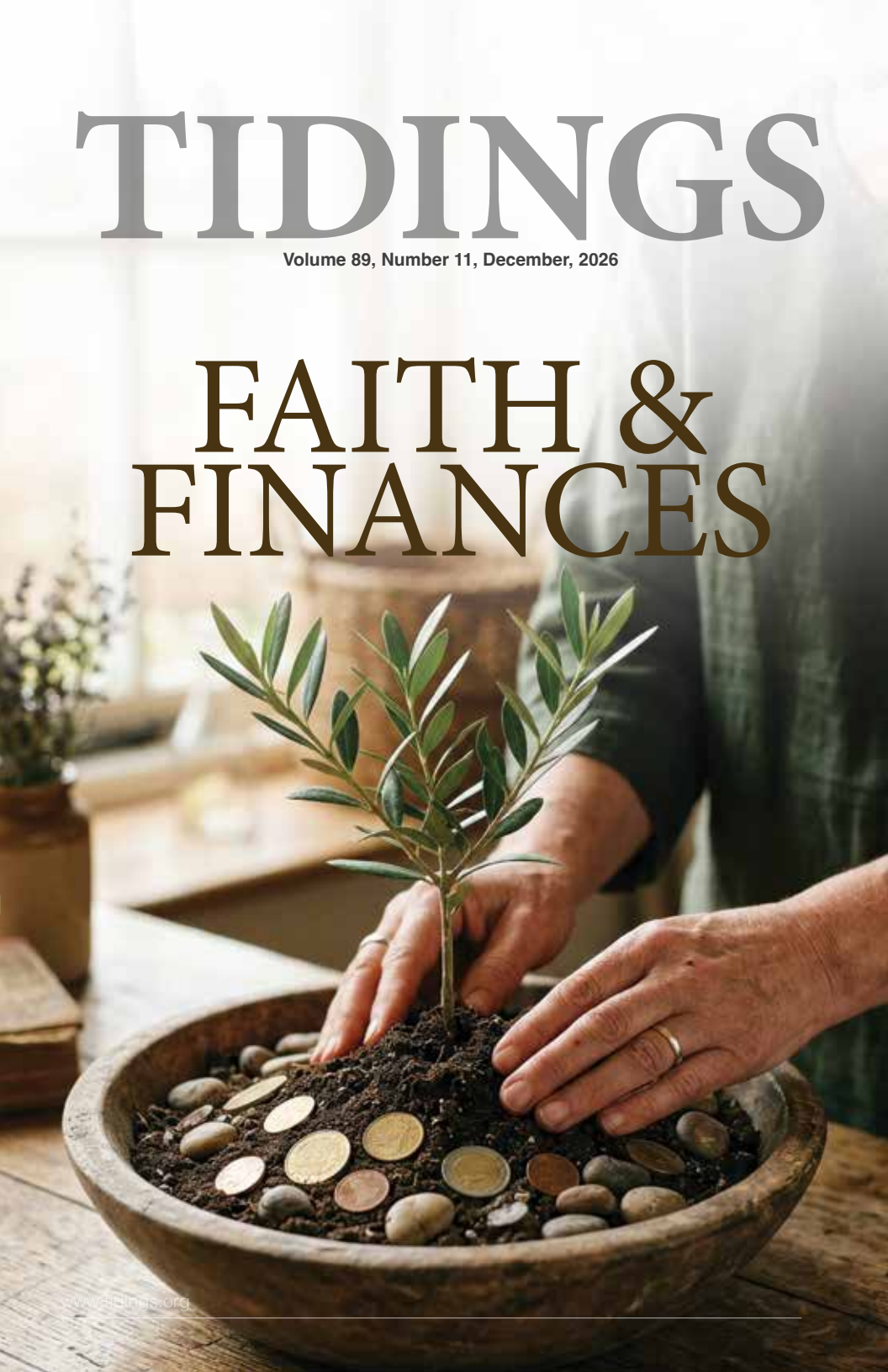
TIDINGS

Volume 89, Number 11, December, 2026

FAITH & FINANCES



Building faith in the Christadelphian community.

TIDINGS

Volume 89, Number 11 / December, 2026



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ARE ALL SINS CREATED EQUAL?



WHAT if someone told you that all sins were the same? Would you readily agree? Or maybe you'd find yourself hesitating.

Maybe I should clarify: what if someone told you that all sins are **equal**?

The question isn't just some made-up scenario. I'd guess that you've probably had this discussion before. Maybe you've been the one to tell others that all sins are equal. Perhaps you've been in a discussion with someone who can't forgive themselves, and to comfort them, you offered the idea that "a sin is a sin." Or maybe you've been someone who pushed back against the idea. Regardless, this equality of sin comes up frequently in spiritual discussions.

Biblically, as with so many topics, the answer is perhaps more complicated than we'd like. Distilling something as complex as sin into a "sin is sin" phrase inevitably misses the nuance Scripture teaches. Indeed, if God wanted things to be this simple, He wouldn't have given us a book that's over 1000 pages with examples, ideas, and stories for us to consider. He could have just given us a nice one-page document with phrases like "I love you," "Sin is sin," and "Be a good person." But He didn't do that. Because our God is a God whose glory is *"to conceal things*" (Proverbs 25:2)[1] and who has His son speak in parables so that hearers *"will indeed hear but never understand."* (Matthew 13:14). God wants His people to think deeply

So what does that mean when it comes to sin?

Equality

The stickiest falsehoods aren't entirely false. When we hear them, we think, "Yeah, I can see how that's true." So if I said to you that the sky is always blue in California, you might not think about the fact that this really isn't actually true (and seeing that this really isn't an important theological truth, it wouldn't really matter if you thought about it deeply or not); yet, the sky isn't **always** blue because it often turns red and purple at sunset, and then is completely black during the night. I recognize that I'm venturing into territory that isn't my specialty; I'm not a physical scientist. But I think you can see what I'm saying.

One reason this "sin is sin" idea sticks so well in our minds isn't just because it's snappy. It's because, in a way, it's true. Consider what makes sin equal: *"For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* (Romans 3:22b-23). Here, the apostle specifically attempts to show that everyone finds themselves in the same situation, regardless of whether they're a Jew or a Gentile. Everyone has sinned. We see equality in that no one can escape sin; it plagues all of us, and at some point we must acknowledge that it holds us captive.

Yet, Paul goes further. As we know, all sins carry the same theological wages, and all have the same solution: *"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 6:23).

We cannot mistake this point. A recognition of the fact that we all sin, all deserve death, and all need Christ is what compels us to transformation:

"Forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32). When we recognize that we were *"dead in the trespasses and sins in which* [we] *once walked,"* (Ephesians 2:1-2), we learn to show humility, compassion, and mercy, because we remember where we came from.

Beyond sin's universality, however, it also has another way it's equal. James writes, *"For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law."* (James 2:10-11). One sin, no matter what it is, breaks the perfection of the law. And, recognizing that *"all have sinned,"* we see that living by law is simply impossible for us humans. While this is similar to what we saw in Romans, it's slightly different because it applies specifically to rules and legalism. By recognizing that we cannot live according to law—because one transgression breaks the whole law—we not only transform our character, as mentioned above, but also how we see the world.

Consider how Paul writes about love: *"When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways."* (1 Corinthians 13:11). In the beginning of life, we have certain structures that guide us and teach us. But as we grow, we no longer need them because we mature. Such is the law. When we understand who we are, what sin is, and who God is, we no longer follow rules and commandments. Instead, we live by principle. Once again, recognizing the equality of sin helps us to live more like Christ and to think according to God's principles.

Unequal

Thus all sin is indeed sin. We all sin, we all deserve death, we all need Christ, and we can't save ourselves through law. But that's not the end of the story. Scripture's pretty clear that all sin isn't equal. Just look at the following verses:

> *And Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them?"* (Exodus 32:21).
>
> *The next day Moses said to the people, "You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin."* (Exodus 32:30).
>
> *Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin."* (John 19:11).

For all the ways in which sins are equal, they also aren't. Scripture classifies some as "great."

Nevertheless, recognizing this conclusion should lead us to ask a few more questions: Why does Scripture classify some sins as "great"? And why does that matter to us?

Unfortunately, human nature tends to take advantage of things like this. We look at Aaron's sin of the golden calf and the Jewish rulers' sin of turning Christ over to Pilate, and we say, "Well, those really are big things, and I've never sinned like that, so I guess I've never committed a 'great' sin." We thus use this to build ourselves up and tear

others down. We create a hierarchy of sin and make sure we come out looking good.

Yet I don't think the point is to judge which sins are really bad and which are just sort of bad. We need to temper this with what we just saw: it **is indeed** equal. So how could sins also be different? It's an enigma, a conundrum, an oxymoron.

The difference is perhaps in the impact. Aaron led a whole nation astray. The rulers caused a whole people to reject their king. In other words, God cares about people, and he cares about what happens to them. That's the reason why we see "great" sins. These sins have an outsized influence on the lives of others.

So what does this all mean? Yes, it means that sin is sin. That should humble us. But it also means that sin affects people. All sin leads to death and is an affront to God, and therefore should be avoided—yet some sin touches the lives of generations and peoples. God cares about those people, and so should we.

This Issue

In this issue, we're going to keep digging deeper. Dalton Henley opens our **Life Application** section by discussing materialism at the beginning of his series, Faith and Finances. Deb Flint tells the harrowing story of Adili Mbuto and his family.

For our **Exhortation and Consolation** section, we're publishing an exhortation by Cliff Terrell on gratitude. Mike Jenner writes for **Back to the Original** about how the Greek text can sometimes follow the Hebrew text, and how comparing the two word orders can yield exciting insights. For **Stuff that Works**, Dave Jennings describes a joint preaching campaign on the biblical teaching of Satan undertaken by many ecclesias in California. In a similar vein, James Bates writes for our **First Principles** section and discusses what it means that Jesus cast out demons.

In **Bible Studies**, we continue our two series. Ben Brinkerhoff considers the meaning of "spirit," and Ben Kitchen the laws of inheritance and redemption. Jen Wallace writes for **Mothers in Israel** about raising neurodivergent children. Finally, we wrap up the magazine with chapter four of *Held in His Hands* (the last chapter we'll be sharing), a couple of articles about Latin America, and the second installment of Peter's story by George Booker.

Altogether, we aim to ask questions and dig deeper, remembering that while it is *"the glory of God to conceal things,"* it is *"the glory of kings… to search things out."* (Proverbs 25:2).

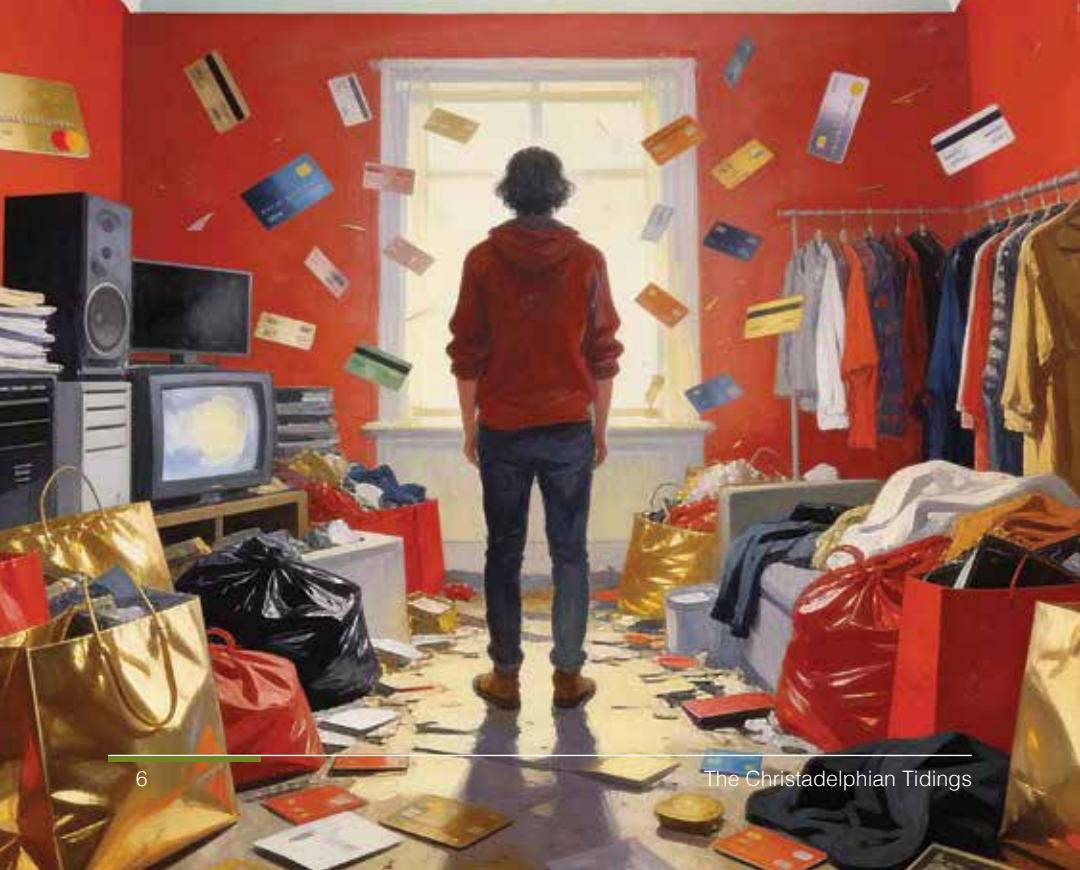
Jason Hensley

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

FAITH AND FINANCES

Part 1: *The Trap of Materialism*

By Dalton Henley
Sacramento Ecclesia, CA



The Bible spends a significant amount of time discussing money, and it's something everyone needs. No matter how much we may not want to think about it, we need it to survive. In our community, we sometimes shy away from discussing it because it feels embarrassing or unbiblical. Nevertheless, our approach to money can strongly impact our walk with God. Brother Dalton Henley (CFP®) is beginning a series on money and the Bible. His experience as a financial planner will help us to consider our approach to money and how we can use it for good.

Jason Hensley

MONEY tends to be a taboo topic in the Christadelphian community, but it's an inescapable, significant part of our lives, so I believe it's worth discussing. Most Biblical discussions about money revolve around the idea that loving money is sinful. But people don't love money. They love what money can buy. Money can buy us goods and services. I've noticed that the link between money and materialism is often not emphasized. We may find the love of money sinful, but not the love of possessions. That doesn't make sense to me. Jesus says, "*Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.*" (Luke 12:15).[1] How can it be any clearer than that?

One issue is that people tend to view materialism as someone else's problem. It is easy to see materialism as a problem in other people; it's harder to see it in ourselves. Materialism is pervasive enough to warrant a self-examination from all of us. In the parable of the Rich Man and the Kingdom, a well-versed man is told by Christ he has only one thing keeping him from the Kingdom of God: "*If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.*" (Matthew 19:21). The man's response to the challenge? "*When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.*" (Matthew 19:22). This young man's possessions were literally keeping him from the Kingdom! The Bible doesn't indicate what choice the young man made. We can only hope he thought about what Jesus said and chose the correct way.

Technological advancements have brought such enormous abundance that people from just a few generations ago could hardly fathom the lives most of us lead. At the turn of the previous century (1901), the average American household spent more than half of its income on food and clothing, 56.5% to be exact;[2] today it is approximately 15%.[3] Even though we are spending dramatically less on food and clothing, most of our pantries and closets are stuffed with so much more than someone 125 years ago would have had. I can't remember where I read this stat, but a while back I read that the average dwelling size per person in 1901 was roughly 150 square feet; today, it exceeds 700 square feet per person.[4] So many of the goods and services we spend our money on either did not exist 125 years ago, or were dramatically simplified versions of our modern-day equivalents:

electronics, vehicles, healthcare, eating out, vacations, processed food, gyms, curated yards, large dwelling places, etc. As our ability to produce goods and services has expanded, more purchases are made with status, not function, in mind. Today, the average American home contains 300,000 individual items. One family has a third of a million items inside their home! The level of material possessions that average citizens in the Western world have would be unbelievable to any other society that has ever existed. It is now commonplace for garages to not have any room for vehicles because they're stuffed with items. Many have exterior sheds on their property for the overflow. The self-storage space industry is booming, so much so that there are enough self-storage units to roof every man, woman, and child in this country. Houses are stuffed, landfills are overflowing, all because we can't curb our addiction to buying stuff. This should give us all pause—what hindrance does materialism pose to our religious calling?

Marketing plays a larger role than you may think. At its core, marketing, or advertising, is convincing someone to pay for something. Marketers have spent decades perfecting the art. The modern advertising industry dates back about 100 years, when businesses and governments worried that increased manufacturing efficiency would lead to overproduction. Up until then, advertisements mostly highlighted products' ability to meet consumers' basic needs. But we all have a somewhat fixed amount of basic needs. Influential business figures realized the key to limitless growth was to shift from meeting basic needs to manufacturing desire. Our modern consumer culture is, in many ways, a creation of a conspiracy among 20th-century government and business leaders.[5] Marketers have learned that



to be the most effective, you don't sell the product; you sell the lifestyle, or the "sizzle," as some identify it. The product is almost irrelevant. It's about what the product says about you. 21st century advertising tends to present a lifestyle. Marketers are really selling us an image of ourselves and our lives. For example, automobile advertisements almost never focus on the vehicle's functionality; instead, they present it as the key to a fun, adventurous life. Advertisers understand that, to be most effective, they must convince us to set aside our rationality and make purchasing decisions based on emotion. And the advertising industry is **massive**! According to Forbes, we are exposed to between 6,000 and 10,000 ads **per day**![6] Many of the largest companies in the world are partially, or even primarily, driven by ad revenue. Why? Because it's profitable. Companies know how to get you to buy their products and pay their marketing team handsomely. Several notable industries have such a strong gravitational pull in our culture that Manhattan streets have become colloquialisms for the industry at large: fashion gets Fifth Avenue, theater gets Broadway, finance gets Wall Street. It's no surprise that the marketing industry gets a street, Madison Avenue. Resisting the nonstop barrage of advertisements is a constant struggle, especially now that technology companies are building lengthy online profiles of us all to tailor marketing to be especially tempting. Add social media's ability to let us peer into the lives of the rich and famous, and the materialistic temptations can become overwhelming.

I want to look at the dictionary definition of materialism because I think it highlights the vapidity that it leaves in our lives. Merriam-Webster gives two relevant definitions for materialism. The first is: "A doctrine that the only or the highest values or objectives lie in material well-being and in the furtherance of material progress." Merriam-Webster's definition highlights the belief that pursuing more and more material possessions is the highest value, or even the only value. For believers, this should not be so. Our highest value should be fulfilling God's commandments: loving Him with all we have and loving our neighbors as ourselves. The second definition given of materialism is: "a preoccupation with or stress upon material rather than intellectual or spiritual things." This definition should really strike deep for all of us. Should we really be focusing on the material instead of the spiritual? How does God feel that we have become so consumed with collecting material possessions?

Modern governments largely follow the doctrine of consumerism: increasing consumption is economically desirable. Governments measure success by Gross Domestic Product, which is primarily driven by consumption. Increasing the purchase of goods and services is heralded as an economic goal in itself. Instead of focusing on overall well-being, the emphasis shifts to the rate of consumption. The business world is structured around the belief, made famous by prominent economist Milton Friedman, that corporations' only goal is to increase shareholder

profitability. Broadly speaking, the simplest way to increase profitability is to increase consumer spending. The entire economic model centers on the belief that increasing consumption is the goal. When we are surrounded by this pervasive mindset, it is difficult to escape it.

We all need money to meet our basic human needs. For most households, the pursuit of money takes significant time and mental energy, and ultimately, how much money we need reflects how much stuff we choose to let into our lives. But it's not just that every item you purchase requires the work to earn those funds; it's that those items come with ongoing costs over their lifetime. Depending on the item, these can include storage, maintenance, cleaning, and power. Buying a house comes with ongoing costs for maintenance, cleaning, yard upkeep, capital improvements, property taxes, insurance, utilities, etc. Buying a car comes with ongoing costs like maintenance, fuel, insurance, annual registration, smog checks, storage, cleaning, etc. Even buying something as seemingly insignificant as a nice shirt means you will now have to clean and store it for as long as you have it. Compound this over the numerous purchases we make, and our days become filled with maintaining our unnecessarily, or even embarrassingly, large arsenal of possessions.

The point must be made that materialism isn't just not godly—it's **un**godly. That is, it not only doesn't lead us toward God; it leads us away. Obsession with acquiring things will actively take us away from the faith. Too often, it can insidiously become a passion, or even life's pursuit, to collect cool stuff, and then spend our precious hours maintaining our inventory. You may scoff at the saying, "Whoever dies with the most toys wins," but maybe we are all living that way, just a little. We live in the most prosperous society in history. All around us, we see great wealth and great possessions. Social media lets us peer into the lives of the most materially abundant. Governments and businesses measure progress by how many possessions we have. Advertisers are working tirelessly to convince us we need more. Are we so confident that materialism isn't impacting us? "*Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have.*" (Hebrews 13:5).

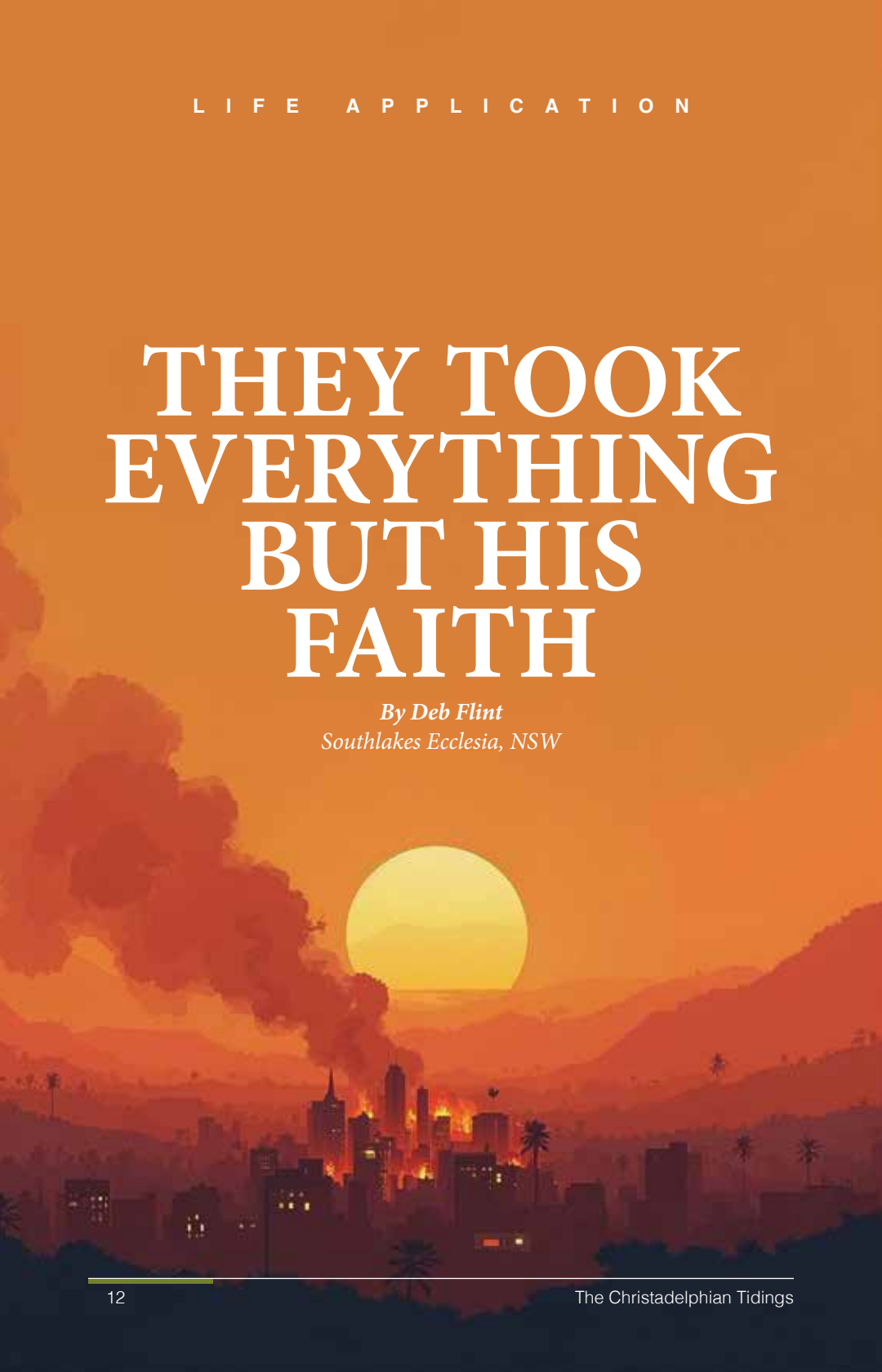
Dalton Henley,
Sacramento Ecclesia, CA

1 All quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version.
2 "100 Years of U.S. Consumer Spending," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006).
3 "Housing and Transportation Accounted for 50 Percent of Household Spending in 2024," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2026).
4 Peter Warden, "Average Home Size in the USA," *The Mortgage Reports*, March 10, 2025.
5 Gus Lubin, "There's a Staggering Conspiracy Behind the Rise of Consumer Culture," *Business Insider*, February 23, 2013.
6 Emilia Kirk, "The Attention Economy," *Forbes*, March 23, 2022.



THEY TOOK EVERYTHING BUT HIS FAITH

By Deb Flint
Southlakes Ecclesia, NSW



In Scripture, we read stories of those who trusted God through great trauma. These stories are real, and throughout the world, some of the people of God continue to find themselves in danger, in fear, and in appalling circumstances. Hearing about our brothers and sisters reminds us of how God works, even in the terror. And it reminds us of the need to share our resources and spend time in prayer for our family throughout the world.

Jason Hensley

ADILI Mbuto is a small but strong and bright-looking man. He wears a broad smile and is a dynamic speaker when teaching God's Word and preaching the gospel. He is one of those people who seems to light up when he talks about the Bible. His passion for God's Word is immediately evident.

Adili is 37 years old. He is married to Mapendo Ghislaine, and they have five children. Adili is a baptized brother and, before the events that changed his life, he was a head teacher at a school. His wife ran a small business, their children attended school, and the family had a shamba where they grew some of their own food.

It was a simple life, but a good one.

Then their world was turned upside down.

Adili is from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a country that has endured years of conflict and violence.

At around 1 am on February 14, 2025, Mapendo woke Adili because she could hear a strange noise. It soon became clear that the sound was continuous gunfire. The Congolese army was retreating from Bukavu and surrounding areas, firing as they fled.

Everyone was terrified and unsure what to do.

Adili's neighbors came to his door and urged him to leave with them and hide in the bush. But Adili could not go. He had three children, and Mapendo was three months pregnant. She was extremely unwell and in no condition to flee through the bush.

So they prayed and waited for morning.

When daylight came, the streets were filled with soldiers. Many were exhausted and sick after days of fighting and retreating. The rebels were advancing.

Adili had very little money, but he knew he needed to find medicine for his wife and whatever food he could. He bravely ventured out into the streets. Many people had already fled during the night, and he knew that soon the town could be almost empty.

For the next four days, Adili and his family remained hidden inside their home, trying to keep quiet and praying for protection.

On February 18, at around 5 p.m., the M23 forces took control of the area. The remaining government soldiers and militia, including Burundian troops and Congolese Wazalendo fighters supporting the government, were unable to stop them.

The situation was now extremely dangerous.

Two days after the M23 takeover, the family had run out of food, and Mapendo's medicine was gone. Adili

Adili explained that he could not take the sugarcane because he was a Christian.



had no choice but to leave the house again to search for what they needed.

M23 soldiers were everywhere.

Adili searched a long way from home but could not find the medicine. As he returned and entered his home compound, he suddenly heard someone behind him say, "Hi!"

He turned around to find a group of M23 soldiers.

They ordered him to come with them. The soldiers gave him luggage to carry and forced him to follow them. There was no opportunity to refuse. The M23 had a reputation for killing people who disobeyed them.

They walked all the way to the other side of the city, where a group of captured government soldiers and militia members were being held. They ordered the captives to remove their shirts and put on M23 uniforms.

Gunfire could be heard all around them. Rather than taking the roads, the group was taken through the bush. As they walked, Adili saw the bodies of dead soldiers strewn along the way.

He wondered if he would ever see his family again. He wondered if he would even see another day.

Eventually they reached a sugarcane farm. The soldiers and captives began cutting sugarcane to eat. Adili would not take any. He was terrified. He had no appetite, and he was convinced that his death was near. He did not want his final act to be stealing.

One of the M23 soldiers asked him why he wasn't getting something to eat.

Adili explained that he could not take the sugarcane because he was a Christian.

The soldier asked what religion he belonged to.

Adili replied, "I'm a Christadelphian."

The soldier then asked whether Adili believed in witchcraft and whether that was why he was afraid of dying. Adili told him that he feared God alone, and that God's law teaches us not to steal.

The soldier became angry and asked whether Adili was calling him a thief. Adili calmly explained that he was not calling him a thief; he was simply explaining what God's law says.

The soldier walked away angrily.

Later, when they reached another farm, the same soldier came back and handed Adili some sugarcane. Adili quietly passed it to the man behind him. Even

amid extraordinary danger, Adili was determined to remain faithful to God's commandments.

The group eventually reached the Ruzizi River, which divides two territories. The river was flowing strongly, and everyone was afraid to cross. They were told to sit and wait.

By this stage, Adili was becoming extremely sick. They had been walking for hours while carrying heavy luggage.

He went into the bush to go to the toilet, with a soldier following him at gunpoint. This happened four times. The soldiers decided that Adili was too sick to continue. They told him to go home.

What a remarkable turn of events.

But there was a warning: they knew where he lived, and they would come back for him.

Adili returned home and spent two days with his family. Then, during the night, soldiers came to the house and told Mapendo to send him to the army camp the following morning.

Adili went. The soldiers recognised him from the time he had been forced to wear an M23 uniform. Word quickly spread that he had joined the M23. He had not.

But now he was caught between both sides. He left his wife and children and hid in a nearby unfinished building. He had done nothing wrong, yet both government forces and the M23 hunted him.

One night, militia soldiers came to Adili's home looking for him. They knocked on the door, but Mapendo did not open it. They broke down the door and demanded to know where Adili was. She told them he had left.

What followed was a horrific act of violence against Mapendo; she was raped in front of her children. She was already pregnant.

When Adili learned what had happened, he was devastated. Mapendo was traumatized and fearful and did not want to speak about what had happened. Once again, they prayed together and tried to find a way to escape.

Adili went out looking for food, but while he was gone, M23 soldiers stole his motorbike.

On another occasion, M23 soldiers stopped him in the street at gunpoint and forced him to accompany them to a hotel occupied by their forces. Then, for reasons he could not understand, they laughed and let him go. It appeared that terrifying and humiliating people was something they did regularly.

Adili felt helpless and desperately sick. But he knew he had to get his family out.

Despite Mapendo's poor health and the danger around them, the family fled on foot.

Eventually, they reached a river that they needed to cross to get closer to Burundi. They found people who were helping refugees cross the river for a fee.

They made it to the other side.

From there, they eventually reached a refugee camp in Burundi.

They had escaped to relative safety. Thanks be to God.



At the camp, they were able to receive some food, and Mapendo was taken to hospital and given counseling. Although her health remains poor, she was eventually able to give birth to a healthy baby boy.

But life in the refugee camp remains extremely difficult. The family receives approximately $5 per month to help feed them all. It is nowhere near enough.

Agape in Action provided some food assistance when they first arrived at the camp. But when I spoke with Adili, he told me that Mapendo and their 13-year-old daughter regularly leave the camp and go into Burundi to beg on the streets.

Their children, aged 15, 5, 3, and less than one year old, remain at home. They are not attending school. And yet, even here, Adili's faith remains strong. An ecclesia meets in the camp, with seven active members, including Adili and Mapendo.

I met Adili during several days of Bible study in Burundi. He had received permission to attend outside the camp.

Adili led one of the Bible studies and spoke with great enthusiasm about why the devil is not a supernatural being. His face lit up. He spoke animatedly and passionately about God's Word. I was told that Adili is an avid preacher in the refugee camp.

It struck me that this was the same man who had endured unimaginable fear, violence, hunger, and loss. His family had been torn from their home, their livelihood had disappeared, his wife had suffered terrible trauma, and his children were living as refugees without school or any certainty about their future.

And yet, when Adili stood up to speak about the Bible, he smiled broadly and was clearly overjoyed to be there. His circumstances had taken almost everything from him. But they had not taken his faith.

Adili is just one of many refugees from the DRC. Each has their own story of terror, loss and displacement. Yet among them we continue to see

remarkable examples of faith, courage and trust in God.

Agape in Action is exploring further ways to help Adili's family and the ecclesia in the Rutana-Museni 1 camp in Burundi. In the last few weeks, Agape in Action has set up a program for food aid for the ecclesia in the refugee camp where Adili lives, and the group is coming up with income-generating ideas to try and help support themselves in the camp, supported by Agape in Action.

Please pray earnestly for this family. Pray for Mapendo's health and recovery. Pray for their children, who have lost their home and education. Pray for Adili as he continues to preach and encourage others in the refugee camp. And pray for all those caught up in the ongoing conflict in the DRC.

Despite everything they have endured, Adili and his family continue to look to God.

Deb Flint,
Southlakes Ecclesia, NSW

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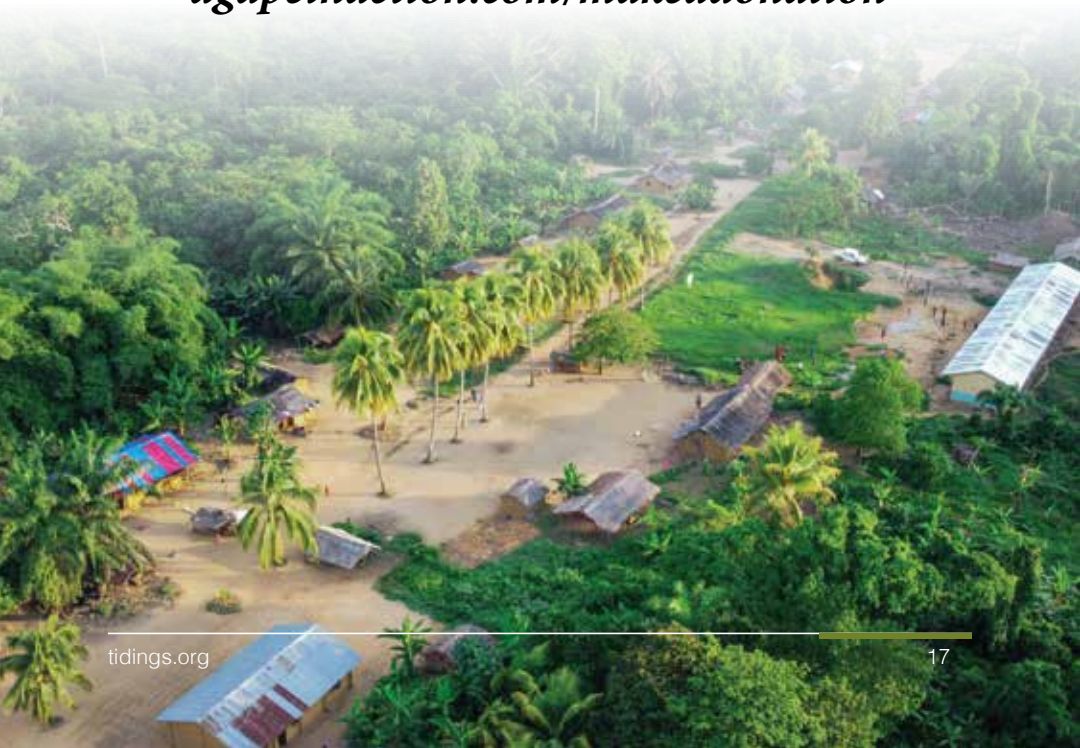

THE GLORY OF GRATITUDE

By Cliff Terrell
Austin Leander Ecclesia, TX



Brother Cliff Terrell fell asleep in Christ in March 2025. He gave this exhortation a year or two before his death. He was a man of deep gratitude, and we can learn from his exhortation to praise God, and to praise Him today, recognizing, as Brother Cliff frequently said, that "Life is the time to serve the Lord."

Jason Hensley

GRATITUDE is an emotion. It's how you feel when you're thankful for something. Think right now about something that you're thankful for. It can be small, like the socks on your feet, or it can be larger, like the roof over your head, your job, your family, or your life. Gratitude is recognizing and acknowledging that something in your life, in you, and in the world around you is satisfactory.

Feeling grateful changes how you feel inside. It's easy to let negative thoughts, words, situations, events, and actions in the world take over your heart and mind. Much of society focuses on the negative: the news, social media, and the general tone of the conversations you encounter during the day, at work or at home.

Yet, the simple emotion and expression of gratitude can diminish all that negativity in a powerful way. Try this during the coming week: each evening before bed, think of **three** things you are grateful for from that day. Don't repeat the same thing day after day either. Say "Thank you" to our God for those gifts.

We can see the same grateful attitude in the psalms. In Psalm 18 we read this: "*Therefore I will give thanks to You among the nations, O LORD, and I will sing praises to Your name. He gives great deliverance to His king, and shows lovingkindness to His anointed, to David and his descendants forever.*" (vv. 49-50).[1] Why does David say he would give thanks and sing praises to God's name? At the beginning of verse 49, it says **therefore**—which means we need to look at the verses before that in Psalm 18.

Throughout this psalm, David repeatedly says how God has rescued him. "*You have given me the shield of Your salvation, and Your right hand supported me, and Your help made me great. You did give a wide place for my steps under me, and my feet did not slip.*" (vv. 35-36 NRSV).

That is why David says in verse 49 that he will give thanks and give glory to God's name, not because life was easy, but because he knew God was there throughout the hard times.

Let's look at some more examples:

> *I will extol You, O LORD, for You have lifted me up, and have not let my enemies rejoice over me. O LORD my God, I cried to You for help, and You healed me. O LORD, You have brought up my soul from Sheol; You have kept me alive, that I would not go down to the pit. Sing praise to the LORD, you His godly ones, And give thanks to His holy name.* (Psalm 30:1-4).

David praises and thanks God for saving him. In all of this, David is so thankful that it sounds like he'll spend

his life (and eternity) saying thank you to God; he brings it up again at the end of the psalm.

> *Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me; O LORD, be my helper. You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness, so that my soul may sing praise to You and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to You forever.* (vv. 10-12).

God has saved David **so that** he can praise and give thanks forever.

But gratitude isn't just part of our lives because God wants us to be thankful. It's actually good for us. Over the years, people have studied the impact of gratitude. What they've found is nothing short of amazing. People who practice gratitude have found:

- They're happier. It increases feelings of optimism, joy, and satisfaction.
- They have less anxiety and depression.
- They have stronger immune systems, lower blood pressure, and get sick less often.
- They get better sleep.
- They recover more quickly from challenges, even from traumatic events.
- They have stronger relationships.

Gratitude changes your perspective on the life that you've been given.

In Ephesians 5, we are told one antidote to sin is saying, "Thank you"!

> *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, b**ut rather giving of thanks**.* (Ephesians 5:1-4).

Clearly, giving thanks is both important and transformative. But does saying "Thank you" somehow tie in with giving glory to God?

We all know Numbers 14:21 (ESV). *"But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD."* In God's Kingdom, we will give glory to God always. But we are to do our best today to give Him glory now as well. But how?

Look at 1 Chronicles 16, where David gives a song of thanks to God. *"Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice!"* (v. 10) ESV. Then in verse 35, he says the same thing again, paralleling it with another idea: *"Save us, O God of our salvation, And gather us and deliver us from the nations, to give thanks to Your holy name, And glory in Your praise."* David asked to be saved so he and God's people could give thanks and glorify God. The two ideas go together!

Let's look at some more illustrations:

In the time of Ezra we see the people giving thanks:

> *And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the directions of David king of Israel and they sang*

> *responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel." And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.* (Ezra 3:10-11 ESV).

Look at what they said: they talked about God and His goodness. Isn't that what it means to glorify Him?

In New Testament times, Jesus showed how he equated giving thanks with giving glory to God.

> *On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then said Jesus, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."* (Luke 17:11-19 RSV).

In the NASB and other translations, verse 18 reads: "*Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?*" The Greek word for "*glory*" means to praise and honor. Praise and glory are interchangeable. By saying "Thank you," we praise and honor God; we give Him glory.

Paul in 2 Corinthians points out that the gospel is being preached for a specific reason—for the glory of God—but look how he phrases it: "*For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase* ***thanksgiving****, to the glory of God.*" (2 Corinthians 4:15 ESV).

When we are thankful, and thankful to God for what He has done, we bring Him glory. And we can do that now, today. We read in Isaiah 38 these serious words: "*For Sheol cannot thank You, Death cannot praise You; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your faithfulness.* ***It is the living who give thanks to You****, as I do today; a father tells his sons about Your faithfulness.*" (vv. 18-19).

Life is the time to serve the Lord. And we serve Him by being grateful. For everything. "*Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.*" (Colossians 3:17).

So let us, day in and day out, give glory to our God by saying "Thank you."

> "*Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.*" (Hebrews 13:15).

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1 All quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the *New American Standard Bible 1995.*

WHEN HEBREW SPEAKS GREEK

By Mike Jenner
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THE first Biblical Hebrew book I ever read was a 1955 textbook I received as a teenager. In the book's preface, R.K. Harrison noted that his old Hebrew professor began each lecture with the words: "Gentlemen, this is the language which God spoke."

There can be no doubt that the Hebrew of the Old Testament is God-given, and this article briefly demonstrates that the Hebrew Bible also provides the foundations and structure for the inspired Greek New Testament.

For example, the New Testament contains hundreds of Hebrew words transliterated into Greek, which have carried over into our English versions. Words such as *"satan," "sack-cloth," "rabbi," "amen,"* and *"hallelujah"* are Hebrew words used in the Greek New Testament and, consequently, by us in English today.

We also know that the inspired patterns of Hebrew Old Testament poetry are found throughout the Greek New Testament. The basic unit of Hebrew thought, parallelism, is frequent throughout the Gospels and the Epistles, such as in the Lord's prayer:

Lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil

The second statement comments on and expands the first, forming a joined couplet or parallelism.

A more complex development of this is inverted parallelism, or chiasmus. The table below shows John 1:1-2 in Greek and English, demonstrating that this passage is a chiasmus, as is much of the poetry of the Hebrew Old Testament. This one has a center point focused on theon/ Θεόν (God).

A Ἐν ἀρχῇ	A In the beginning
B ἦν	B' was
C ὁ λόγος,	C' the Word,
καὶ ὁ λόγος	and the Word
D ἦν	D was
E **πρὸς τὸν Θεόν,**	E **with God,**
E' **καὶ Θεὸς**	E' **and God**
D' ἦν	D' was
C' ὁ λόγος	C' the Word
οὗτος	the same
B' ἦν	B' was
A' ἐν ἀρχῇ **πρὸς τὸν Θεόν**	A' in the beginning **with God.**

John 1:1 provides another example of how the order and arrangement of words in the Greek New Testament can be seen to follow Hebrew norms. The Greek text omits the definite article and can be literally rendered *"In beginning."* This follows the Hebrew structure of Genesis 1:1, where the definite article is absent and can also be literally translated as *"In beginning."* Though the style of Genesis 1:1 is normal in Hebrew, it reads as peculiar in Greek, and the unusual sentence structure therefore directs the Bible student back to the Hebrew of Genesis 1 to understand what God is communicating in John 1.

A further example of Hebrew word order in the Greek appears a few verses later in John 1:6, where the English phrase *"whose name was John"* looks like the following in the Greek text: ὄνομα αὐτῷ Ἰωάννης, and literally means "name to him John." While any English reader will find this word order strange, and not something we would say in daily English, Greek scholars will tell us it is just as strange in Greek. However, this word order follows the succinct Hebrew style of announcing a name. In Hebrew, "name to him John" is the normal way of speaking, and this demonstrates what we see repeatedly: Hebrew not only underpins the Greek text in poetic patterns and style, but also in word order.

This relationship between the Old and New Testament texts is so prevalent that when Robert Lindsay translated the Gospel of Mark into Hebrew, he found that the New Testament Greek consistently provided him with the correct word order for his Hebrew translation.1

Since I became aware that Hebrew word order underpins the Greek text, I have tried to use this when studying passages of Scripture. Sometimes, the word-order link is clear in our English Bible translations. But more often than not, our English versions obscure what would otherwise be an obvious link, a signpost that would prompt the Bible reader to go back and study the Old Testament passage on which the Greek is commenting.

I will give one example of this Hebrew-Greek word-order parallel that I observed by slowly reading the book of Romans in Greek. Once you notice the Greek word order, the obvious link to a Hebrew Old Testament passage jumps out of the text (even though our English versions obscure it in both the Old and New Testaments).

When Romans 9:30 is read in the Greek, the double use of the word *"righteousness"* is striking as written below: *"What shall we say then?, the gentiles which followed not after righteousness, have attained to* ***righteousness righteousness*** *of faith."* (my translation).

The English versions all insert connecting words between the repetition of *"righteousness"* and so obscure the exact structure found in Deuteronomy 16:20. An English version reading of Deuteronomy 16:20 gives a translation of *"that which is altogether just you shall follow,"* but as the KJV (Cambridge) margin notes, *"altogether just"* is simply *"justice justice"* or *"righteousness righteousness."* Deuteronomy 16:20 literally translated would be *"righteousness righteousness follow."*

God instructed Israel, as His people, that they would occupy the land because of His righteousness, not their own (9:4, 5, 6). The repetition of "righteousness" in Deuteronomy 16:20 should have caused every Israelite to ask what righteousness they should follow. Isaiah 51:1-2 picks up the theme by instructing those who *"follow after righteousness"* to look to Abraham and Sarah, who found God's righteousness through faith, rather than trying to prove their own righteousness. The passage later emphasizes this same righteousness: *"Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law."* (Isaiah 51:7). Romans describes how the mistake

of the Pharisaical mind was to seek to demonstrate their own righteousness by keeping the law instead of understanding the need to live by faith. By "following" what they thought was the way to righteousness, *"by the works of the law,"* Israel had not attained to God's righteousness.

By contrast, the Gentiles, who in past times *"followed not"* after righteousness, have now heeded the instruction of Deuteronomy and followed the righteousness of God, not by works of the law but by the obedience of faith. So, it can be said of them that the Gentiles have now attained to *"righteousness righteousness of faith."*

And the argument in Romans moves on in chapter 11 to explain how the Gentiles are now grafted into the tree of the hope of Israel because they *"stand by faith"* (Romans 11:20), whereas, for a time, the branches of natural Israel are broken off because of *"unbelief."*

Therefore, the doubling of the word *"righteousness"* in proximity to the command to *"follow"* creates a word-link bridge across the two languages of the Testaments and powerfully reinforces that God's inspired instruction has remained the same over millennia.

See Romans 9:30-32 aligned against Deuteronomy 16:20 below:

Transliteration of Hebrew of Deuteronomy 16:20	My Translation of Deuteronomy 16:20	Greek Transliteration of Romans 9:30-32	KJV English of Romans 9:30-32
20 **Tsedek tsedek terdof** lamaan techye v'yarashtah et haaretz…	20 **Righteousness, righteousness follow** so that you live and possess the land which Yahweh your God is giving to you.	30 …**mae diokonta dikaiosunain**, katelabe **dikaiosunain**, **dikaiosunain** de tain **ek pisteuos** 31 Israel de, **diokon** nomon **dikaiosunais**, eis nomon **dikaiosunais** ouk efthase. 32 diati? hoti **ouk ek pisteuos**, all hos ex ergon nomou.	30 What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which **followed not** after **righteousness**, have attained to **righteousness**, even the **righteousness** which is **of faith**. 31 But Israel, which **followed after** the law of **righteousness**, hath not attained to the law of **righteousness**. 32 Wherefore? Because they sought it **not by faith**, but as it were by the works of the law.

Beginning to Read the Bible in Hebrew and Greek

In this 500th year since William Tyndale's English New Testament reached the shores of England, we cannot overstate the immense privilege we have had for so long, to read the Word of God so faithfully translated into our own language, English.

Nevertheless, sometimes our English Bible versions can veil the Bible message, and by peeling back the English to see what underpins it, we can see how clearly and simply the Hebrew and Greek word orders can make plain the profound teachings across the Testaments written by our Heavenly Father.

Since I have no formal training in Hebrew and Greek, I can understand how accessing and comparing the original texts can be daunting and, at times, seem impossible. However, I implore you to see how you really can investigate God's word in this way. Many online Bible versions offer an "interlinear" function that places the English translation of a word underneath the original Hebrew or Greek. With these tools, the Bible student can clearly see the word order (including word repetition). You can test this yourself with the table shown above; the repetition of the same order of sounds in the original languages is clear when you pause to evaluate the words.

I can assure you that a little Hebrew and Greek knowledge can go a long way in Bible study, and there are plenty of self-study guides to help you grasp the basics. Once you move past the hurdle of learning a new alphabet, you will find reading the sounds of the Hebrew or Greek texts really enjoyable, and you will see how many words you already know through your Bible knowledge and your knowledge of English.

Remember, no one will put you on the spot; this is not a timed test. Anyone who has tried to learn another language knows the hardest parts are active listening and real-time speaking. After that comes writing with all the nightmarish challenges of grammar rules. But with Bible study, you can set those skills aside and focus on the much more passive skill of reading.

You can take as much time as you want. No matter how slowly you read the text or compare words, it will yield fruit in due season. In fact, slower Bible reading is preferable as it aids more careful and diligent consideration; when one is less familiar with Hebrew and Greek, it can lead us to analyze each word in turn, which can give truly wonderful insights and comparisons across Old and New Testaments to support the reading of our main English Bible (as I've tried to demonstrate with the examples above).

We started by quoting Professor Harrison's description of Hebrew, but for some years I have amended his words to better reflect the cross-Testament character and urgency of the Biblical message to all: Hebrew and Greek are the languages in which God speaks. Hear His message.

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Rugby Ecclesia, UK

1 Robert, Lindsay, *A Hebrew Translation of the Gospel of Mark: Greek-Hebrew Diglot with English Introduction* (Jerusalem: Dugith Publishers, 1973).



EXPOSING THE SATAN MYTH

By Dave Jennings
Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA



THE 16 California ecclesias just wrapped up a joint preaching campaign, called "Exposing the Satan Myth." This was in response to the call to action on the fiftieth anniversary of the Year of Witnessing (1976). In 2025, an inter-ecclesial committee was formed, with a target date of September-October 2026 for public witness.

Why the Topic of Satan?

We debated several potential topics, but ultimately decided to go with the popular false doctrine of a supernatural Satan. There were less provocative titles considered. However, the committee felt this topic represented a unique perspective of Christadelphians. Recent polls taken by Christian organizations indicate a falling popularity of the belief in a supernatural world of evil. We concluded that this topic would be relevant to those seeking Bible truth.

First Objective

We had hoped to attract interested friends to our ecclesias in California. Unfortunately, since the Bible reading seminars at the beginning of the century, we have returned to a time when, no matter what we present, we get almost no visitors to our addresses at our halls or public venues. Behavior has changed with the Internet's proliferation. Twenty years ago, Bible seminars regularly drew 100 registrants. However, today people can sit comfortably at home and watch a wide variety of content online.

The Exposing the Satan Myth outreach program attempted to test this again, to see whether a compelling, well-executed series of public addresses might reverse the trend of non-attendance. The objective was to direct interested people to attend a public address near their home.



How the Project Unfolded

We acknowledged from the beginning that launching an effective preaching program required digital content. We were thankful to have talented brethren volunteer to develop websites. We decided to run the campaign in both English and Spanish, with mirrored websites. In California, fifteen million people speak Spanish as their first language. You may still visit these sites, as they remain active today. The English website is ***satanmyth.com***, and the Spanish website is ***mitodesatanas.com.***

In connection with these websites, our committee partnered with the Bible Unlocked team to create eight short, animated videos as a "teaser" for the addresses to be held in the Fall. The topics included:

- The Origin of Satan and the Devil
- Hell
- Lucifer
- Demons
- The Temptation in the Wilderness
- Jesus Destroyed the Works of the Devil
- A World Free of Sin and Death
- Who Are the Christadelphians?

These eight videos were placed on the two websites (in both languages). They were also heavily used in a well-managed social media campaign. This campaign was led by Sis. Rebeca Binch (Avon, Indiana), who does similar work professionally. More on this later.

Ecclesial Involvement

Beginning in June 2026, the work shifted to the ecclesias. Bro. Peter Wilson (Verdugo Hills) oversaw the production and distribution of printed materials, including 5-by-7-inch cards for local outreach. Each card briefly introduced the topic and invited readers to scan a QR code to visit the English or Spanish websites, where they could watch short videos, read introductory material, and register for a public talk. In total, the ecclesias distributed ten thousand cards.

Additionally, ecclesias received large, colorful banners advertising the website. These were posted at ecclesial halls. In my ecclesia, we posted one at the front of our ecclesial driveway, and a larger one facing the train tracks just outside our back fence.

Ecclesial members were encouraged to invite their friends, neighbors, and work colleagues to the talk at the nearby hall. Each ecclesia was responsible for designing and offering its own follow-up program for those who came to the addresses.

We also placed display ads in several newspapers. We ran a half-page ad in *La Opinion*, the largest Spanish-language newspaper in the Los Angeles area. We ran smaller ads in mid-sized English-language papers. In total, these papers' combined circulation was well over three million.

Exposing the Satan Myth Presentations

A subcommittee developed the content and presentation materials for the ecclesial presentations. Bro. Jason Hensley (Simi Hills) and Bro. Allen Laben (San Diego) led this team. The rest of the presenters included Bre. David Collister (Verdugo Hills; the Spanish presentation), Christian Russell (Verdugo Hills), James Robinson (San Francisco Peninsula),





Flyers were distributed and banners displayed to attract visitors.

Jason Robinson (Thousand Oaks), and Jim Seagoe (Mariposa). They all used a standardized presentation that the team had developed. One presentation is now available on the English website. The public talks were delivered in September and October.

Results

Our first objective was to encourage visitors to attend the public presentations at each ecclesia. Sadly, very few people attended the talks in person. Across the ecclesias, we had seven visitors in total. Most ecclesias had no visitors. This was disappointing, but it matched our recent outreach experiences.

Online results, however, were highly encouraging. Our social media posts reached nearly 200,000 unique screens and achieved an impressive 11% click-through rate, meaning that 11% of viewers clicked to learn more. Although some visitors engaged only briefly, others explored the content in depth. The Bible Unlocked videos also received 200,000 views.

The most popular English topic on social media and YouTube was "The Origin of Satan and the Devil," followed by "The Temptation of Jesus in the Wilderness." In Spanish, it was "Jesus Destroyed the Works of the Devil" and "The Origin of Satan and the Devil." The average video watch time was just under two minutes. This is really quite exceptional compared to other digital content available online.

The Spanish-language public presentation was conducted online, as a Facebook Live event. As many as 1,000 unique accounts attended this live event, presented by Bro. David Collister from the Los Angeles Ecclesial hall. After the live event, we posted the recording on ***LaBiblia.com***, where another 4,100 people have viewed the talk.

Because we targeted our advertising spend to California, Meta and Google AdWords focused our audience on California. Ninety-two percent of all visitors accessed content from a smartphone. Our ad spend for Meta and Google AdWords was just under $5,000 USD.

Conclusions

We are still searching for an effective way to bring visitors to our ecclesial sites. Content alone, no matter how important, may not be enough. Today, people are awash in information. Far more information is available than they can possibly consume. People may be searching for provocative content, but it matches more powerfully with a personal or social connection. We need to find that "sweet spot" where we can bring together the truth of the gospel and a personal, communal connection. How can we connect the power of Jesus's message for people in both word and in action?

We were overwhelmed by the incredible response from our digital audience. Given our spending limits and our purposeful focus on California, we might wonder what we could still do with the existing content and additional funding. For this reason, we intend to keep the two websites live. We will add more content soon, to include addresses on "Demons" and "The History of Satan and the Devil." The two websites provide an ongoing way to proclaim the Truth and could be used by other regions for that purpose.

The upside and downside of digital advertising is that we are just as likely to reach a person thousands of miles away as we are the person next door. We may never know the impact of the content on the digital audience. Overall, we were encouraged by the countless positive comments on social media from non-Christadelphians. Of course, some did not agree with us.

Digital preaching offers a unique form of outreach whose impact cannot be measured solely by attendance at public talks. Like the Sower in Jesus's parable, it enables us to spread the gospel widely. Much of the seed may fall on unreceptive ground, but some may take root. We pray that it will bear fruit in people who join us in honoring and glorifying God.

An Important Benefit to California



The benefit of ecclesias working side by side on preaching work strengthens our fellowship and reminds us of our shared calling to promote the gospel.

Ecclesias

For more than a century, Southern California ecclesias have worked collaboratively on preaching work. In the earliest days, even during the Depression era, ecclesias worked together to buy airtime on the major Los Angeles radio stations. Ecclesias dedicated part of their Sunday School time to answering phone calls from listeners who wanted a free pamphlet or correspondence course. Bro. Morrie Stewart was a popular speaker on radio and later television broadcasts. I fondly recall those days in the 1970s, when there was great excitement about the public witness. It united our ecclesias.

About five years ago, the longstanding Southern California Preaching Committee was disbanded. Ecclesias decided to create and carry out their own outreach efforts. The Satan Myth project has led us to conclude that we need to reinstate an inter-ecclesial committee. The benefit of ecclesias working side by side on preaching work strengthens our fellowship and reminds us of our shared calling to promote the gospel. This committee's work was truly more effective because it involved so many.

This ad hoc committee represented many of the ecclesias in Southern California. Bro. Kent Ellis (San Diego) was our faithful project leader, ensuring all project action items were addressed. Bro. Aaron McDonald (Thousand Oaks) and Bro. Andrew Ackerman (Thousand Oaks) designed the two websites, and Bro. Aaron served as treasurer. Bro. Ed Hawthorne coordinated the ecclesial talks and provided video services. Bro. Peter Wilson (Verdugo Hills), Bro. Jim Land (Los Angeles), and I were additional committee members. Bro. Jason Grant (Barrie, Ontario) provided critical graphic support. We are happy to answer your questions and pleased to share what we developed for this project.

We are confident the Lord will bless our efforts and lead us to men and women with open hearts and minds.

Dave Jennings
Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA

HE CAST OUT MANY DEVILS

By James Bates
Stark County Ecclesia, OH



THIS past summer at Manitoulin Youth Conference, we discussed Mark 1:34 at dinnertime, and questions came up. The verse reads, *"And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him."* One brother boldly asked how we might explain this verse in light of Scripture's teaching on supernatural devils and demons.

What urges us to look deeper? We are convinced that Lucifer is a symbolic name for the king of Babylon, as seen in Isaiah 14:12, verse 22 of the same chapter, and Isaiah 13:1, which describes the subsequent message as *"the burden of Babylon."* We know that Satan, a general word for opponent or adversary and symbolic name for that which defies God, *"fall*[s] *from heaven"* (Luke 10:18), because when Christ empowered the disciples with the power from our Father, that old enemy, Death, and the plagues sin caused, were finally defeated.

We believe the antichrist is nothing more than all people who deny Jesus Christ *"came in the flesh."* (2 John 6-7). He is real, was like us, and thus suffered all the challenges we do, yet never sinned, giving us an example and sacrifice to approach our God. None of these, when closely examined, makes a solid case for evil, supernatural beings causing us to sin and fighting literally against the armies of God.

So why does this passage cause confusion? It portrays devils, or, as many translations call them, demons, as beings with direct, physical intelligence, not, in this context, a symbol for sin. Stepping outside mainstream theological reasoning and church traditions, God's word reveals the truth in three specific puzzle pieces: the target of Jesus's charge, what demons actually are, and the charge's beautiful message.

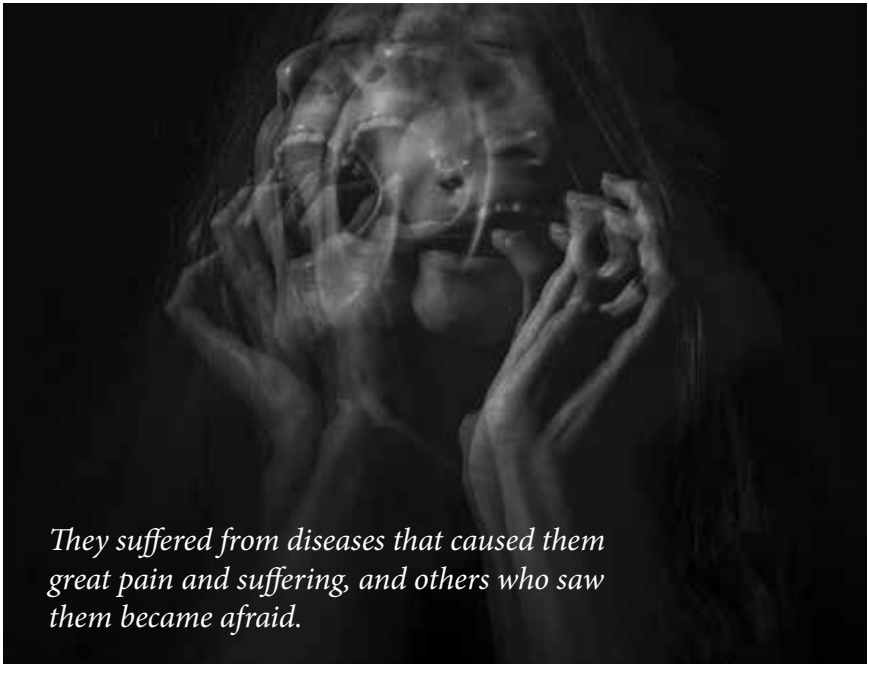
Before we talk about anything else, we should first understand who or what Jesus is talking to. Taking Mark 1 at face value would mean he spoke directly to the demons, and from there things start to get confusing. However, let's see what happens when we look at other passages first. Following the Greek word for demon, *daimonion*, we arrive at the story of Legion. Legion was a man possessed by many demons (Luke 8:30), and as we read, he was terribly troubled. With incredible strength, this man was unable to be bound and subjected to bondage by anyone, but yet, when he saw Jesus, he couldn't help but run to him and fall at his feet. Compassionately, Jesus asks, *"'What is thy name?' And* ***he*** [Legion] *answered, saying, 'My name is Legion, for* ***we*** *are many.'"* (Mark 5:9). This saying is noteworthy because it shows that Jesus speaks directly to the man, but the demons respond. Jesus's words and Legion's response draw a physical and psychological connection between the demon and the man; the demon lives inside Legion, shares his thoughts, and makes him believe he is a multitude of people. Something similar could be happening in Mark 1:34. This conclusion is perhaps the weakest evidence and almost seems like a lie, but as we move into the next section, it seems much more plausible.

After discussing Jesus's words, which he spoke directly to the man, and the "demon" responds, and revisiting the context of Mark 1:34 to present a

stronger case, the next logical step is to uncover who or what is speaking. What, actually, is a demon? In Mark 5, we revisit the case of Legion. This man was fully convinced (Mark 5:9) that he was multiple people. This was a man utterly broken, so much so that he would cry and cut himself day and night (Mark 5:5). In Matthew 17, we read of a young boy who was *"a lunatick, and sore vexed: for ofttimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water."* (Matthew 17:15). Whether he chose to enter either consciously or not, we can agree that mentally, he was unwell. In Mark 16:9, we read that Mary Magdalene, *"out of whom he* [Jesus] *had cast seven devils,"* came to the disciples and professed that Jesus had visited her. Perhaps the reason such a characteristic was mentioned in that context was that the disciples believed she somehow still had a demon, and thus still had delusional, crazy thoughts. In Mark 7, we read of a Syrophoenician woman whose daughter was greatly troubled by a demon, and through her faith, when she arrived home, she found her daughter lying on the bed, a sign that her daughter was now at peace. Each one of these people was mentally troubled, and each one of them had a symptom we can easily identify as a psychological or neurological disorder.

I should preface this by saying that I am not a professional doctor, nor am I legally qualified to medically diagnose anyone. The Bible provides ample evidence, however, to reasonably connect the following disorders to Biblical figures. The textbook definition for dissociative identity disorder (DID) is "A mental health condition where you have two or more separate identities."[1] I think that can clearly apply to Legion, given that he states, *"We are many."* (Mark 5:9). The *"lunatick"* can be categorized as an epileptic, given that "Epilepsy is a long-term condition that causes seizures due to unusual electrical activity in the brain."[2] The boy would *"oft"* be involuntarily seized by the water and the fire, casting him defenseless into harm's way. It may be a stretch, but Mary Magdalene may have suffered from psychosis, an umbrella term for differing degrees of hallucinations and delusions.[3] Given the disciples' rejection of Mary's claims and her having multiple (seven) demons before she was healed, this disorder makes the most sense. Admittedly, the Syrophoenician's daughter doesn't have a clear diagnosis based on what we've been given, but she is important because, like many of the other "demon-possessed" people, she gives us insight into how the people react afterward.

Each one of these people was mentally troubled, and each one of them had a symptom we can easily identify as a psychological or neurological disorder.



They suffered from diseases that caused them great pain and suffering, and others who saw them became afraid.

The people's state afterward makes one of the greatest remarks on first principles within our scope. Before we read about Satan *"falling from heaven,"* we first read about the seventy disciples' joyful remark after they went out preaching and healing the sick: *"Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name."* (Luke 10:17). Though when we read their words we do not hear how they sound, the words that they use reveal what they're most excited about. They almost have a hint of surprise when they see that the people with demons suddenly listen to them. This ties the picture of demons together nicely.

All the people previously mentioned were both unyielding and unhealable to the average Jew and Gentile. They suffered from diseases that caused them great pain and suffering, and others who saw them became afraid. Yet Jesus Christ, in Legion's life, the lunatic's life, the Syrophoenician's daughter's life, and Mary Magdalene's life, made them whole (Matthew 15:28) and set them in their right minds (Mark 5:15). Through Jesus Christ, these people were given a life of peace they had never known, and all they needed was faith. Only through Jesus Christ did they receive this peace and salvation from their illnesses, and the same is true for us. The demons, then and now, were a living parable of cleansing and redemption from the sicknesses of sin (they didn't necessarily obtain these things because they sinned; John 9:3), and the only way to live is by faith in Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Romans 6:3-8).

The last piece of the puzzle that ties everything together is Jesus's command to those whose "demons" cried out when they were healed. To dig into the roots of this, let's ask ourselves, "In what way did they know Jesus?" Mark 1:34 simply states that *"They knew him,"* but that seems fairly general. They could have known he was the carpenter's (step)son, a healer, or merely someone named Jesus. But Luke 4:41, a parallel account, makes it very clear: *"And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, 'Thou art Christ, the Son of God,' And he suffered them not to speak, because they knew he was Christ."* Jesus rebuked them because they were declaring him to be the Christ. In our day and age, we strive to profess such a declaration every day of our lives! It would be a joyful remark that would hopefully turn more to repentance. It doesn't at first make sense that Jesus would command anyone to withhold their testimony of him, especially when considering that before he ascended, he commanded the disciples, and all of us, to come, to *"preach the gospel to every creature."* (Mark 16:15). So why was Christ not supportive of that in Mark 1:34?

We find our answer in Mark 8:29-33, where the disciples told Jesus he was the Christ. Then, he charged them not to spread that truth yet, because he was to suffer many things and then be killed, rising on the third day. After Jesus told them this, though, Peter rebuked Christ. Imagine how hard that would have been for Christ to hear. You can picture his strain as his heart tugged in his response: *"Get thee behind me Satan: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men."* Jesus knew that the more people who knew he was the Christ, the more they would prod him to overthrow the government and restore the Kingdom at that time (as explained in John 6:14-15). In such a case, those seeking to put Christ to death would be themselves dead, and the mission would be physically interrupted. All the external pressure and expectations would make the



Jesus knew that the more people who knew he was the Christ, the more they would prod him to overthrow the government and restore the Kingdom at that time.

mission much harder to fulfill (though God could still make Jesus's sacrifice possible). The more people who would present him with such a prompt, the more opportunities his flesh would have to tempt him and wear him down. His focus was set on the mission, the mission that, if he endured, looking to the joy ahead of him, preaching the blessings of the Kingdom, trusting God fully throughout the process, then all mankind who embraced his name would share in an eternal, greater degree of mental peace experienced in fraction by those with demons who had been made whole.

When he returns, we hope for our mortal bodies to be shed, and all our sinful urges and thoughts and inhibitions we have due to our flesh, to pass away. Jesus charged people to focus on the main message of salvation and the good news of God's kingdom, not on the present solution to our challenges, and when we look at Mark 1:34 from this angle, God's holy principles become much more personal.

In summary, these Biblical references clarify Mark 1:34, and three things stand out. One, Jesus talks directly to the man, yet the "demons" seem to answer for him, thus showing the blurred line and mental confusion of those who have demons (Mark 5:9). Two, reviewing all other references reveals to us that demons are psychological and neurological disorders, not fallen angels or wicked ghosts haunting people. Three, Jesus commanded those with demons not to speak because if people knew he was the Christ, they would riot and overthrow the government, and at the same time, take away from his original mission of preaching the kingdom of God and fulfilling the word of the prophets (John 6:14-15; Luke 4:43; Mark 8:29-33). These give us a clearer picture of the sufferings that will be removed from us when Christ returns (1 Corinthians 15:50-55), and fully when God is all and in all (Revelation 21:4-5).

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1 "Dissociative Identity Disorder," *Cleveland Clinic*, June 7, 2024.
2 "Epilepsy," *Cleveland Clinic*, February 27, 2026.
3 "Psychosis," *Cleveland Clinic*, May 15, 2022.



BIBLE STUDY

PART 9

THE CHAPTERS THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

By Ben Brinkerhoff
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THE MEANING OF THE SPIRIT

THE subject of our next few articles is perhaps the hardest to write about and understand. It is hard to write about because it took me months to get my own head around it, and I honestly struggle to summarize my reflections in a series of articles that will leave you with something meaningful.

First, you will recall that Paul left us with a bit of a cliffhanger at the end of Romans 8:4. Paul qualifies the blessing of those who escape condemnation. He says that this blessing is for those *"who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."* (Romans 8:4 RSV).

That's a big "who," and Paul knows it. How do I *"walk not according to the flesh but according to the spirit"*? I believe Paul feels the tension of the statement, and so he explains in Romans 8:5-6:

> *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.* (RSV).

I want to understand these verses because Paul explains the fundamental difference between those who live according to the flesh and those who live according to the spirit. For the latter, the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled. They are the ones who set their minds on the things of the spirit and have life and peace. Those who set their mind on the things of the flesh die without hope and, by implication, have not escaped condemnation.

To understand these verses, I think we should start with a working definition of the words *"spirit," "mind,"* and *"flesh."*

What does *"mind"* mean in these verses? The mind relates to your conscious thoughts, basically something that can be *"set"* (RSV) or controlled, so there is an obvious element of choice to these thoughts. This contrasts with feelings. Feelings can't always be controlled and may occur without our choice.

In these verses, our mind must have some control over the actions we take and what we think about.

What is flesh? To begin with, Paul means more here than skin, muscle and bone. The flesh is our mortal nature, and the urges and inclinations he describes come from that nature; Paul names the desires after their source. We looked at this in previous articles.

But what is spirit? It is clearly an important word because Romans 8 uses the word 22 times (RSV). So, we should probably get our head around the word spirit.

The word spirit is used commonly in the Bible and in modern language, but in slightly different contexts. In the Bible, spirit (Hebrew: *ruach* and Greek: *pneuma*) refers to a power whose effects can be seen, though the power itself cannot.

- For example, "wind." You can see the effects of wind, but you can't see the wind itself. How confusing must that have been for ancient man? The ancient word for wind is spirit (John 3:8).
- But what else has power but cannot be seen? A living person, for example. A living person and a dead person look awfully similar. They both have heads, hands, feet, and a heart. But one moves around and the other lies flat. The living

person has a spirit, some unseen but very powerful thing that makes them alive (James 2:26).

- You can think of that thing as breath. Living people breathe. You cannot see the air they breathe, but without breath it is obvious that people die. So, the ancients called breath spirit (Ezekiel 37:5-6).
- It is also clear that living people can think. No one can see thoughts; they are not physical per se, but they can be very powerful. The ancients called thoughts spirit (1 Corinthians 2:11).
- There are other examples like angels. Angels are powerful, but unless they want to be seen, their presence is concealed from men, so they are called ministering spirits (Psalm 104:4; Hebrews 1:14).

But let us get even more subtle. Words are invisible. You cannot really see a word as it travels in sound waves from my mouth to your ears, or how the words on this page enter your mind through your eyes. Yet words are very powerful, aren't they?

Why are words so powerful? Well, you learn through words. I know about my wife Elissa because we spoke on the phone during our courtship. More importantly, I know and confess that Jesus is my Lord and King, has saved me, is coming back to earth to live, and will rule for a thousand years. How do I know this? Because I heard and learned through words (John 6:63; Romans 10:17).

So, words are invisible, but also incredibly powerful. If you think about it, words can save us. Words have the power to give us life. If you hear the gospel message, and those invisible words enter your invisible thoughts, and they cause you to respond with faith, leading to baptism and a life lived for Christ by the spirit, then you will be saved. Words, specifically the words of truth, can lead you from death to life.

Words become learning, learning then becomes faith, and faith, supported by continual renewing, grows into love and works. God gives such a believer life.

Making this connection between words, spirit, and learning matters because it demystifies "spirit" for us.

In Galatians 3:1-2, Paul makes it clear that the spirit comes by hearing the word in faith.

> *O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you:* ***Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*** (NKJV).

John Carter, in his book on Romans, helps define the idea of "spirit" as expressed in that letter. He says, "Spirit indicates a mental and a moral development through hearing and faith in the gospel which has its ultimate source in God who is spirit and who has revealed it through his power which is also called spirit."[1]

In Romans 1:16 (RSV), Paul connects faith, power, and the gospel when he says, *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith."*

Yet we can understand that the gospel is taught, heard, learned, and believed through words. And when those words are believed, they become the power of God to save.

In *Elpis Israel*, Dr. Thomas puts it clearly and concisely: "Where the truth has possession of the sentiments, setting them to work and so forming the thoughts, it becomes the law of God to them; which the apostle styles 'the law of his mind'; and because it is written there through the hearing of 'the law and testimony,' which came to the prophets and apostles through the spirit, he terms it 'the law of the spirit' (Romans 7:23; 8:2) inscribed 'on fleshly tables of the heart' (2 Corinthians 3:3); and 'the law of the spirit of life,' because while obeyed, it confers a right to eternal life."[2] This "right" is not earned; it is the gift of God's grace in Christ (Romans 6:23), which we receive in faith and show in obedience.

So, when Paul says, *"set your mind on the things of the spirit"* (Romans 8:5-6), the spirit he is speaking about is the word of God, the gospel through which God exercises His power to save. Since these thoughts dwell within us and "take possession of the sentiments," we can say that God and Christ dwell in us through them. This idea is big, but not without precedent for the believing Jew, for God said He, *"dwell*[s] *in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit."* (Isaiah 57:15 RSV).

This is the meaning Paul is drawing on when he uses the word spirit in Romans 8:5-11.

Beyond these useful definitions from Scripture and our pioneer brethren, I think you can reflect inwardly and find spirit. You can find the power within you, fed by the truth of God. You can understand the contrite heart where faith and the love of God live. It motivates you, by Christ's example, to be humble and kind. It takes possession of the sentiments. It encourages you not to seek self but to seek the benefit of others. It rejoices in what is good and in the Lord's will and knowledge.

I think you can identify the inner man who is fed by the Word and loves it. In this inner man, God and Christ live. This is the "right spirit" David asked God to renew (Psalm 51:10). This is the humble and contrite mind in which God dwells. This is where the inclination to do good, motivated and informed by God's wisdom, abides within you.

Strange as it sounds, and as amazing as it is, even those with the spirit still struggle with the flesh. We will look at this in our next article.

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1 John Carter, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Birmingham, UK: The Christadelphian, 1992), 91.
2 John Thomas, *Elpis Israel* (Findon, SA: Logos Publications), 90.

PART 2

NOTHING LEFT BUT FAITH

By Ben Kitchen
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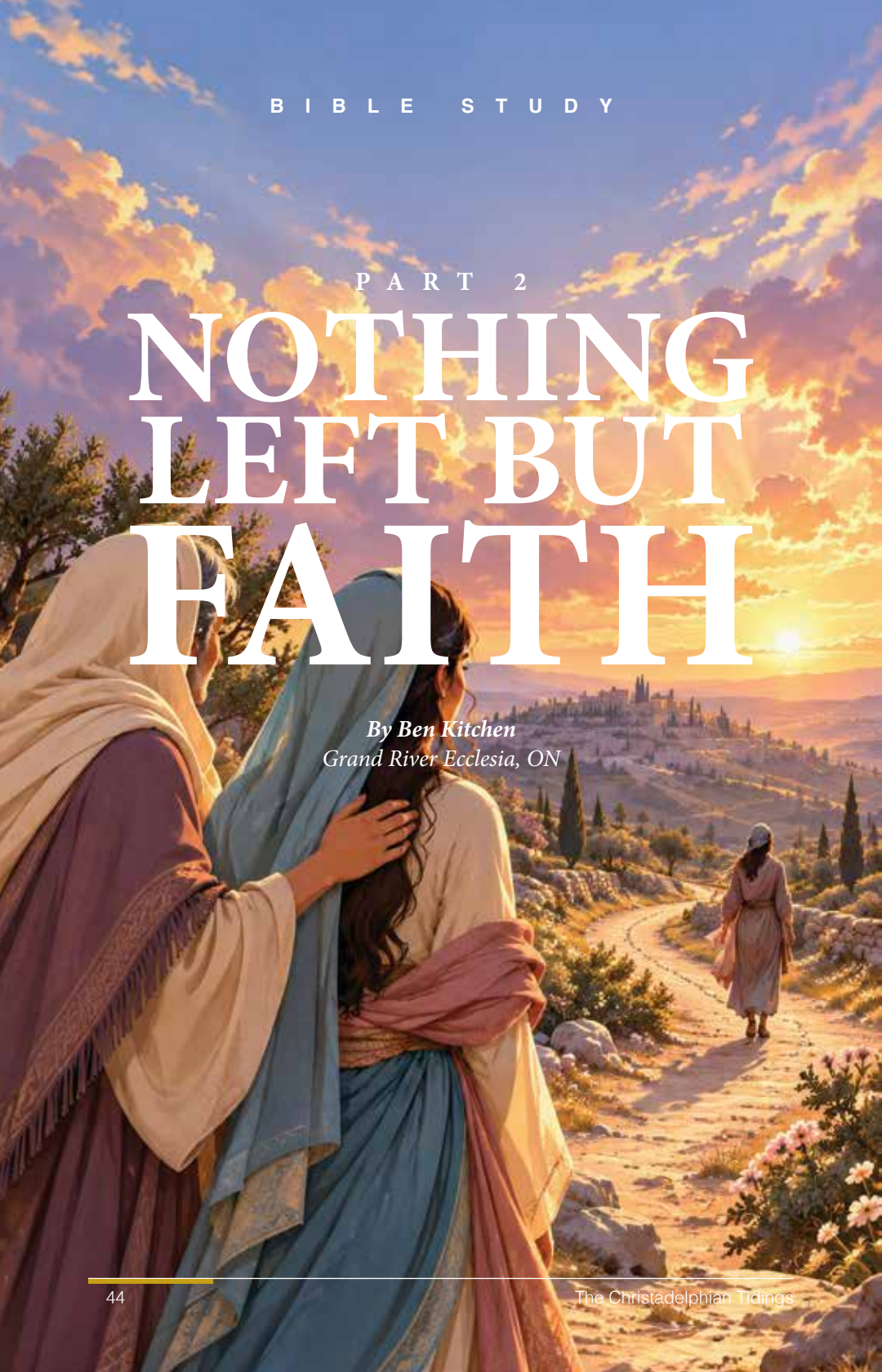

In the previous article, we looked at the hopelessness of Naomi and Ruth's situation and why Naomi seemed so genuinely keen to send her daughters-in-law back to Moab. They had no possible legal future in Israel. At least, certainly not a happy one.

Now, however, Naomi has returned, and despite her attempts to the contrary, Ruth has stubbornly come along with her, braving the long and dangerous road all the way back to Bethlehem.

Ruth's presence gives Naomi a cause for concern, but also a purpose. She now devotes herself to finding a way to provide for her daughter-in-law (and herself).

At this point, as Ruth heads into the fields to glean, Naomi seems to have spent her days at home, deep in thought. She still "owns" Elimelech's land (assumingly because it has not yet been redeemed, sold, or inherited by a distant relative). Someone—a male—now needs to own it, or it will pass into another family (and Elimelech's "name," his estate, will be lost).

But how can she use this to provide for Ruth?

The Laws of Inheritance

Firstly, let's dip a toe into the laws of inheritance in Ancient Israel. Much of what we know about these laws comes from the pleas posed by Zelophehad's daughters.

With the daughters of Zelophehad, note again that the "name" is really about the "inheritance," not the genealogy. "*Why should the name of our father be taken away from his clan because he had no son? Give to us a possession among our father's brothers.*" (Numbers 27:4). God's solution begins in verse 7 and continues through verse 10. Here's the summary:

1. A man's estate passes to his son(s).
2. If he has no sons, it passes to his daughters, who must marry within the tribe (vv. 6-9).
3. If he has no daughters, it passes to his brothers.
4. If he has no brothers, it passes to his uncles.
5. If he has no uncles, it passes to his nearest male relatives.
   a. Cousins? (See v. 11).
   b. Cousins' children?
   c. Father's cousins?

The piece of land that belonged to Elimelech would technically have passed to his sons at his death. However, since the family was in the land of Moab and email had not yet been invented, it seems plausible that the elders at the gate of Bethlehem had no idea Elimelech had died until Naomi returned. By that point, Mahlon and Chilion had also died. When Naomi returned, the elders had to legally transfer the land into someone else's name, leaving the two women alone and homeless.

Unless, that is, an heir will suddenly come from somewhere. It seems plausible that the elders delayed this transaction at Naomi's request, as she tried to find a way to get herself, and, more importantly in her mind, Ruth, out of their dire situation.

Normally, the land would pass to Elimelech's heir, but Mahlon and Chilion are both dead, and neither left sons. If Naomi could have more children, Ruth could marry them,

and that son would inherit Elimelech's estate, but Naomi simply can't have any more.

If Naomi does nothing and lets the land pass to the nearest heir (likely the near-kinsman from Ruth 4), someone would at least own the land, but Naomi and Ruth would still get nothing.

The point of the Law is that the land provides for people (especially widows, orphans, and strangers), tying in with the famine in Ruth 1 and Naomi describing herself as going out "*full*" and coming back "*empty*."

So, why would Naomi authorize a transaction which leaves her and Ruth without an inheritance? It doesn't make sense, nor would it align with the spirit of God's Law, which was to provide.

Property Ownership in Ancient Israel

While the rights to houses (within city walls) appear to have been fairly similar to the freeholds we have today, the rights to **land**, that is, agricultural production fields, were very different. To fully grasp how it worked, and how it applied to Elimelech's estate, you need the full passage in Leviticus 25:8-34.

To sum up the main points from that passage, the land belonged, and still belongs, to God (v. 23). He is the actual landowner, the landlord of every tenant to whom he gives an inheritance. The people were "*strangers and sojourners with*" God. The Israelites did not "buy" their land from God; God gave it to them for free, via lot. Thus, they were in effect leaseholders of the land, the



price of which would technically be the income from fifty years' harvests (the period from jubilee to jubilee).

Now, the people could "sell" their "lease" of the land if they were desperately poor and needed to make up some money (v. 25). That lease would essentially be calculated using the expected value of the harvests in however many years were left before the year of jubilee (vv. 15,16).

For example, if the land was worth $1,000 per year to a new landowner, and there were 20 years until the next jubilee, the current landowner could "sell" their "lease" for $20,000. If the poor man became wealthy again, he could repurchase the lease back into his own name using the same maths. For instance, if another ten years had elapsed, leaving only ten years until the jubilee, he could repurchase his land for $10,000. In the year of the jubilee, all the land returned to the original owner (v. 13) or their heir, whoever continued their "name."

And here is where a *"redeemer"* comes in.

What Defined a Redeemer?

The Hebrew word for *"redeemer"* is *go'el* (H1350; Ruth 2:20; 3:9, 12, 13; 4:1, 3, 4, 8, 14). We have no single effective corresponding word in English. That interests me because it's outside our cultural scope, and we are naturally ignorant of what being a *go'el* really means.

The closest English translation likely comes from the NIV: *"kinsman-redeemer."* A *go'el* is someone closely related (from the man's family) who is supposed to act as their protector—if he is able. Other ways to understand the scope of a redeemer include an avenger, a deliverer, a savior, a protector, and a guardian, all in one. *Go'el* is used in three distinct cases in the Law:

1. Land redemption (Leviticus 25:8-34). This clearly applies to Naomi and Ruth's situation, and the intricacies of the land ownership are discussed later on.
2. Redemption from slavery (Leviticus 25:47-55). While this doesn't quite apply in the context of Ruth and Naomi, its principles may apply to Boaz's marriage to Ruth.
3. Blood-vengeance (Numbers 35, Deuteronomy 19). This wouldn't seem to apply in this story. In these cases, the *go'el* is specifically a *go'el ha-dam*, a "redeemer of the blood."

These references make clear that redemption is ultimately about people, even when the redemption concerns inheritance and land, which are closely tied to the person. Land redemption restores property and inheritance to a person or family; redeeming relatives (or oneself) from slavery means being freed from servitude, like being taken out of Egypt and brought into the Promised Land; even blood-vengeance concerns blood "polluting" the land and atonement.

For a person's redemption, the *go'els* also have an order: *"One of his brothers may redeem him, or his uncle or his cousin may redeem him, or a close relative from his clan may redeem him."* (Leviticus 25:48-49). This follows the same order as the inheritance laws and may apply

to all redemption processes — hence Boaz going to the nearer kinsman and offering him the right of redemption first (to be discussed in more detail later).

Naomi Has No Legal Options

In truth, Naomi had no legal options. The only possibility was that someone, out of the goodness of their heart, would redeem the land and provide an heir so Ruth (and Naomi) would have a legal right to it. But who would do that?

Returning to Leviticus 25, as we look at a landowner falling into poverty and needing to sell his "land-lease," we see the redeemer's role in this case.

The poor landowner doesn't **have** to sell their land-lease to a redeemer; they could sell it to anyone willing to purchase it. However, the redeemer had the first right to purchase the land from the poor man and could always redeem it from whoever bought it (as assumed from the story of Ruth and Leviticus 25:25-28).

Likewise, the redeemer doesn't **have** to purchase the land; they can only do so if they are materially able, and even then they can choose not to. If they do purchase the land, they are free to use it as their own. It's not a "charitable" act (by law, at least) in the traditional sense; the redeemer doesn't just gift it back to the poor man. They farm it themselves and enjoy the fruit of its harvests until the year of jubilee, when they lose all rights to the land, and it returns to their close relative, the poor man who originally sold it, or, if he has died, to his heirs.

There is an example of property ownership, exchange, and redemption playing out in Jeremiah 32. Jeremiah's cousin, from Anathoth, asks him to redeem his plot of land. This is amid a Babylonian siege, so the cousin's land could not be used for much, and his finances were struggling to make ends meet.

Hanamel, Jeremiah's cousin, asks the prophet, *"Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours."* (Jeremiah 32:7 ESV). That *"right of redemption by purchase"* likely refers to Jeremiah's status as the closest relative and redeemer (*go'el*). We also see that the poor man can choose to sell straight to a redeemer if he wishes.

Jeremiah pays 17 shekels of silver, then

> *signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions and the open copy. And I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of Hanamel my cousin, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard.* (vv. 10-12 ESV).

This is a prophetic symbol, but it may also offer insight into how land-lease worked legally in Ancient Israel, especially in the context of redemption.

But here, after Ruth comes home and tells Naomi about Boaz, the older woman realizes God's hand is still at work in their lives. And an idea begins to form, culminating in her sending Ruth on a secret visit to Boaz at the threshing floor.

Why They Need a Redeemer

Below, in my opinion, is one of the most likely reasons why Naomi sends Ruth to Boaz.

Someone has to redeem the land, while Naomi somehow finds a man willing to act as a voluntary levirate (discussed below), who would marry Ruth and whose firstborn son would inherit Elimelech's estate. As Ruth's son and the beneficiary of Elimelech's (through Mahlon's) estate, this boy would provide for both Ruth and Naomi, saving them from the hopelessness of their situation and restoring the land to an owner through inheritance. If Naomi can find a redeemer willing to do both, then their futures, and the land's ownership, will be secure. However, a redeemer is not **obligated** to redeem, and because purchasing land involves a significant financial transaction, it could harm their **estate**. Add in the fact that Ruth is a Moabitess, and finding a redeemer is entirely dependent on the goodwill and kindness of one of their near-relatives.

People rarely act out of kindness if it's not a good business decision.

When Ruth visits Boaz at the threshing floor in Ruth 3, she uncovers his feet and lies down (v. 7). Then, when he awakens (v. 8), she asks him, *"Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer."* (v. 9). *"Wings"* here is a reference to Boaz's garment uncovered by Ruth, but it is also a nod back to Ruth 2:12 (ESV): *"The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!"* The Hebrew word is the same, and this also ties in with the type that God is the ultimate redeemer (of the land, of the people, and of vengeance), in whom we find "refuge," or protection, safety, and peace. In the immediate context, this is what Ruth and Naomi see in Boaz.

Ruth's midnight visit to Boaz was a request for contractual redemption of the land **and** to marry her—which, in effect, would lead to a son who would redeem her and Naomi—to which he agreed.

Since Boaz owned land and is described as *"a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech"* (Ruth 2:1 ESV), and we know that he subsequently carried out the redemption of property and of person (although not quite in the sense of slavery), we can be sure that he was kind and wealthy in both material and spiritual things. In other words, he was the only person Naomi could turn to for redemption, for herself and Ruth.

The final article in this series will delve into the mechanics of how that redemption played out at the gate of Bethlehem.

Ben Kitchen,
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RAISING NEURODIVERGENT CHILDREN

By Jen Wallace
Upper Gully Ecclesia, VIC



WHEN I was first asked to write an article about the challenges of raising neurodivergent[1] children, I was pretty hesitant. The biggest reason is that everyone's journey is so different. There is no one-size-fits-all, and as much as we can learn from and support each other, it's still a personal journey of growth.

We have three neurodivergent children. When our first child received a diagnosis, we felt grief and anger. By the time our second child received a diagnosis, we celebrated and embraced it. It was simply another piece of information that helped us understand the child we already knew and loved. When our third child received a diagnosis, it kind of wasn't even a thing.

I think that says more about how much we have changed than anything else.

For a very long time, I struggled to reconcile how deeply I loved my child with how hard we found life. Things that seemed to come naturally to other families took enormous planning and energy for ours. And then there was the guilt. I loved my child more than I could put into words, so why was I finding this so hard?

I also struggled with trying to fit into what I thought a Christadelphian family was supposed to look like. Attending meeting, Bible schools, and ecclesial events was something we genuinely wanted to do, but sometimes just getting there took everything we had.

When we did make it, we could arrive already completely depleted. Other parents seemed able to keep an eye on their children from across the room while having conversations, while I needed to be right there with mine. I might physically be sitting in a talk, but mentally I wasn't hearing a word. I was watching my child. Were they okay? Was the noise becoming too much? Did we need to leave?

One of the hardest things in those early years was feeling judged.

People would send us parenting articles or recommend parenting books. They would try to relate by telling us about something their child was doing or a parenting struggle they were having. I know most of it came from wanting to help, but sometimes I would sit there thinking, **I wish those were our problems**. And then I would feel awful for thinking that too.

We couldn't punish or consequence our way out of neurodivergence. It wasn't that we hadn't tried hard enough or weren't consistent enough.

There were times when we were absolutely drowning, and it felt like people standing safely on the shore were criticizing the way we were trying to stay afloat.

Looking back, I can see how much that fear of judgment affected my parenting. For a very long time, I parented out of fear. I didn't want to look weak or like I couldn't control my child. Sometimes I parented for the people watching instead of the child in front of me.

At this point in our journey, I have learned to parent out of love and not fear.

That doesn't mean I expect less. Sometimes I limited my children because I was frightened of what might happen. Now I have higher expectations of what they can achieve, while understanding they may need more support to get there.

I've also learned about capacity. Just because my child can do something one day doesn't mean they can do it the next. Being capable of something and having the capacity to do it in that moment aren't always the same thing.

Even between our three children, neurodivergence looks completely different. They have different strengths, struggles, and capacities. Our middle child, who is autistic, has struggled significantly more, and we went through a crisis that lasted years.

There is grief that comes with that.

Sometimes we are frightened to admit to grief because it sounds as though we are grieving our children. I'm not. I adore my children. But I have grieved how hard life has been for them—watching my child struggle in a world that doesn't always understand them.

Sometimes we are frightened to admit to grief because it sounds as though we are grieving our children. I'm not. I adore my children. But I have grieved how hard life has been for them.

Love and grief can exist together.

I've learned that faith and grief can too.

For much of my life, I have struggled to reconcile my emotions and my faith, as if the two are mutually exclusive. If I was finding life this hard, something must be wrong with me. My faith must not be strong enough. I must not be thankful enough. I haven't prayed hard enough.

I've heard well-meaning comments: "God doesn't give people more than they can handle," "someone else has it worse," "just pray, read your Bible, and leave it to God."

There have been times when I have been completely brought to my knees, and I've come to believe that sometimes we are given, or allowed to go through, more than we can handle.

That is why we need God.

There is no shame in unveiling our brokenness to Him. So many psalms give us a picture of exactly that: someone crying out to God, pleading with Him, and at the same time acknowledging His mighty hand and giving thanks.

God is big enough for it all.

He is big enough for our anger. He is big enough for our questions. He is big enough to hold our tears.

If I could sit beside the mother I was when we received that first diagnosis, I wouldn't give her another parenting book or tell her to look on the bright side.

I would put my arm around her and say, **"This is still your child. This is the same child you loved yesterday. You don't have to understand everything today. You are going to learn together. You are going to grow together. And God loves your child."**

That same God understands the physical exhaustion, patience, and emotional weight it takes to raise your child. I love

the tenderness of Isaiah 40:11: *"He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom and gently lead those that are with young."*

Something about those words, *"gently lead those that are with young,"* speak differently to me now. The God who gathers our children in His arms also knows what it takes to care for them. He sees us, and He gently leads us too.

My husband and I have talked many times about how we are all made in the image of God. God created our children in my womb. He knew them before I did. He saw fit to create them the way He did.

He loves them.

And if I truly believe that, if we truly believe that, then it has to affect how we think about belonging in our ecclesias too.

My children are some of the most loving, thoughtful, insightful, funny, and determined people I've ever known. They continually show up in a world that isn't always built for them. They show up when the noise is overwhelming and when simply being there takes more effort than anyone realizes.

Sometimes they suppress who they are to fit in. Sometimes they hold everything together while they're there and fall apart when they get home.

And still, they show up.

I wish our ecclesial spaces understood that better. I wish people didn't make comments about a child being "too old" to sit on the floor. Sometimes sitting on



the floor is what allows that child to be in the room. I wish we thought more about noise, quiet spaces, schedules, and sensory needs. What looks like rigidity around a routine might be what keeps a child safe and regulated enough to participate.

But I don't only remember the times I felt judged. Some of the moments of love shown to us are etched into me just as deeply.

I remember leaving an event after one of our children had really struggled. I was overwhelmed and broken. It was pouring rain, and a friend stood beside my car, their arm around me, getting soaked while I cried.

That's it.

They stood in the rain while I cried.

They didn't give me advice or tell me everything would be okay. I just remember that they didn't leave me there alone.

When we were in crisis, for weeks, a family would drop a meal at our house on a Sunday. They didn't know what they could do to help, but they knew everyone needed to eat. Another friend dropped off coffee and flowers, with no expectation that I'd invite them in or explain anything. They just wanted me to know they cared.

Those are the things I remember.

Not someone with the perfect words or a perfect understanding of neurodivergence. Just people who loved us enough to come close.

In my darkest days, I couldn't reach out. Half the time I didn't even know what we needed.

We often say, "Reach out if you need anything." I know it comes from love, and I've said it too. But perhaps we need to stop relying on people who are drowning to reach out, and get better at reaching in.

Drop off the meal. Send the text. Leave a coffee at the door. Send the card. Sit beside them. Notice when they disappear outside with their child.

Stand in the pouring rain.

A phrase I have tried to live by in my adult years is, "Be the person you needed." Raising our children has given those words an entirely different meaning for me.

What I needed wasn't someone to take away my sadness or remind me somebody else had it worse. I needed tenderness, warmth, compassion, connection, and presence. Sometimes love is simply being willing to sit with someone in their darkest moments without trying to fix them.

Some of our greatest resources have been neurodivergent people themselves. Listening to people with lived experience has helped us understand our children in ways generic parenting advice never could. Specialists and professionals who understand neurodivergence have also been invaluable. I especially love Rach Vermeulen's writing from A Little Extra Love. Her writing about disability, parenting, and church life touches my heart because so much of it feels relatable.

But my greatest teachers have been my children.

They have taught me about capacity, behavior, and assumptions. About resilience, grace, and love. They have shown gifts of problem-solving, creativity, empathy, hyperfocus, and

attention to detail. They have taught me that what something looks like from the outside doesn't necessarily tell you what is happening underneath.

Most of all, they have taught me that belonging shouldn't depend on our ability to fit in.

We are still learning. There are still hard days. There is still grief. I don't want to tie everything into a neat bow and pretend we have arrived, because we haven't.

But I am different.

The mother who received that first diagnosis with grief and anger couldn't see the mother she would become, how much her children would teach her, or the ways God would carry us when we couldn't carry ourselves.

She couldn't see beyond the pit she was standing in.

And the thing about being in the pit is that the pit lies. It tells you this is all there is.

I love the thought that hope is the voice that meets you in the storm and says there is more than what you can see right now. Sometimes we need someone else to hold that hope for us until we can see it again.

Maybe that is one of the greatest gifts we can give each other as an ecclesial family.

Notice. Reach in. Make room. Love our children as the people God created them to be.

And sometimes, when there are no words and nothing we can do to fix it, just be willing to stand with them in the rain.

Jen Wallace,
Upper Gully Ecclesia, VIC

1 Neurodivergent is a non-medical descriptive term that means that an individual's development and/or functioning is different from what is culturally or societally considered the norm.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Regarding *"Let Us Learn, Part 2"*:

Thank you Martha for your article using the words "forever" and "for the length of his days." The more we read our Bibles, the more we realize and appreciate the entire history of God's word. We see how it is interwoven on a daily basis and look forward to the day when we see "forever" being fulfilled.

Barbara Abel,
Barrie Ecclesia, ON

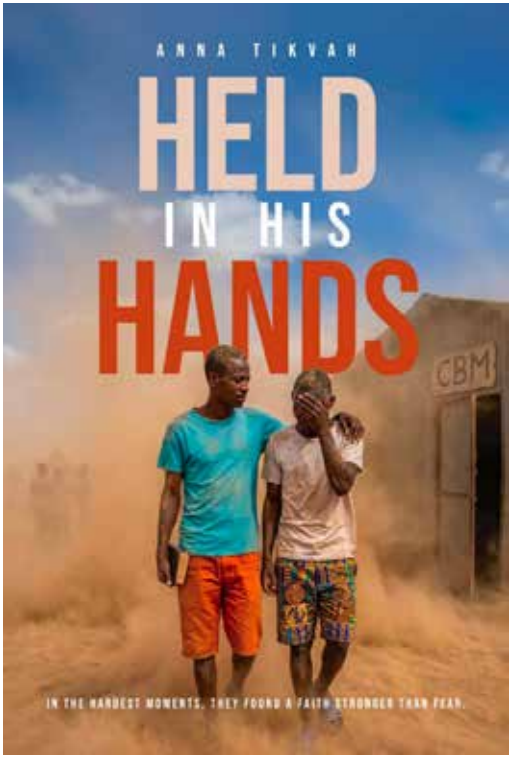
Regarding *"Recognizing Opportunities"*:

I loved this article! I appreciated all the positive ideas, and the interesting insights on the parable of the talents. Thank you, Josh!

Kellie Gelineau,
Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA

I remember hearing Josh speak about this in one of his exhortations some time back. So glad he wrote it up for the *Tidings*. I especially like seeing the practical ideas listed out. Praying for open eyes; that's a good one!

Steve Davis,
Boston Ecclesia, MA



CHAPTER 4

David's Story, A Dangerous Decision

For seven months, David and the other students stayed with the government army. The compound was in the forest, and life was better with the soldiers than it had been with the rebels. The government soldiers had food and they were being paid, so their uniforms were newer and they didn't need to steal food from the farms nearby. But even though life was better, all the young lads longed to go home. Occasionally, they begged to leave and continue with their studies and see their parents again, or even just give them the message that they were still alive. They hoped that the government soldiers would have some compassion on their situation, seeing they had been kidnapped from school, but none of them did. As the weeks went by, the young men came to realize they were only going to get in trouble or be beaten if they kept on asking. Leaving the army was not an option anyone would freely grant to them.

Every morning, they woke early to fetch firewood and water from the river. They cooked ugali for the soldiers, washed their clothes, and polished their shoes. No duty was permanent. If one day they cooked, they would wash clothes on the next. There was always some chore to be done so that no one was idle, and the chores had to be

done well or some sort of punishment would take place. Still longing for his family and lonely in his heart, David was at least thankful that he wasn't forced to raid farms or shoot villagers.

Even though they were young and it was a common practice in the DRC for rebels to force youths into their army, the government soldiers were wary of this group of students they had captured. They kept calling them "rebels." At first, armed soldiers went with the boys on every outing to get firewood and water. It took a long time to win their trust. As the months passed, only one soldier slowly became friendly to the students. When he was paid his monthly allowance, he would sometimes share a few francs with the boys and spend time talking to them. In turn, they would help him mop the floors of his house or do any other duty he required. Mani became his official ugali maker, as he had perfected the technique. Ugali is called "food" in Kenya. Made from ground corn, ugali is a very important staple in every meal.

Day after day went by as David collected his little pile of francs and kept them bound in a rag in his pocket. If he ever found a chance to escape, he knew it might be useful to have some money, and he was always looking for such an opportunity. Far away from any markets, there were no temptations to spend the money on mandazis or other treats.

All the weekdays blurred together, without school or church. David's mother had once said that any child of hers that didn't go to church would no longer be her child… but it was impossible to fulfil her wish. The comforting vision that his mother had instilled in his mind—that a Higher Being was watching over them—was now riddled with holes of doubt. It certainly didn't feel like they were in God's loving hands. Even the vision of Heaven was becoming a fanciful tale that no longer gave him peace at night when he ached for his family. Day after day, he wondered how they were doing and whether he would ever see them again.

Sometimes when David lay awake in the dark, he wondered if his mother thought he was dead. Did she wish she could have at least buried him with her own hands? Did little Furaha still cry out for him in the early morning hours? Did Miriam ask when he was coming home? Did his brothers miss playing with him? Was his father dismayed that he would never see his eldest son graduate? All the hopes that he could change the future for his family were crumbling into the dust. If only he could find a way to escape.

The Government soldiers had strict rules on the boys doing anything in groups. Some of the students were older and in Form Four; they had been preparing for their final exams before being captured by the rebels. Fearful of their defection, the government soldiers watched them carefully. But as time went on and the lads proved trustworthy, the soldiers began to let them fetch supplies on their own.

One day it was David's turn to go to the river to fetch water. Mani was with him, as were six other students, but there were no soldiers. Finding his way through the shrubs and brush that lined the river, it was very much on David's mind to find a way to freedom;

to escape this life that he had not chosen and that went against every principle he had been taught. Although he had been fearful of speaking to Mani about his feelings, he was fairly confident that his friend felt the same. Life in the army had ended their hopes of providing for their families, torn them away from the people they loved, and restricted every action and opportunity… except the opportunity to forgive.

After filling his twenty-litre jerrycan full of the cloudy river water, David noticed

that the other students had gone on ahead. He and Mani were left behind. No one was watching.

Looking carefully around as they carried their burden of water up the riverbank, David spoke softly, "We could escape."

Mani hesitated.

For a moment, David considered that his words could be used against him. If Mani were to report such words to the soldiers, it could bring a quick death to the traitor. Anxiously, he glanced over at his friend, trying to read his response.

Walking slowly, Mani didn't meet his gaze. His mocha coloured face was tense and unreadable. His dark eyes were uncertain, and he was staring straight ahead.

Sweating profusely, David wiped his forehead with his free hand. He wished he hadn't spoken so frankly.

Placing his jerrycan on the hard dirt path, Mani turned slowly. "We could," he said.

David placed his jug on the ground as well. Their eyes met with fearful excitement, knowing there was no turning back from this decision. If they were caught, they were dead. If they escaped, they had to escape far, far, away fast. Both had been contemplating the option for months, but it wasn't something either had felt free to discuss. Now there was no time to carefully ponder the pros and the cons. It was "act now" or wait for another rare opportunity.

Cautiously, they slid into the bushes, and then they began to run. They ran and ran for many kilometres to get far away from the soldiers. It was only when they reached a forest on the top of a hill that they stopped to make a plan.

Hiding in the cluster of trees, David was weary. He bent over with his hands on his legs, trying to catch his breath. They were on a high hill and he wondered if they could see any of the lake near their old home. As he panted and wiped his brow, he peered through the low-hanging branches. Lake Tanganyika stretched across the horizon like a beautiful, sparkling ribbon of blue.

His friend noticed it as well. Eagerly, he pointed towards the large body of water that stretched north to south for nearly seven hundred kilometres. It is one of the largest freshwater lakes in the world. "Maybe we should hide during the day and walk at night,"

Mani suggested. "We will likely pass a lot of people on the way home. There are so many towns."

A terribly distressing thought suddenly passed through David's mind. With a deep sigh, he said, "They might come looking for us! We can't go home so quickly. The rebels and the government will be against us now."

Painfully, Mani agreed. "True… They might come after us." In anguish, he added, "But I just want to let my mom and dad know that I'm safe."

Both looked longingly in the direction of their village. It was too far away in the distance to see buildings, but they knew their little homes lay on the banks of that beautiful ribbon of blue. They could imagine their moms out in the gardens and their siblings working hard at school. The blue ribbon beckoned to them with every beat of their heart. If only they could run towards it.

"What are we going to do?" Mani asked. "Camp out in the forests for a few months?

What will we eat?"

Pondering their dilemma, David considered their options. It was dangerous to stay close to home. He knew the refugee camp was close by, and many had fled there in the past. "We've got to get to the Tanzanian refugee camp," he determined. "It's not far. Maybe after a year or two we can come back."

Mani agreed sadly. He turned and looked south. Looming high in the distance was the mountainous region of the Ubwari Peninsula. It jutted out into the lake towards the neighbouring countries. It was the way to safety.

Nodding, David gazed in the same direction. Playing with the bound wad of coins he kept in his pocket, he said, "Somewhere there we can get a boat over to Tanzania."

Mani sighed glumly, "I never wanted to live in a refugee camp…"

"What choice do we have?" David shrugged. "Be a soldier the rest of our lives with no chance of escape? Or take our chances as refugees?"

They were young. Hopelessness had engulfed them for months, and now the only flickering flame of freedom seemed to beckon in another country. Any glimmer of hope was better than nothing at all. With long, wistful glances towards the homes they so desperately wanted to run towards, they said their farewells to their families.

"Good-bye, Mama and Baba," David whispered, his heart breaking as he looked over the region where he'd once lived in poverty but with all that really mattered. "You must know that I want nothing more than to come back home and be with you all

forever! But coming home right now would put everyone in danger. It could bring more hardship to our family. You don't need this." He paused and wiped the tears from his eyes. "I'm sure you would tell me to choose freedom and safety if I can." Wistfully, he added, "I just wish we could let you know where we're going, and I really hope we find each other again!"

Mani gave his own tender farewells, pleaded for protection from the three prophets, and then they set off towards Ubwari.

For two wearisome days, the young men pushed themselves through thickets, up hills, trudging through tall fields of corn, in the day and in the night, always keeping the mountainous area in view. When they were hungry, they dug up cassava, which grew abundantly on many farms in the region, and ate the roots. When they were thirsty, they tried to find a stream of water. All the time they were wary of meeting any human beings, always afraid of being recaptured or shot in the head. At any moment, their hopes of escape could be crushed completely. If they thought they heard people coming, they hid in the bushes until they passed by. Surprisingly, for much of the journey through the hilly, forested region, they didn't see anyone at all. Birds sang out merrily in the treetops above, and this was the only noise that was welcome to their ears.

Finally, they reached Mwanzalulu on the shores of sparkling Lake Tanganyika. With some of the money they had tied up in rags, they boarded a boat to Tanzania.

Anna Tikvah

This is the last chapter of *Held in His Hands* that we will be sharing.
If you'd like to read the rest of the story, you can find the book on Amazon.



Bukavu, Sud-Kivu, République démocratique du Congo

OPENING DOORS IN URUGUAY AND PARAGUAY

By Jim and Jean Hunter,
CBMA Links



Meeting visitors at the hotel in Paraguay

Colonia del Sacramento Colonia Department, Uruguay

BRO. Bro. Jaime Mate (Recording Brother of San Salvador) with his wife, Sis. Karla, along with Sis. Pati Vasquez, traveled to Uruguay and Paraguay in September to meet with some of the Bible course students there.

They were encouraged to talk with a number of interested friends. Bro. Jaime gave some talks at their hotel in Paraguay, attended by 4 men, and they distributed a good amount of literature. This is the first visit to these countries to reach out to students of ***labiblia.com***, and they were encouraged by the enthusiasm of those they met. God willing, they will arrange another trip next year to follow up on their interest.

Jim and Jean Hunter,
CBMA Links



Visitors in Paraguay



Students at the hotel in Uruguay

CELEBRATING THE BIBLE IN EL SALVADOR

By Jim and Jean Hunter,
CBMA Links



Bro. Rene Castillo talking to a visitor

Sunrise at Ecoparque El Espino, El Salvador

APPARENTLY, September was officially "The Month of the Bible" in El Salvador, so the ecclesia decided to have a special effort, with four public lectures on "How we can Know the Bible is True," "How to read the Bible," etc. The lectures were also held on Zoom.

A Bible exhibit was set up on the second floor of the hall for visitors to view after the talks. They were also invited to share a light lunch with the brethren and sisters.

The Salvadoran brethren and sisters are happy to report that 18 different people came to the talks over the month, most of them more than once. Seven friends attended via Zoom.

Jim and Jean Hunter,
CBMA Links



Guests visiting the Bible Exhibition



Bro. Rene visiting with a visiting couple

THIS I KNOW

Prophets & Promises, Track 11, Caleb Osborn, Thousand Oaks Ecclesia, CA

I am overwhelmed by questions, my faith is under siege;
All the claims God makes are hard to take, it's so hard to believe.
I'm afraid that all I once held dear is built on shifting sand;
The pressures rise, my zeal subsides, I cannot see God's hand.
But this I know, this I know:

You made oceans part so slaves could be set free.
You move nations and their tyrants to fulfill Your prophecies
And Jesus heard the doubting father's plea.
So when I doubt, remind me what I know:
You are good, You are good.

I am anxious for the future, what will tomorrow bring?
What if the cup You're filling up proves far too hard to drink?
What if sickness strikes my child at night, and I can't find the cure?
Can I expect You to protect, how can I rest secure?
But this I know, this I know:

You slew giants who defied Your holy name.
You made Elisha's servant see Your angel riders, all aflame
And Jesus faced down death, and overcame.
So when I doubt, remind me what I know:
You are good, You are good.

Well, I made some reckless choices,
And I listened to the voices
In my head, that said to live just for today.
Now I'm face down in the gutter,
And far too late, I wonder,
If I made it home, would I be turned away?
But this I know, this I know:

You gave Samson strength to topple Dagon's pillars.
You kept mercy still for David, even though he was a killer
And Jesus died to save the chief of sinners,
So when I doubt, remind me what I know:
You are good, You are good.



Shouts of Grace Music has released a new 12-track album called *Prophets & Promises*.

It opens with the haunting questions of Habakkuk, and explores the experiences of Old Testament men and women who grappled with what it means to take God at His word amidst hardship and failure. Some songs focus on individual stories, while others address God's relationship with Israel and His purpose with the nations. Throughout, they keep returning to the faithfulness of the God who keeps his promises and will not stop working in the world or in our lives. The album ends with a celebration of arrival in the promised land, concluding that "*not one thing has failed of all the LORD our God foretold.*"

Listen to the album on the platform of your choice at:
ditto.fm/prophets-and-promises



PART 2

I AM PETER

By George Booker
Austin Leander Ecclesia, TX

DESPITE my many failings, Jesus still loved me.

My worst moments came at the worst possible times—in the Upper Room, for example, where we observed our special Passover, and I had the audacity to say, "Lord, even if all these others fall away from you, I will not!" It was only a matter of hours before I broke that proud vow.

And then there was the dark garden where we all slept while he prayed, and where I awoke from sleep, and in a stupor attacked the wrong person with a dagger which I had no reason to carry. Then, most terrible of all, at the palace of Caiaphas, I lied and lied again and lied yet one more time, cursed in the name of the One who should not be named in vain, and saved my useless carcass from the fate I deserved.

I had promised three times that I would never forsake or deny Jesus, and then I turned my back on him three times! He did not ask any of us to make such promises, but my mouth, once again, put me in the worst possible predicament. When all of us disciples ran from Gethsemane to save ourselves, I found myself returning, just a few hours later, to the scene of my most egregious sins. There I threw myself on the ground where he had lain, and I wept tears which would not stop.

I was so close to taking my own life, like Judas Iscariot actually did. During the nightmarish days that followed, I waited, struggled, stumbled, and fell time and again, but I still clung to my life, which seemed without merit. And then I heard that my Lord, now risen from the tomb, had asked for me. I went, frightened and cautious at the beginning, but on I went, until I found myself in his presence, prostrate on the ground before him. For once, I had nothing to say.

He lifted me up with arms so much stronger than mine, and he said, "Peter, of all my friends, you have tried the most to do what I would wish, and you have failed the most. For your failures I forgive you, a hundred times and more. For your efforts to serve me, I thank you. There will be time, much time, for you to grow into the fullness of discipleship and look after my flock. That is why I have called you to follow me.

"As you grow in spiritual things, you will take the lessons you have learned, hammered home by your own shortcomings and mistakes, and you will give hope to those who feel the same way you have felt. They will need you. You will be their shepherd; you will feed them in green pastures, and quench their thirst in streams of living water. You will be their example, not of perfection, but of perseverance. You will counsel them on how to ride out the storms of life, and to hold firm to hope in the greatest of trials. Then you will show them how to live. And finally, you will show them how to die."

Reflections

So, my dear friends, I stand before you as an example, a most useful example. Here is my life, with its pathetically few successes and its myriad failures. Here is how to hold on to the faith, no matter what, to wait for the storms to pass and the tears to dry, and always, always, to see our Lord and Savior in every aspect of life.

Yes, we may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. But these trials will be the crucible in which our faith is purified, like gold refined by fire, to prove it genuine and give glory and honor to our Savior.

In God's infinite mercy, and despite our sins, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. Yes, we may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. But these trials will be the crucible in which our faith is purified, like gold refined by fire, to prove it genuine and give glory and honor to our Savior.

Therefore, prepare your minds and set your hope fully on the grace you will receive when Jesus Christ is revealed. For you know that you were not redeemed from your empty life with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

When Jesus first met me, he called me "Peter," a stone. I thought he meant I was a strong, immovable rock, but that wasn't the case at all. In fact, and sadly, I turned out to be a loose rolling stone with no anchor. Even so, Jesus forgave me, more times than you can imagine, and I finally became what he wanted me to be: a "rock" of faith. So I can tell you, my brothers and sisters, all of us who believe can be living "stones." We can be built up into a spiritual house, offering our spiritual sacrifices to God through Christ, our cornerstone.

Brothers and sisters, live as servants of God. Love the brotherhood of believers. Respect God. Honor the king; no matter how wicked he may be, God has put him in power. Remember, if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. You were called to this, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example to follow in his steps.

What does it mean to follow Christ's example and do good? It means to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.

Love is mentioned last, because it is the most important quality. Without love, we are nothing. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you share in Christ's sufferings, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your cares on him because he cares for you. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Farewell

My beloved friends, I must leave now. The Lord has called me to visit a family of Romans who want to hear our precious gospel and be baptized into Christ. Yes, I know they are Gentiles, but it does not matter. They are children of God, as we all are.

The Lord has shown me that I should never call anyone common or unclean, so I go to preach to them as well as to you all. I have learned that lesson from our Lord Jesus Christ; he chose me to be a follower—and he offered me, the most common and unclean of men, a precious inheritance in his kingdom.

He has called all of you too, into the same eternal glory. We know we will suffer a little while before that great reward comes. So we must be patient in suffering until that day. Do not give up. Do not quit. Hold fast to your hope.

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Grace and peace be to all of you who are in Christ. To him be glory both now and forever!

George Booker,
Austin Leander Ecclesia, TX

References:

- We know that, among the disciples in the Upper Room, there were at least two "swords" (Greek: *machairai*, large daggers) (Luke 22:38), and that, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter was carrying one of them (Matt 26:51; Mark 14:47; Luke 22:50; John 18:10). In the Upper Room, Peter had also wanted to know the identity of the traitor, and he asked John, reclining next to Jesus, who it was (John 13:21-24). It seems likely John withheld that information or didn't entirely understand it at the time. However, in the Garden, when Peter saw Judas Iscariot arrive with Jewish and Roman soldiers, he realized Judas was the traitor and attempted to kill him. In the darkness and the scuffle, Peter accidentally cut off Malchus's ear, the servant of the high priest. At least, this seems to explain the events involving Peter in the Upper Room and in Gethsemane.
- Peter's cursing is mentioned in Matthew 26:74 and Mark 14:71, where he denied three times that he even knew Jesus.

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