all of us, *"Who do others say that I am?"* To this there were various answers… John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah. But when Jesus asked us, *"Who do you say that I am?"*, then I answered right away: *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

When I answered Jesus's question ahead of my fellow-students (for that is what we were, and still are), I felt so proud when he commended and blessed me. (Yet there was no reason for pride; I should have felt humility and gratitude.) Then, before we could scarcely turn around, I had been tripped up by my own tongue when I presumed to rebuke Jesus and give him advice he did not need at all. That presumption earned me a harsh rebuke, which seemed to wipe out my would-be accomplishment of only a few minutes before. I was ashamed when he called me "*Satan*," as though I were his enemy. Why, oh why did I have to open my mouth so much? There was so much I still had to learn!

Then I listened to our great Teacher explain to us the principles of forgiveness, and I just had to ask a silly question: *"Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"* Why did I think that we should put a limit on forgiveness? If I had only examined myself, then and later, and realized how many separate acts of forgiveness I would need, all by myself, I would have slapped my hand over my mouth. My *"Up to seven times?"* condemned me practically from the start. If there were no more than seven opportunities to be forgiven, then what hope did anyone have? And what hope did I have, particularly?

But, dear brothers and sisters, the wonder of my experiences is not that I was so silly and thoughtless; **it was that Jesus loved me anyway**. Me! There is no greater miracle than that—that a self-centered, foul-mouthed fisherman could be embraced and forgiven by the sinless Son of God, not just once, not just seven times, and not just seventy-seven times. And the wonder of it too was that it took me so long to realize what a miracle it was. But we'll consider that together next time.

George Booker,
Austin Leander Ecclesia, TX

References:

- "Cephas" means rock or stone in Aramaic, a common language in first-century Israel.
- There is some guesswork in Peter being a big, strong man. But such a description suits what we do know about him for sure, e.g., that he was outspoken, loud, presumptuous, and prone to cursing. And he could lift heavier weights of fish than the other fishermen could (John 21:11).
- Andrew was the first to introduce his brother, Simon Peter, to Jesus, the Messiah (John 1:40-44).

THE CHRISTADELPHIAN
TIDINGS
OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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

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

Christadelphian Tidings Publishing Committee: Alan Markwith (Chairman), Linda Beckerson, Peter Bilello, Nancy Brinkerhoff, Steve Davis, Jeff Gelineau, Dave Jennings, Allen Laben, William Link, Maritta Terrell, David Fraser.

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