



BA  
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# I Am With You

Great Commission - Part 6



# 2019: Resurrection Commission



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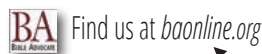
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## Immanuel

“**A**nd, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (KJV).

With these words from Jesus, we conclude our Resurrection Commission theme, even if Christ’s Great Commission is just beginning for us (Matthew 28:20b). I do hope that you’ve been challenged and inspired by this yearlong journey. I have.

“I am with you.” Let these words sink deep into our hearts. Oh how we need them in this hour when so many voices of distraction and doubt attach themselves to us. As we’ve seen throughout our study in 2019, the Great Commission is about Jesus from start to finish. He calls us to Him. We see Him and worship. All authority is in Him. We go make disciples in His name. We teach all to obey Him. And now Jesus promises His presence. He does not send us alone; He goes with us.

This is *Immanuel*, “God with us.” One of the great themes of Scripture, this Name is a good summary of the Gospel of Matthew. Not only does Immanuel conclude it, His Name introduces it: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, ‘God with us’ (1:23). In your doubts and distractions, stop and look; Jesus is there. This is Matthew’s message and is essential to our mission. Because the Risen walks with us, we have all we need.

Our mission together with God in Christ continues in our focus next year, with the Ministry of Reconciliation as our theme. Building on the Great Commission, we hope to explore the amazing details of our mission and ministry. I can’t think of a better theme for 2020 than reconciliation. With relationships fraying and breaking at every level all around us – and often our own – what better time than now to look to the source of all relationships and their restoration: Jesus!

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14 – 6:2 for a taste of what’s to come, and we’ll see you in this space next time as we begin to examine our profound relationship with God as ambassadors for Christ. See page 13 or the theme flyer at [baonline.org](http://baonline.org) for more details.

Remember: *Immanuel!*

– Jason Overman





# Like the Master

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Learning from Jesus  
how to share Jesus.  
by Abel Zaragoza

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A mother teaches her toddler to share her toys with her brother, who is one year younger. A father instructs his seven-year-old son about trust and mistrust before he goes to school.

Teaching and sharing are a natural part of our daily lives. They should also be a natural part of our daily witness. For example, a co-worker can share her personal encounter with Jesus and how this has impacted her life for the good. In a brief testi-

mony, a person on a plane can share with the person sitting next to them the good news of the gospel – for such a time as this.

We are instructed to go into all the world and teach others about Jesus. This happens by being proactive and engaging in their lives, and it takes forethought, risk, and determination. Though it may appear difficult, it's easy when we care for others and embrace the commandment "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Remember, our Father didn't say to love only your relatives, friends, and the people of your race, ethnicity, or political persuasion. No, going into "all the world" means all ethnicities, all walks of life, all social and economic statuses. *All* people!

How do we reach all people with the love of the Father? We

can make it hard on ourselves by trying to share our faith from a religious point of view or merely trying to earn points with Yahweh God. We can get caught up in the method or rationale of witnessing and fail to gain the perspective that we're trying to save drowning victims, like those who perished in Noah's day. We are to teach wherever we go and, as in the parable of the sower, we are to sow gospel "seeds of grace" and our heavenly Father's love for humanity. But we need a strategy. How did Jesus share the good news when He was on this earth?

## Divine strategy

For one thing, Jesus called people to follow Him so He could train them and so they,

in turn, could train others. It's what the apostle Paul later wrote about in 2 Timothy 2:2: "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." Jesus cared about people's welfare, but He knew that being confined to a human body, He couldn't be everywhere as He was before the Incarnation.

We can follow Jesus' method of operation in our own outreach. Here are a few ideas.

**Selecting teams.** Jesus was particular about who would be in His first circle of influence. He chose twelve men as an elite team (Matthew 10:1-6; Luke 6:13-16) who would later have apostolic authority when He went back to heaven. He spent the next three-and-a-half years pouring into them the eternal truths and principles that would change their lives forever. They, in turn, would teach others by the Holy Spirit, as recorded in Acts. This first circle wasn't only the Twelve but included those related to them and Jesus: their families, Jesus' mother, His half brothers, and other women who ministered to Jesus' needs as a group of evangelists.

As His mission expanded over a larger territory in Israel (Luke 10:1, 2), Jesus chose seventy others for His second circle of influence. These frontline people would go ahead of Him to towns and villages, preparing the way, telling others that Jesus was coming soon. These men of the Bible evangelized in much the same way as the late Billy Graham. Whatever city his crusade went to, he would send a delegation six to twelve months ahead of

time to take care of logistics, like finding churches and pastor support and developing local prayer teams to pray for the event from beginning to end.

**Small groups.** Another example we can follow is Jesus' way of ministering in intimate settings, meeting personal needs. Matthew 8 says that Jesus lovingly healed Peter's mother-in-law when she was sick and that, being made well, she lovingly helped Jesus in service (vv. 14, 15). In His close contact with others, the gospel became good news indeed.

## Baiting and sowing

We need to be like Jesus when seeking people who will be faithful followers. We can do this as fishers of men and women and as sowers of good seed by baiting the hook with the right bait and scattering the seed liberally. These suggestions can get us started.

**Ask questions.** We can talk to someone with friendly interest and get to know their needs. Simple conversation is a gateway to discipleship. Jesus' questions with the woman at the well (John 4) can be like us talking with

“We are to teach wherever we go, to sow gospel “seeds of grace” and our heavenly Father’s love for humanity.”

More than once Jesus went to Martha's home in Bethany when traveling to Jerusalem from Galilee. He would meet with her and her two siblings, Lazarus and Mary, their friends, and other followers. These occasions revealed that Jesus was different from His religious contemporaries. He was accessible and near. His teaching was intimate and included transforming power, proving to others that they could respond to Him immediately. Jesus showed them that God is a personal God.

a person on a plane or in our neighborhood. Asking a question like, "What do you do for a living?" is a way to get started.

As an example, one person may say they're a national salesman traveling three to five days a week. You may ask if he or she is married, and they may say, "Yes, with two small children." You can ask, "How is traveling so much working for you?" If the person responds that they've missed some birthdays and anniversaries, you may reply, "How does that affect your home life?"

Whatever their response, you have baited the hook and sown a seed. Encourage them to seek God's wisdom, or share a godly perspective. You may ask if you can pray for them or leave them a gospel tract to read later.

**Share yourself.** One of the best ways to tell someone about Christianity is to be transparent about your faith. Share your own testimony — how following Jesus has changed your life. That's

the news. Wait for their answer, then share a sentence or two of what you think from a Christian perspective.

Continue talking if the opportunity is there. Either way, you have planted a seed and baited the hook. Maybe you'll see evidence the next time you see the person again. By asking questions and sharing yourself, you can expect a response. Wait for it.

“Sharing the gospel takes courage and commitment, and a desire to follow in Jesus' footsteps.”

what the woman at the well did after Jesus related the truth about Himself. Transformed by Christ, she told her neighbors her story (John 4:25-30). We can too.

Some encounters with people are routine, like those at work, school, the gym, or the grocery store. We should take advantage of these opportunities to build friendships and trust, and be ready to share the good news when the time is right.

Maybe you are shy or passive. If so, do something simple to break the ice, like giving the person a compliment and introducing yourself by sharing your first name. In time you'll feel comfortable asking a pertinent question, like about something in

**Value others.** Getting to know a person is also important. For them to value what you have to say depends on their knowing you value them. This is especially true with a big question like “Who, in your opinion, is Jesus?” or “Are you a follower of Christ?”

Be ready for an array of replies. You may get an atheistic one: “I don't believe in God or Jesus!” Prepare to give an answer, but first listen — and then listen some more. This shows genuine love and concern for the person.

**Be patient.** What is the person's body language telling you, or their voice inflection? Do they appear to be angry or apathetic?

Do they seem to be inquisitive? The person may say that they, a friend, or a relative had a bad experience at a church. Tell them that you're sorry and follow up by stating that not all churches are bad. Share a recent experience at church that was healthy, and follow their cues, changing the subject if you need to. You've given the person plenty to think about. Too much in one setting can be detrimental and could cause them to walk away from the conversation or get defensive.

Take your time. Love is patient. And sowing and fishing with the Master require patience.

### Following the Master

Participating in the Great Commission is not a choice but a mandate from our Lord Jesus. Sharing the gospel takes courage and commitment, and a desire to follow in Jesus' footsteps. There's no formula except His way of sharing and teaching. Every person you meet, every encounter you have, will be unique, but the way of the Master is universal. Begin by loving people as He did.

So are you ready to go to the next level in sharing your faith? The good news is that you are not alone: Jesus promised that He is with us always. And He gives us a helper, the Holy Spirit, as we follow the guidance Jesus left for us. Let's be like the Master: Let's go! **BA**

**Abel Zaragoza** writes from Yucaipa, CA.





# On Mission ...

*Dick Baclaan (left)  
and John Klassek*

# In the Philippines

*We've enjoyed providing you with stories from around the globe this year. In our last issue for 2019 we feature an interview conducted by IMC Secretary John Klassek with senior pastor Dick Baclaan of the Philippine church. They talked during the 62nd national convention near the city of Cagayan de Oro on the island of Mindanao.*

*The following is an edited transcript of the video interview, which can be viewed in its entirety at [http://imc.cog7.org/media/dick\\_yt.html](http://imc.cog7.org/media/dick_yt.html).*

**John Klassek (JK):** Thank you very much, pastor, for sharing in this conversation. Can you give me a brief history about the Church of God (Seventh Day) in the Philippines?

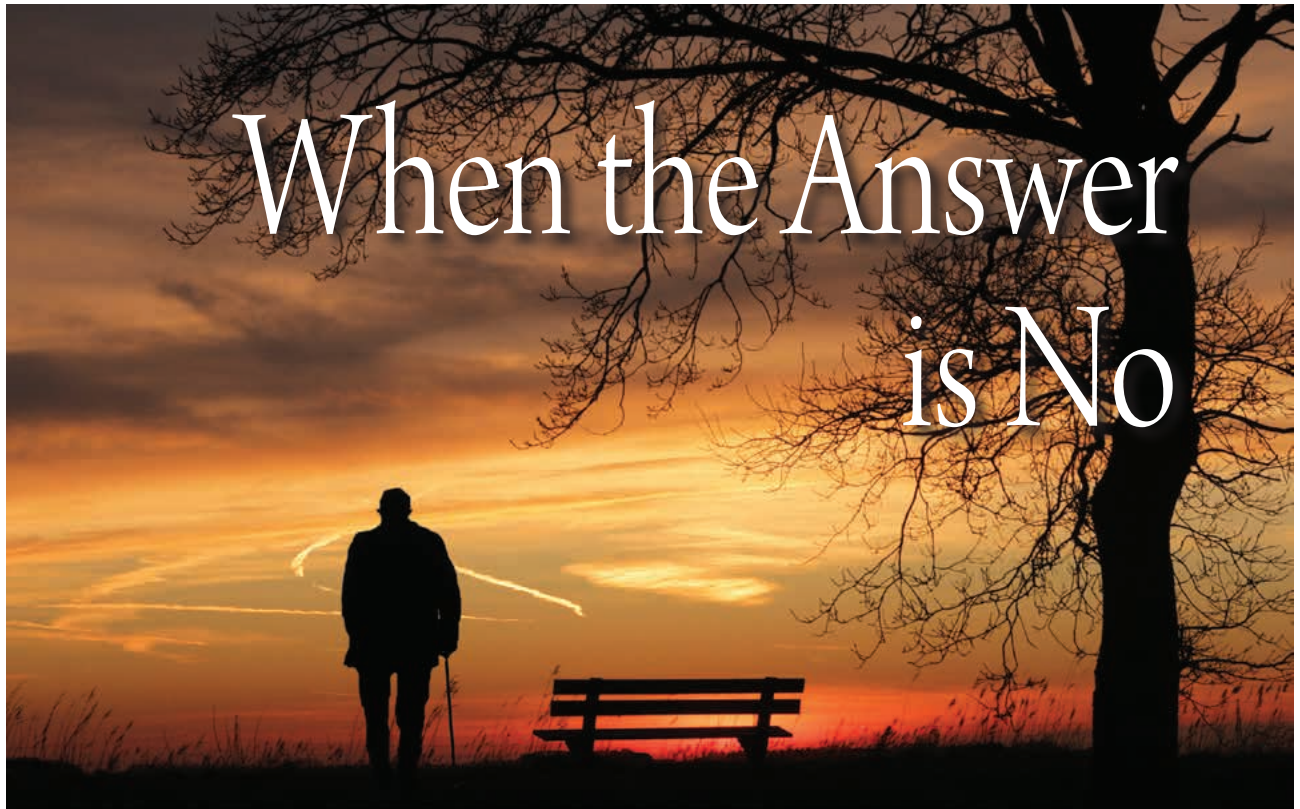
**Dick Baclaan (DB):** As far as I know, the Church of God (Seventh Day) started in the Philippines about 1938. An American fellow came here by the name of Charles. The first brethren operated this church in Lanao del Norte, in my own province. Then almost all the pastors who became converted in this church came from the Seventh-day Adventists. They heard the message from America and accepted the message of salvation shared by the Church of God people in

America. Then many of them were baptized. Those people who were baptized in Simpak scattered far away. Some went to Bukidnon, some to Luzon, and some to other locations. Fortunately, the connection was still there.

These days, Church of God (Seventh Day) in the Philippines has become strong. We are united and cooperative (hallelujah!), and with the grace of God, we now observe that Church growth is very fast.

With the use of our new methods and strategies in preaching, we have tried to follow the Great Commission in Scripture to preach the gospel. So with the

*continued on page 28*



# When the Answer is No

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Obeying God even when  
our efforts fail.

by Sherri Langton

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I stared at the mortuary pamphlet in my hand. Dates, times, places. Death — the death of my grandfather, Emmett. My eyes scanned the page and froze at the name under *Officiant*. It was my name — not a minister, but Emmett’s granddaughter.

Three days before, my grandfather succumbed to emphysema. Only a handful of relatives had known he was in a nursing home, and the same few would show up to pay their respects. So in making the arrangements, my parents wisely simplified: a graveside service, a single spray of flowers, no minister. Would I,

instead, write and read a composition in Grandpa’s memory?

Edging nearer the casket at the gravesite, I reluctantly unfolded a poem — a personal collection of memories. The paper and my voice quivered as I recalled spending holidays with my grandparents, collecting rocks for Grandpa to polish, and walking with him in the mountains.

But the last memory stung the most: My grandfather’s refusal to accept Christ.

Tissues and handkerchiefs were tugged from purses and pockets, trying to muffle the sobs. My composure crumbled as well. Despite the record heat that July day, the family shivered in the finality of my grandfather’s death.

I opened my Bible and read aloud that though darkness and death had won this battle, they would ultimately be defeated

(Isaiah 25:8). I finished the service with 1 Corinthians 15:25, 26: “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

I refolded the poem, stuffed it into my Bible, and slowly threaded through hugs to the limousine. In its plush silence, I unfolded another collection of memories: the times my family and I had talked to Grandpa about Jesus Christ. *Did we miss something? I drilled myself. What more could we have done? If the angels in heaven rejoice when one sinner repents, what are they doing now?*

Neither a pang of regret nor a void of unfinished business answered my questions but, rather, a bath of peace.



## Sow and tell

I waited for God to unroll the list of things we could have done better. But He didn't.

Instead, He unrolled a list of church pageants and programs my sisters and I had been in as children — times when our grandmother beamed from the pew and our grandfather scowled, times when Grandpa attended church and heard the gospel. After each presentation, he strolled out of the church as if he had just been to a museum.

Years later after Grandma died, Grandpa sank into a bottomless pit of grief. We thought he might be more receptive to the gospel, so I phoned him one night. I waited and prayed while Grandpa cried in little-boy sobs. Then I spoke. "Grandpa, Jesus knows what you're going through. He knows how sad you are. He can help."

My grandfather's reaction revived mental pictures of his stoicism in church. "I just miss Helen," he choked out — and closed the conversation.

My family and I also practiced the gospel before Grandpa. When Grandma died, she left him helpless in running the household. So Mom taught him how to write a check and make out a grocery list. I wrote detailed instructions on how to operate the washer and dryer. Many times we took Grandpa to lunch. We talked. We listened. We cried. We hugged.

We sowed. A year after my grandfather's death, I read the parable of the sower. "A farmer went out to sow his seed," Jesus began in Matthew 13:3. I'd heard reachers expound on the different types of soil Jesus went

on to describe, yet they stepped over His first thought: The farmer sowed.

As the farmer sowed without thought of the soil, so the prophet spoke without thought of his listeners. In His call to Ezekiel, God said, "Do not be afraid, though briars and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions. Do not be afraid of what they say or be terrified by them . . . You must speak my words to them . . ." (Ezekiel 2:6, 7).

in different words. In His parable, once the farmer scattered the seed, he lost control. The response to the seed went one of four ways. In the first scenario, the seed fell along the path, but before it could take root, "the birds came and ate it up" (Matthew 13:4). In other words, the Evil One snatched away what was sown (v. 19).

As I thought about God's warning to Ezekiel and Jesus' parable, I recalled my grandfather's response to what we spoke and

“If the angels in heaven rejoice when one sinner repents, what are they doing now?”

Ezekiel's job was to communicate. Following this call, his book unfolds into a message of doom, judgment, destruction, and restoration. But all God required of Ezekiel was that he speak.

## The right to choose

Before Ezekiel could summon breath, God warned him, "The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says.' And whether they listen or fail to listen — for they are a rebellious people — they will know that a prophet has been among them" (vv. 4, 5).

Jesus shaped the same truth

sowed. After he moved into the nursing home, Mom visited Grandpa on one of his down days. Claspng his wrinkled hand, she crouched next to his chair. "I remember the lines of an old hymn," she began. "O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer."

A defiant stare dried the moisture in Grandpa's eyes, but Mom kept speaking. "You know what that song says? That God is a big God. He wants you to bring everything to Him — including your heart."

My grandfather's eyes shifted from Mom to the TV. "I don't

*continued on page 23*



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One word describes the beginning and ending of love.

by R. Herbert

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Have you ever noticed that in his famous list of love's qualities in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, the apostle Paul begins and ends the list with the same trait: patience? Although he uses two different words, showing different aspects of this important quality, they both mean patience.

It is often said that the Greeks had a word for everything. Ancient Greek actually had two words for *patience*, both used by Paul. Let's learn more about these words and what they tell us about how we should relate to God and to others.

### Patience with people

The first is *makrothymia*, composed of *makran* ("far away") and *thymos* ("anger") – in other words, to put one's anger far away. This involves patience with others, particularly in the restraint of anger, when it is often needed most. The word does not connote the patience of those who are powerless to do anything about a situation, but rather the patience of those who have the power to act against the object of anger, perhaps even to exact revenge or punishment. This is the patience of those who could affect others and react with negative action, but in love choose not to do so.

*Makrothymia* is the patience husbands need with their wives and wives with their husbands, that parents need with children (and sometimes children with parents). It is the patience employers at times need with

employees, and workers need with those they work for. It is the patience we should have when someone irritates or hurts us in any way, great or small, and we feel a desire to retaliate. It is the kind of patience that every Christian must develop, and that we may need many times in a given day.

So it is not coincidental that this is the first quality Paul tells us love consists of – the patience of those who are provoked but choose restraint. Without this primary quality, love for others cannot exist. It is foundational to love itself.

### Patience with circumstances

Paul ends his list of the characteristics of love with the second form of patience. The word he uses here is *hypomonē*, which fuses *hypo* ("under") with *monē* ("remaining" or "enduring") and

*continued on page 23*

# Questions & Answers



**How** does Paul's teaching on mutual submission in Ephesians 5:21 relate to his instructions on submission within specific authority structures (v. 22 — 6:9)?

**In** Ephesians 5:21, Paul moves from general instructions for all believers to how these apply in specific relationships. In context, he is writing to the saints in Ephesus — men, women, and children; Jews and Gentiles; masters and servants; rich and poor. They are chosen and beloved children of God, redeemed and given every spiritual blessing (chapter 1). Despite their former walk in darkness, God had granted them salvation by grace through faith. This empowered them to live holy lives in unparalleled unity, despite their previous estrangement.

In Christ, the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles was broken down, creating a new humanity no longer divided and ranked by ethnicity, socio-economic class, gender, or other factors. Rather, Christ created a united family, a unified citizenship, a single structure built to the glory of God (chapter 2). Bound by the great love of God, believers would bring reconciliation and redemption out of the ashes of sin and death (chapter 3).

God's people are to walk worthy of their calling, relating to each other in humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, and love. United by shared belief, yet diverse in gifting, this new humanity would grow up to be like Christ as each part did its part. Such a community required a lifestyle of repentance, continually setting aside the old ways of sin and death, being cleansed, and walking in a new way of holy life (chapter 4).

The upshot of all of this is a call to "walk in love" (NASB throughout), imitating God's sacrificial and servant-oriented love expressed through Christ (5:1, 2). Abandoning darkness, believers are called

instead to walk in light with one another, glorifying and thanking God for His grace and love. The closing phrase of this address to all believers is "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (v. 21). Two radical changes occur in Christ. First, we are called to mutual submission; Christ alone is our Lord, and we are His servants. Second, we no longer relate to one another according to sinful constructs of power, force, subjugation, inequity, or selfish ambition, but in humble, sacrificial love.

Turning to specific relationships (husbands-wives, children-parents, servants-masters), Paul calls these to cast off the models of worldly authority and embrace the loving, humble, sacrificial leadership of Christ (cf. Matthew 20:25-28). Household codes were common in Greco-Roman society at that time. In them, those in authority were given absolute power and were not to love or serve those under their authority. Those subjected to them were called to submit to this power. Paul's household codes turn these worldly models of authority upside down, placing the burden of sacrificial love on those in authority and calling on them to practice Christlike authority, characterized by loving service and sacrifice.

Paul's final words to the Ephesians admonish them to put on the armor of God, for they do not battle against flesh and blood but against dark spiritual powers (chapter 6). Once more, Paul challenges the kingdoms of darkness that call on us to conquer by force, subjugate by power, and control by dominance. Instead, we live by righteousness, peace, and faith, walking in salvation by the Word and Spirit of God and praying for one another in love. Paul's call to all Christians to walk in love, just as Christ loved us, is a call to mutual submission, serving and sacrificing ourselves both for those over us and those under our authority.

— *Elder Israel Steinmetz*



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A surprise assignment yields deep insights.  
by Harriet E. Michael

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When my youngest son was in fifth grade at a Christian school, he surprised me one day with this request: “Mom, my teacher has started having the kids do morning devotions. She said we could do them ourselves or get our parents to come and do the devotions. So, I signed you up for tomorrow. I told my class that you would teach us all about Revelation. We are reading it right now, so I told my class you had studied it in your Bible study and you know everything!”

Wow, what a task!

The next morning, I would be

expected to teach a class of fifth graders “everything” about the book of Revelation — in the span of twenty minutes. And I had less than twenty-four hours to prepare. The very idea made me laugh and still makes me laugh today. How does a mother fulfill such a request? Here’s what I did.

### Study plan

First, I explained that Revelation is the hardest book in the Bible to understand. I also told the class that actually no one knows for sure what everything in Revelation means. Great Christian scholars throughout history have studied it and held differing opinions.

Nevertheless, I *had* studied the book for two years through an in-depth Bible study, and I did have *some* understanding, but it would take too long to explain it all. So

instead, I was going to give them a demonstration of how a person goes about studying parts of the Bible that are hard to understand.

I explained that, when we’re confused about a passage in the Bible, the place to go for answers is other scriptures. I told them it is okay, and even helpful, to see what their friends and teachers think, but what really matters is what God says. God’s thoughts are recorded in the Scriptures. The Bible is His Word, so the best thing to do when trying to figure out what God means is to read more of His words.

### Puzzle

Then I gave the children a little exercise. I told them Revelation is like the huge puzzle my family works on every summer during vacation. But when my family works one, we have a box with a picture on it so we can see what

the puzzle is supposed to look like. However, when trying to figure out Revelation, we don't have a picture to look at, making it a difficult task. Still, some of the puzzle pieces can be figured out.

I told the class we would solve a tiny piece of the puzzle in class that day so they could see how it is done. I had my son read Revelation 1:16: "In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword." I explained that the person described in this verse is Jesus. We talked a little about whether the sword coming out of His mouth is a real sword or a symbolic one. I explained the terms *tangible* and *intangible*. By a show of hands, about half the class thought the sword is tangible, and the other half thought it is intangible.

### Limited knowledge

Then, after reminding them that the place to look to understand Scripture was other Scripture, I had my son read Hebrews 4:12: "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword. . . ." I asked them how they would identify the sword coming out of Jesus' mouth. One of the kids raised her hand and said she thought it is the Word of God. I agreed. Then I asked again if the sword described in Revelation 1:16 is tangible or intangible. They all agreed it is intangible.

Next I had my son read Revelation 2:16: "Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth." And Revelation 19:15: "From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down

the nations. . . ." I asked the class one more time if this sword is tangible or intangible. They were stumped! It did "smite the nations," after all!

So I explained the terms *finite* and *infinite* and the fact that our knowledge is finite, or limited, but God's is infinite, or without limits. I concluded by saying that even though we have trouble understanding this, God doesn't. What we can say for certain is that the two-edged sword coming out of Jesus' mouth is the Word of God. Yet it is somehow also a powerful weapon — so

powerful, in fact, that it can smite the nations.

I don't know about the kids, but the experience that day was loads of fun for me. More than that, it was a challenge. I certainly don't know everything about Revelation, but, like those fifth graders, I'm learning. **BA**

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#### Harriet E. Michael

writes from Louisville, KY. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.



## Welcome, 2020!

### The Ministry of Reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:14 — 6:2)

The six BA issues next year will explore the details of the divine "ministry of reconciliation." In our deeply divided world, is there a more important message? Our editorial team will feature content rich in biblical insight, personal testimony, and practical application that will inspire and equip the church to bring Christ's reconciling peace to a bitterly broken world.

For all you readers who would be writers, this is your invitation. Please visit [baonline.org](http://baonline.org) for submission guidelines and theme deadlines.

#### January-February:

Reconciled - 2 Corinthians 5:18, 19  
*What God has accomplished for us in Christ*

**March-April:** New Creation - 2 Corinthians 5:17  
*Our new life as new creations in Christ*

**May-June:** The Ministry - 2 Corinthians 5:18, 19  
*God's gift of a new covenant in Christ*

**July-August:** Ambassadors - 2 Corinthians 5:20  
*God's ministers of reconciliation for Christ*

#### September-October:

Becoming - 2 Corinthians 5:21  
*Being made the righteousness of God in Christ*

#### November-December:

Together - 2 Corinthians 6:1, 2  
*Workers with God in Christ*



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Enlisting as a participant in  
God's expanding kingdom.  
by **Bob Hostetler**

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**T**he 2000 movie *Pay It Forward* tells the story of a seventh grader named Trevor, whose new social studies teacher issues an assignment to think of something that could change the world, and then put it into action. Trevor comes up with the idea of doing big favors for three people that are not intended to be paid *back* but *forward* — that is, the receiver is challenged to do “a big favor” for three new people, and so on. Trevor’s efforts begin to change lives (including his

own), becoming an expanding circle of kindness that exceeds Trevor’s dreams and eventually outlives him.

The movie inspired millions of people and gave birth to the charitable Pay It Forward Foundation. But the premise wasn’t exactly new. In some ways, it mirrored the teachings of Jesus about the kingdom of God.

### Understanding the kingdom

During His earthly ministry, Jesus spent much of His time and effort defining and explaining God’s kingdom. He said it is like a priceless treasure. He said it can be hidden, yet it can grow in beauty and influence like you wouldn’t believe. He showed that it is a mysterious, wonderful,

healing, life-giving thing that lives and grows within every follower of Jesus (Matthew 13:44-46; 31-33; Luke 21).

In his book *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*, Frederick Buechner writes:

It is not a place, of course, but a condition. *Kingship* might be a better word. . . . As a poet, Jesus is maybe at his best in describing the feeling you get when you glimpse the Thing itself — the kingship of the king official at last and all the world his coronation. It’s like finding a million dollars in a field, he says, or a jewel worth a king’s ransom. It’s like finding something you hated to lose and thought you’d never find again — an old keepsake, a stray sheep, a missing child. When the Kingdom really comes, it’s as if the thing you lost and thought you’d never find again is yourself.

When Jesus taught His followers to pray, “Thy kingdom come” (Luke 11:2), He did not prescribe a mere hopeful sentiment. The phrase is intended to ignite and fuel something like internal combustion in a person’s life. To say, “May Your kingdom come” is to say, “I enlist in Your cause. I adopt Your agenda. ‘Here am I! Send me!’” (Isaiah 6:8). As Philip Keller points out in *A Layman Looks at the Lord’s Prayer*:

When I pray, “Thy kingdom come,” I am willing to relinquish the rule of my own life, to give up governing my own affairs, to abstain from making my own decisions in order to allow God, by His indwelling Spirit, to decide for me what I shall do. . . .

[W]hen Christ uttered the simple yet profound petition, “Thy kingdom come,” He envisaged His own future kingdom on earth and also the very Spirit of the living God coming into a human heart at regeneration to make it His holy habitation. He pictured the King of kings so permeating and invading a life that His authority would be established in that person’s mind and will. He saw a human being as a temple, an abode, a residence of the Most High. But He knew that only when such an occupied heart is held and controlled by the indwelling Spirit could it be truly said that here indeed is a part of the spiritual Kingdom of God where His will was done on earth.

### Prayer particulars

That expanding kingdom not only occupies and grows within all committed followers of Jesus but also should spread outward from them, like a raging wildfire.

Thus, when I pray, “May your kingdom come,” it is a visual exercise for me. As I say those words every day (and often several times a day), I survey in my mind’s eye a panorama of where I want God’s kingdom to spread. The picture starts in me, with my heart and life, and spreads outward. I “see” God’s kingdom transforming my family, my children and their workplaces, my grandchildren and their schools, my neighborhood and church. I envision God’s kingdom changing “the east side” of my community, where people live in poverty and fear, enslaved by drugs and alcohol.

I visualize God’s kingdom invading the nearby prison until it becomes a place of reclamation and renewal. I see my nation’s capital, revolutionized by wisdom and teamwork and unity. I picture the Middle East (it’s amazing how far and fast you can travel in prayer), and see Jerusalem, a city I’ve come to love, where residents and neighbors alike enjoy peace and prosperity.

When I say, “May Your kingdom come,” I pray for mercy, grace, and peace — in me and in those around me. When I say, “May Your kingdom come,” I pray for His kingdom to invade seeking souls and hungry hearts. I pray for love to conquer all. I pray for wars to end. I pray for the church to be healthy, united,

a static reality. It is a call to which you respond, a cause in which you enlist, and a daily task you undertake, like a soldier reporting for duty.

In *The Servant’s Heart*, Samuel Logan Brengle, the Salvation Army’s “prophet of holiness,” wrote:

No one can tell how much the future spread of God’s kingdom may depend on you. “See how great a forest a little fire kindles!” (James 3:5, NKJV). Keep the fire of love and faith and sweet hopefulness burning in your heart, and you may start a blaze that will someday sweep the country or the world.

Strike the match. Fan the

“When I say, ‘May Your kingdom come,’ I pray for His kingdom to invade seeking souls and hungry hearts.”

and effective. I pray for justice. I pray for diseases to be eradicated. I pray for racial reconciliation, sensible government, a healthy environment, and a vigorous economy.

### Heeding the call

Every follower of Jesus Christ can play a part in that expanding kingdom, through prayer and action. The kingdom of God is not

flames. Pray and work until God’s kingdom sweeps through your whole family, community, country, and world. **BA**

**Bob Hostetler** writes from Las Vegas, NV.





# Amazing Grace

by Jody McCoy

Jesus has entrusted us with a critical rescue mission where eternal destinies hang in the balance. Most of us realize we let Jesus down. Our lack of faithfulness reflects our lack of love.

My purpose isn't to immerse us in guilt — that's self focused; but to help us see how much we've been forgiven — that's Christ focused. As we saw last issue, Jesus correlates love for Him with the awareness of being forgiven. Therefore, to deepen our love for Him, we must understand the depth of His forgiveness for us.

Our humanistic culture believes we're good by nature. But if we're good, we don't need a Savior. That's the lie of humanism. God, on the other hand, wants to share His good nature with us and does this when His Spirit dwells in us. It's important to remember that the goodness comes from Him, not us. Denying our sinful nature directly contradicts Jesus' words that only God is good (Luke 18:19).

Some may speculate that Jesus meant humans are mostly good and only God is perfect. Ephesians 2:3 makes it clear: We are "by nature children of wrath." Jesus didn't rescue us from slight imperfections but from sin and death. He is our Savior.

God created physical laws to rule the universe. These are laws of force; we're forced to obey the laws of physics. God also created spiritual laws that require respect for God and for humans created in His image. These are laws of liberty; we have free will. We have the ability to respond, and with that comes responsibility. The penalty for violating God's law, for disrespecting God or others, is death.

We agree that God's law is good. In a perfect

world, we respect others and they respect us. But we live in a fallen world. What happens when someone disrespects us? God's law requires us to respect others, period. Yet an innate sense of justice drives us to respond to unkindness with unkindness. We see it as justice, but it's revenge; it's evil. By rewarding evil with evil, we perpetuate evil.

When we return evil for evil, we don't feel guilty; we feel vindicated. That's because this behavior is natural for us. If others break the rules, we feel justified in breaking them too. In violating God's law, we become a law unto ourselves. We become our own gods. Do you see why we are by nature objects of wrath? The penalty for our disrespect for God and others is death. And Jesus took that penalty upon Himself on the cross.

Thankfully, Ephesians 2:4-7 says:

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

From children of wrath to children of glory. "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,/and grace my fears relieved." That's amazing grace! Make it your mission to share it.

BA

Jody McCoy writes from Austin, TX.





# I Am With You Always

As I think about my life  
Walking through each day,  
I remember what Jesus said:  
"I am with you always."

When I have lost a loved one  
And grief upon me lays,  
I remember Jesus saying,  
"I am with you always."

While I am feeling anxious  
In my work or in my play,  
I cling to what the Master said:  
"I am with you always."

I will keep my focus  
On Jesus Christ today  
Taking comfort in His promise:  
"I am with you always."

Lord, help me get the word out  
About Your truth, I pray.  
And remind me of what I need to  
know:  
"I am with you always."

Lisa Harp South



# Skin and Bones

by Whaid Rose

The story is told of a busy father who wanted to occupy his toddler so the boy wouldn't distract him. The father tore a world map into several pieces and sent the little boy to his room to put it back together, instructing him not to return until the job was done. Surprised by his son's soon reappearance with the task complete, the father asked how he got it done so quickly. This was his son's reply: "You see, Dad, there's a picture of a man on the back of the map, and I figured that to put the world together, all I had to do was to put the man together."

His answer is both intriguing and instructive. We live in a broken world, and key to putting it back together is putting the men and women who live in it together. Improving conditions in the world at the expense of improving the lives of the world's most valuable resource is a colossal failure of our generation.

This raises important questions: How do we take Christianity to a deeper level? How do we cultivate fully devoted, happy, and whole followers of Christ? How do we help new Christians order their private world, ensuring that commodities such as

discipline, character, and integrity are plentiful in the stockroom where they matter most?

Within the broad framework of Christianity, a one-word answer is offered: discipleship.

## Free will

This day-to-day process of sanctification is how women and men in Christ are put together, or "built up." It's why Reggie McNeal has described discipleship as the process of "people becoming people." And therein is the Christian's dilemma. He or she is delivered from sin's penalty but is still dealing with sin's presence and practice — complete in Christ but still living in a broken world, with a heart prone to wander.

This raises new questions. Having redeemed us, why does our loving God allow us to struggle in our walk with Him? Why does God's plan of redemption include struggle and frustration? Answering this question could get highly theological. But to keep it simple, let's just say that the reason for the process — the reason God doesn't just zap us and get it over with — is that He doesn't want robots for disciples. It's the same reason He gave Adam and Eve free will in the garden. He didn't want robots then, and neither does He want

# Discipleship

robots now. Just as Adam and Eve exercised their free will in disobedience, God wants us as new believers in Christ to exercise our will in obedience.

Though perhaps implicit, this is emphasized throughout the New Testament, where our volitional will is the focus of commands such as “put to death the deeds of the body” (Romans 8:13); “walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25); and “put on the new man” (Ephesians 4:24). In both His first creation and in His new creation, God’s design is that those made in His image exercise their volitional will in obedience to Him. And as New Testament believers, we have the presence of the Holy Spirit in us to give us the power to do so.

This is good news! In Romans 8:13, referenced above, it is by the Spirit that we put to death the deeds of the flesh. So, simply stated, believers play a role in the sanctification process, and we have the power of God within us to do so.

## Relationships

This prompts an important reminder. The Holy Spirit often works through people — someone sitting across the table from another believer who helps him or her grow, shed old habits, heal hurts, and rise above past failures

— especially someone who has experienced overcoming grace in these areas. It has been well observed that just as hurt and harm typically take place in relationships, so healing and health usually occur in relationships. Disciples are best made by other disciples. This is why Jesus has entrusted the important task of making disciples of all nations to His disciples.

This is the reason for the Incarnation. God, who is a Spirit, manifested Himself in human flesh so we could see and know and touch Him (John 1:1-18). This is God’s way. As Howard Hendricks wrote in *Teaching to Change Lives: Seven Proven Ways to Make Your Teaching Come Alive*, “God’s method is always incarnational. He loves to take his truth and wrap it in a person.”

Afraid of being alone in the dark one night, a little girl asked her father if someone could stay with her. When her dad assured her of God’s constant presence, she replied, “I was hoping for someone with skin and bones.” So it is in discipleship. God puts on skin and bones, working through people to shape other people into Christ’s image.

Yes, Christ is with us always, even “to the very end of the age.” Through the great mystery of His plan, one of the ways that

He makes His presence known is through the lives of ordinary people like you and me. **BA**

**Whaid Rose** writes from Denver, NC.



This article is an adapted excerpt from *Vibrant Church: Biblical Reflections & Practical Tools for a Vibrant 21st Century Church* by Israel Steinmetz and Whaid Rose. To purchase a copy, visit <https://center.artioscollege.org/resources/>.



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A real-life shepherd reflects on Psalm 23.  
by Mike Wallace

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**I**t was 2:38 a.m. and only eighteen degrees outside. I was soundly sleeping in my warm, comfortable bed when I heard a deep growl and loud barking in our yard. Two large dogs were attacking our lambs and three-month-old horse.

The nightmare scenario of every shepherd enfolded in front of my eyes. What could I do? By the time I dressed and ran outside, the battle for survival had begun. As a shepherd, I used the power at my disposal to dispatch one of the attacking dogs and ran the other dog off.

This time the shepherd won, and the animals were safe for another day of life. But what about next time? Would I always be there for my little flock of sheep?

David was a shepherd too. He understood my job and how it applies to people. That's why I often turn to Psalm 23 for encouragement. Here are just a few observations.

**The LORD is my shepherd;  
I shall not want.**

Every day I must take care of my little flock. I must work with them, comfort them, protect them, feed them, and give them fresh, nourishing water for their thirst. My flock shall not "want."

Winters are bone-chilling cold in Montana. The first lamb we ever had was born outside when the temperature was negative six

degrees. "Lambsickles" are a sad sight — frozen baby lambs that could never get up off the snow. A shepherd tries to be there at all times so his flock will not want, but I cannot always be there. However, Jesus, our Shepherd, is always there for us. He will never leave us nor forsake us. He's more of a shepherd than any of us could ever be for sheep.

**He maketh me to lie down in  
green pastures: he leadeth me  
beside the still waters.**

Green pastures are plush and comfortable and edible. Many spring evenings when the sun is setting and the birds have returned to chirp in the nightfall, I find myself sitting in "green pastures" with my little flock of sheep and lambs. All is peaceful. The evening is quiet; the sheep

are content. I am relaxed. My day is done.

As I sit on the pile of hay, the ewe mamas wander over to their shepherd. I pet them, talk to them, and console them. They baa a reply. One by one, I call their name, and one by one they answer me. One sheep named Eve puts her head on my shoulder and won't leave me until I have rubbed her behind the ears. When I stop, she takes her front hoof and hits me, asking for more. She always wins. Her babies sit on my lap until they run off to leap and play.

"Still waters" create a most satisfying sensation, quenching the thirst. The waters by green pastures keep sheep alive. Cool, clear, clean, calm water is what sheep need. In green pastures, by still waters, peace reigns — until a coyote or dog enters the scene. Then the shepherd must do what is necessary to protect the flock from the evils of this wicked world. In the same way, we, as God's flock, rely on the Good Shepherd for the comfort, refreshment, and protection only He can give (John 10:1-9).

**He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.**

Sheep are timid by nature, easily killed and afraid of danger. They often just wither and die weeks after a dog attack. Only a good shepherd can "restore their soul." I do my best, but no amount of consolation seems to cure them after a vicious animal has torn their young lamb to pieces.

Sheep do not have a soul like

you and I have. They have no "life ever after" as our Shepherd will give us at His wonderful return. But as our Shepherd, Jesus restores our souls every day of our lives. We have His Spirit, His love, His kindness, His shepherding of our lives. I lead my sheep to physical food and water; He leads us to His eternal life. He's our example of righteousness. What Jesus does for us can never be done for my physical sheep. His shepherding leads us to perfect peace.

**Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.**

It was my daughter's eleventh birthday — a rainy June day. Dismal. Pouring. Thunder. Wind. We brought our sheep guard dog, Leo, into our home because the weather was so frightful.

In his distraction, this shepherd let his guard down. We found four lambs in the corner of the field just a few yards from our front door. Four beautiful little lambs piled in a corner by a

fence, dead. A throat was ripped out of one. Another was gutted by a coyote. The mama ewes were cowering in another part of the small field.

Thank God, our Shepherd never lets His guard down. Every day we walk through the "valley of the shadow of death." It is part of life; we will all die. But Jesus is there for us at all times. Therefore, "I will fear no evil." Really? My sheep fear evil. How can we overcome fear? By trusting our Shepherd.

**Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.**

Protection. Food. Water. Even in the face of dogs, coyotes, wolves, or lions and bears like David faced, a shepherd must make sure the flock is strong and healthy. Well fed. Watched over. Taken care of. Night, day, weekends, holidays, vacations, I must be there for them. How often does God do this for us? Every day!

Oil on a sheep's head? What could that be? Medicine for ticks



and worms? Soothing ointment that protects from the elements? Maybe it's healing balm from the physical shepherd just like, as God's flock, we have the presence and the healing powers of His Spirit. He anoints us with oil, the symbol of His Spirit, His soothing, loving protection from the elements, both physical and spiritual.

Our Shepherd loves us so much that He gave *Himself* to save all of us. Our Passover Lamb, God on the cross. Love so great and fantastic that it "runneth over" for all humanity – the John 3:16 Shepherd.

**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.**

Goodness and mercy for sheep are unusual. Dogs do not have mercy on sheep. Dogs

aren't mean; they are just following instinct. Dogs do not understand goodness and mercy, but shepherds do! We care for our flock because we love the flock. A good shepherd is kind and caring to his sheep. But our Shepherd is good as only God can be good (Luke 18:19). He gives us His all. His home. His power. His protection. His majesty. His *life* so we can have life with Him forever after: "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (John 10:10, 11).

I often think about our Lamb of God. He raises us, takes care of us, doctors us, feeds us, gives us the physical and spiritual medicines we need. He protects us from that roaring lion, Satan. He fights for us when danger is present. He holds us in His loving arms of grace when we are little and cute and when we are old and gray.

We do differ from sheep. Once a sheep dies, it goes back to the dust forever. But our Shepherd gives us His resurrection to life eternal in His kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:50-53). He makes sure we will live forever with Him in perfect harmony without thoughts of danger or death. He delights in giving His kingdom to us. He is our Shepherd of life for life: "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:20b). **BA**

**Mike Wallace** writes from Florence, MT. Scripture quotations are from the *King James Version*.



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**STATEMENT**

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# When the Answer is No

continued from page 9

want to live anymore.”

“I know you miss Helen,” Mom persisted, grabbing the remote and switching off the set. “All this time God could have been helping you. He waits for you to ask Him. Do you know you don’t have to be in church to accept Jesus in your heart? You can do that right here.”

But Grandpa reclaimed the remote and revived the TV screen. “I have everything I need.”

A few days before Grandpa died, Mom spoke once more to him about his need for Christ. “There is a place beyond this side of the grave,” she said. “If you accept Jesus in your heart, that place will be with Him.”

But my grandfather answered in those familiar flat tones. “That’s not for me.”

## Peace and satisfaction

Nearly thirty years have passed since Grandpa’s death. My parents and most of those at Grandpa’s funeral are gone. When I think of our attempts to witness to him, I never fail to sense God’s peace. I better understand Jesus, who grieved over Jerusalem’s rejection of Him (Luke 13:34), yet faced death satisfied that He had revealed His Father to others (John 17:6).

The experience with my grandfather has given me a more holistic view of evangelism — that satisfaction is not limited to seeing a harvest of souls but doing all God expects of me, regardless of the results. **BA**

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**Sherri Langton** recently celebrated

her thirtieth year as associate editor of the *Bible Advocate*. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*. This article was originally published in *Discipleship Journal*.



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## Patience, First and Last

continued from page 10

connotes the idea of “remaining under” suffering or difficult circumstances. In the New Testament the word is often translated “perseverance” (Romans 5:3, 4, etc.). It is a particularly rich word with a wide range of meaning. In Luke 21:19, for example, we find it translated “Stand firm, and you will win life” (emphasis added). The King James translates this verse a little less clearly: “In your patience possess ye your souls.”

This kind of patience represents the attitude of those who are not in a position of strength, but of weakness — unable to do anything to change the situation they are enduring. This is the patience of the Christian undergoing persecution for their faith, whether from the individual’s government, job, neighbors, or even their own family. It is the patience of those dealing with long-term illnesses, injuries, poverty, loneliness, depression, or any other kind of suffering.

If it is not a coincidence that Paul begins his list of love’s qualities with patience (what we must have with others), then it is not a coincidence that he ends his list with endurance, the patience

we must have with situations. If we cannot love others without the first type of patience, then we cannot love God without the second kind. Without persevering love, our love for God will fail when tested by the inevitable trials of life. That is why the word *hypomonē* is found in Jesus’ parable of the seed, in which “the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by *persevering* produce a crop” (Luke 8:15, emphasis added here and below).

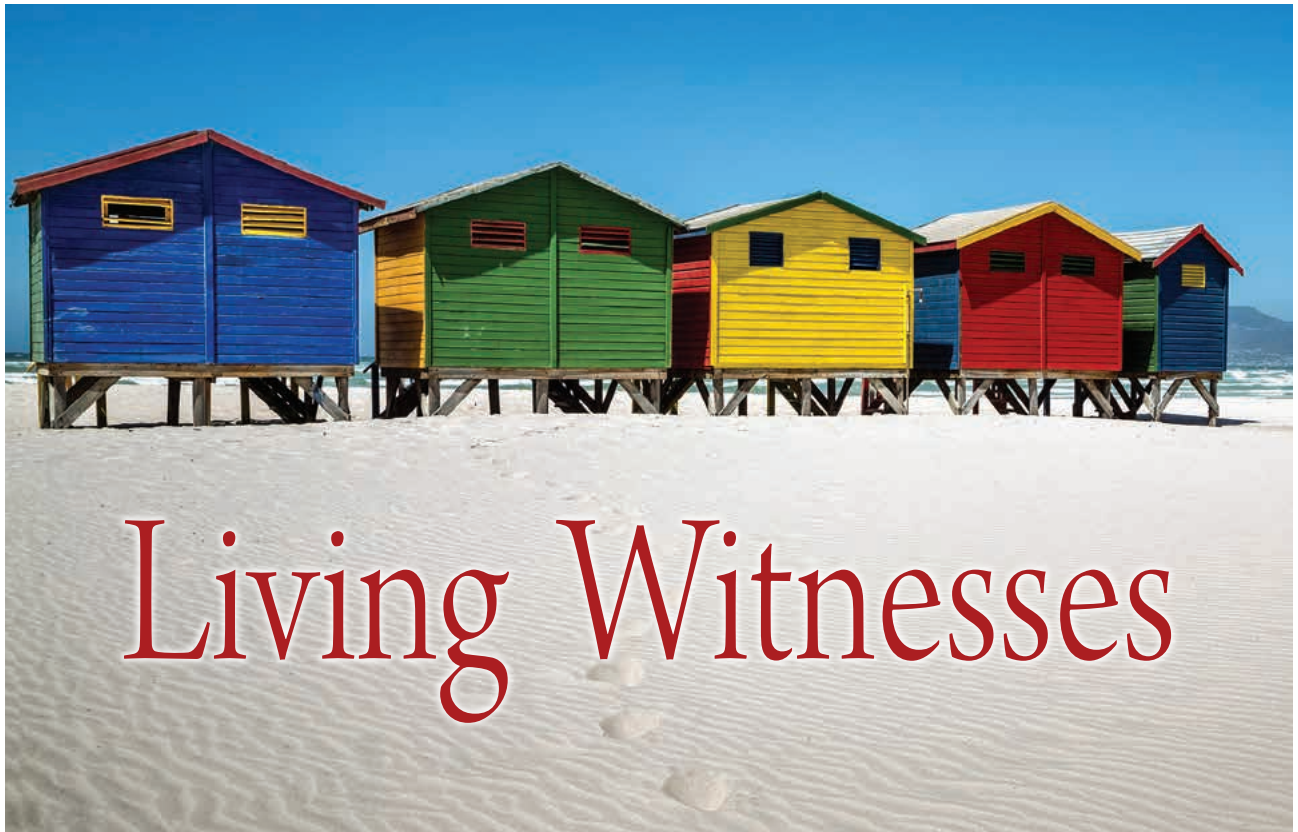
## Pivotal quality

All too often we think of patience as a virtue, but perhaps only a minor one — a distant cousin of the great spiritual virtues, such as faith and love. Yet careful consideration of the structure of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 shows us that love itself begins and ends in patience and that this quality is pivotal to effectively loving others and loving God. This is especially so as we go about fulfilling the Great Commission.

Romans 15:5 tells us that God is a God of patience. If we are to become like Him, patience, in its two forms, is a quality we must strive to develop with His help. As Paul himself wrote in his letter to the Colossians, we must live “being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great *endurance and patience*” (Colossians 1:11). **BA**

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**R. Herbert** (a pen name) writes for a number of Christian venues. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



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Making a difference by  
taking a stand.  
by JP Robinson

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**I**n 2016 I shut my classroom door for the final time, choosing to leave a dream job and face an uncertain financial future because of my faith. By no means was this choice an easy one. The list of reasons to stay was long and daunting.

I was the sole breadwinner in our family. My wife and I had just purchased our first home. I had devoted countless hours to building up an academic program at the school. And, most of all, I loved my job.

But while working with high school students afforded me everything I wanted and more

in a profession, a higher call, another voice compelled me to be a living witness, to show those around me that conscience is more sacred than a career and faith more powerful than fear.

So I resigned.

### Faith in action

By no means was I the first to have to make such a choice. The Scriptures are full of examples of men and women who were willing to forsake everything for the cause of Christ in their generation. When ordered to deny their faith by King Nebuchadnezzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego opted to stand with God. He, in turn, stood with them in the midst of the flames.

It was not that those three Hebrew boys had anything against the king or his subjects. In fact, they had thrived under his rule,

rising to places of prominence in the very heart of the government. But when lines were drawn and they had to compromise or be cast into the fiery furnace, they chose to be living witnesses and showed the world the power of faith in action.

With this mindset, I handed in my resignation. But the conflict didn't end when I turned in my ID badge and keys — at least, not for me. That day began a prolonged battle with depression that threatened to drag me down for more than two years. Questions, to which I had no answer, raged in my mind: *Who am I? How can I provide for my family? Where is the constitutional guarantee of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" when I can't teach unless I accept liberal ideologies that contradict my religious beliefs?*



## Sovereign God

In the midst of this inner turmoil God's abiding presence became more of a reality. Jesus' injunction to "pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44), and the assurance that He orders the details of every believer's life, were the only truths I could cling to. I admit there were times I struggled with bitterness. Like the disciples on the stormy sea of Galilee, I felt my boat of life being tossed about by waves I could not control.

But Jesus was still in control and always had been. That is the cornerstone of the Christian's faith — that God has a purpose He is working to accomplish in everything. Yes, our nation may be in chaos and our world falling apart, but God is not worried. In Isaiah 46:9, 10 we read:

"Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.'"

A greater plan overrides the petty ambitions of earthly governments, just as a greater plan overrides our own understanding of how our lives should be ordered. The Bible shows us that God's path is mysterious and His ways are unsearchable (Romans 11:33). Like a student myself, I was about to experience that spiritual truth in a whole new way.

## Power on display

In 2018 I went back to the school and attended the gradu-

ation ceremony of some of my former students. That day is forever etched in my memory. While the moving music and my pride in my students' accomplishments were meaningful, the comments I heard from parents and other members of the community linger in my mind. They had learned why I had left and were inspired by my choice.

Then I understood. The most effective witnessing I had ever done in that community was when I had made the decision to leave. Why? Because the world saw then that there is a power in Christianity — a power to stare in

to make decisions that will allow it to be displayed in our lives. But that submission to the Holy Spirit is precisely what gave the early church victory in spite of their bitter suffering for their unrelenting faith.

The might of the pagan Roman Empire was leveraged against a group of seemingly insignificant radicals. These included believers like Aquila and Priscilla, who were confronted, on the one hand, by the permissive nature of Roman society and, on the other, by its militant oppression of all who refused to accept its licentious ways.

“It was not my words that impacted the community; it was my deeds.”

the face of overwhelming opposition and refuse to bow. It was not my words that impacted the community; it was my deeds.

That day revolutionized my understanding of the power of a Christian witness. While we must testify to the gospel with our words, *living* our testimony is an even more effective way of showing Christ's power. Our choices under pressure will ultimately determine how much of an impact we have on the individuals around us.

It is easy to talk about the power of God; it is much harder

This couple did not compromise. They did not bow to the gods of man. They refused to back down or give in to the pressure to conform. As a result, these believers changed the world, sowing seeds that are still bearing spiritual fruit after more than two thousand years.

## Fulfilling the Great Commission

Now it is our turn to push the Great Commission closer to its fulfillment. Like our spiritual forefathers, we live in a world hostile

to truth. Like them, we are faced each day with opportunities to stand up and boldly proclaim our faith, not only with our words but also by our actions. Yes, the choice to proclaim Christ may drive us to our knees, but isn't that where every believer stands tallest?

Let's look at this on another level. John 1 declares that Jesus is the Word — the incarnation of every messianic prophecy. Jesus didn't just talk about God; His life brought God on the scene. His ministry wasn't one of simply words but one of supernatural

His death, Jesus promised that He would rise again (John 2:19). Those were bold words that no mortal had ever uttered. Yes, prophets, like Elijah, had raised other dead people, but Jesus claimed ability to raise Himself *after* He had died. How could it happen?

It seemed impossible, but early on that Resurrection morning, Christ became a living witness of the power of that promise. Almost eight hundred years earlier, David prophesied, "Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest

identify with Joel's prophecy. A witness who could prove by his own life that the tomb could not hold the Son of God.

God requires us to speak His words of truth, to proclaim the power of the gospel with every breath we take. But if we truly wish to be effective witnesses, we must be willing to show the truth of every biblical principle with our lives. That is how believers can best impact the world.

### New strength

Shortly after that momentous decision, I was blessed to see my writing ministry grow in ways I could not have anticipated. It is as if the testimonies I have lived are now to be shared through the written word. Despite a period of great pain and personal struggle, God's faithfulness brought healing and forgiveness to my heart when it was most needed. Through it all, I now find myself stronger in Him and more determined to impact lives for Christ than ever before.

Let us resolve not to limit our Christian witness to our words alone, but, with full trust in Him who has promised never to leave or forsake His own, let us be living voices that proclaim the risen Christ to a dying world. **BA**

“ We must be willing to show the truth of every biblical principle with our lives. ”

power that revealed the heart of God to everyone He met.

The crowning moment of Jesus' ministry came that fateful night in Gethsemane when He made a decision no other could make. "Not my will but thine be done," He said. Those were tough words, but they were followed by actions that made Him a living witness of God's great plan.

According to Isaiah 53:11, "After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities." Before

secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay" (Psalm 16:9, 10). Christ's literal body was living proof that this prediction was the Word of God.

On the Day of Pentecost, the disciples themselves became living witnesses. Previously they could quote Jesus' promise that they would be "clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). When Peter stood before the masses that day in Jerusalem, however, he brought them more than words. He was a living witness — one who could joyfully

**JP Robinson** writes from Lampeter, PA. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.





## Solid teaching

The Jan-Feb [2019] issue was a great start to a very important topic "The Great Commission." I found the article "The Little Commission" compelling, convicting and commanding. It pointed out one of those — unpreached on — points in the Bible that have deep and significant importance to our daily walk and our calling with the Kingdom of God. It covered one of those points in the Good Book that I had just read many times, but, until that article I had not caught that detail, contemplated, prayed about, applied to myself or meditated upon. . . . that is why there are good teachers in the world helping the Spirit to reveal such things in the Scriptures.

L. D. (inmate)  
Ft. Stockton, TX

## Getting Job right

Just had to write and comment on the article about Job in March-April BA ["The 'Oh!' of God," p. 12]. Very few people get Job right. Job did not disrespect God! God says Job is blameless and upright . . . Job 1:8. None like him in the earth (2:3). Holding fast his integrity

(says God) tho you moved me against him *without a cause*. His three "friends" accuse him of wickedness. Job maintains it was not anything that he had done that brought this on . . . (without a cause). What is right, *like my servant Job*. Job repents of not totally understanding but never does it say he sinned with his lips (2:10) or disrespected God. God says Job spoke what was right! What brought [it] on? Satan! God allowed it and Job received double in the end for remaining faithful. Satan did not win.

J. C.  
Dillon, MT

*Editor's note: Job was a good man, and his suffering was not a result of his sin. Job dramatically repented at the end of the story because of his direct encounter with God. He had questioned God, and God answered with questions of His own: "Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? . . . Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? He who rebukes God, let him answer it" (38:2; 40:2). Job's experience of divine correction overwhelmed and humbled him. He repented not for misunderstanding but for misspeaking. The realization of his disrespect cut deeply: "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth. . . . I have uttered what I did not understand . . . I abhor myself . . ." (40:4; 42:3, 6). A good man acknowledges his failure, as Job did.*

## Foreign facts

I would just like to thank you and each of your team at the

BA for the work that you do in producing print and non-print materials for the Church of God (Seventh Day). The May-June 2019 issue was excellent. I especially enjoyed the two articles that Elders John Klassek and Israel Steinmetz wrote. It is obvious that both of those men have the hearts of pastors and take seriously their responsibilities to shepherd their flocks, besides caring for their wives and children. I always make it a habit to pray for not only the author of an article in the BA but also for their spouse, and if they are listed, their children.

I have always enjoyed the subject of geography, and therefore maps, so it was a pleasure to read the article by Elder Klassek in which he interviewed Elder Hector Renderos and included was a map, that nation's flag and a few facts for both Canada and El Salvador. How I wish you would be able to carry on "a series" in future BA's where you would feature each and every nation on this earth where the CoG7 has congregations, with a map, flag and some facts. What was so interesting was the stark contrast between Canada and the [place] of Elder Renderos' birth, El Salvador.

R. R.  
Cape Coral, FL

*Editor's note: Thank you for the prayers and for the good idea. We hope to make the On Mission series a regular feature of the Bible Advocate.*



# The Philippines

continued from page 7

help of the senior pastors, we have developed a Bible school. We call it Bible Training Institute (BTI). I am one of the teachers because I also graduated in my Bible studies in Luzon with the help of the foreign mission international pastor, Robert Coulter. He went to our place, and we met each other there. Then he asked my father, "Are you interested to go to Bible school?" My father said, "Yes." Then Robert told me to look for a Bible school in the Philippines, and they would try to support him. That's why, Pastor John, I consider myself one of the fortunate pastors here because I graduated my Bible school — four years. That's why my co-pastors now are also trusting in me, especially in our doctrines. They trust that I can teach the young pastors.

**JK:** Have most of the pastors here in the Philippines gone through a Bible school?

**DB:** No, but there are some.

**JK:** How many congregations do you have in the Philippines now?

**DB:** Eighty-plus.

**JK:** What would your membership be here in the Philippines?

**DB:** Based on the attendance of the Lord's Supper, about 8,000 baptized members throughout the Philippine archipelago: Visayas, Mindanao, and Luzon. We are now growing faster through the use of new strategies in preaching the gospel.

**JK:** If you look back over the last so many years, are the strengths that God has developed as the characteristic strengths of the Church also in the Philippines?

**DB:** I can say many things about that. I think there is a big difference now between the past and today. In the past, the system of teaching was more on just what you can find in the Bible and expounding on the verse. Today we also receive books, like the *Bible Advocate*, and especially *This We Believe*, which is now translated into our own Cebu dialect. Hopefully by next

conference, it will be bound in book form. What you sent us, we look at now as very timely. It will serve the needs of the people today.

In the past, pastors depended on what they had learned directly — personal opinions. It's not like that today. Lessons you have given to us here are good for our thinking. That's why we are happy. This is really what we need. For example, the presentation of the ten-point vision.

**JK:** How long have you had the ten-point vision?

**DB:** Since 2000.

**JK:** How has the congregation received the vision?

**DB:** Before, many reacted. They don't want to be changed. You have to break something in order for them to be changed. But now you can see almost everyone participating in the ten points. Fully accepted.

**JK:** Which of the ten points would be easiest for you to preach on? Which is the subject you have in your heart?

**DB:** Being Christ centered. Most have said no we don't have to accept the Christ centered only, because we are also church centered, or something like that. But we explained to them this is the way. This is the reason we accept ourselves as a Christ-centered church. Of course, we are also church centered, but that is not what we want, because it should be Christ as the center in our lives. Once we accept Christ first, then we can put the church second.

**JK:** Which of those vision statements do you find more





difficult to think through, or less your gifting to talk about?

**DB:** Against those ten, there is no less. They are all important.

**JK:** What are your concerns for the Church in the Philippines? Where is there more work to be done?

**DB:** My greatest concern is training. We really need to have the Bible school, because I want to train the pastors in a way, a system, in a new scheme of preaching because it really helps — fast evangelism. A system. We can implement that to all the pastors if we have a school. It is important to know how to answer questions, like what we are doing now, and how to present our doctrines. If you don't have the exact knowledge about doing those things, it will be hard to understand. But people today, particularly here in the Philippines, are curious about how authentic the things are you are going to teach them. They need proof from Scripture that our teachings are really true. It's good we are a Bible-based church, and therefore it is through the Bible, and the Bible alone, that we can prove to them these things are true.

**JK:** If we go back in history, were you always part of the Church of God (Seventh Day)?

**DB:** Yes.

**JK:** In your evangelism work here in the Philippines, what is the most effective form of evangelism that can reach people?

**DB:** We have used many systems. We have done mass evangelism, or pub-

lic evangelism. Often times we spent 50,000 pesos just for three to four days, because not only are we winning religious people by using sound systems and teaching them about things, but we also give them gifts. So people are coming, coming, coming. First they wanted to get a gift, but the most important thing they get is to hear the gospel. Then we have had an open radio program. But now it stopped because of high cost. As of now we have agreed that house-to-house is the best strategy. You can talk to the person face-to-face, and then you can explain to them the gospel.

**JK:** We have several baptisms happening today. How did those people come to the point of baptism?

**DB:** Through evangelism. We give time for the work. It is an important ministry in the Church.

**JK:** I have one final question. If you wanted to share a few words with your brothers and sisters in the International Ministerial Congress of the Church of God



(Seventh Day) around the world, what would you say?

**DB:** We are happy for the many efforts you have made. It really helps us here in the Philippines. My personal message is that we will continue our effort. I do believe it is God's purpose. I believe God is happy with the efforts of the people who belong to the Church — the International Ministerial Congress. Pastor John, thank you for your life and extending your time throughout the world and not to be paid by money. Only God can give you comforts for the efforts. Thank you for the leadership of the IMC. As far as the work is concerned, we will try our best to cooperate — the work for the whole world.





# GC Ministries News

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## Artios Center for Vibrant Leadership

Does your congregation want to become more intentional about using your influence to reflect Christ into your homes and communities? The Artios Center for Vibrant Leadership offers dynamic Sabbath gatherings that will engage your entire congregation. Its keynote presentations, focus groups, and Q&A sessions are designed to coach you in finding practical solutions to maximizing your effectiveness. Follow-up resources include on-site, phone, and web-based consultations and leadership coaching to help your leaders solve problems and develop strategies unique to your congregation.

For more information, visit [center.artioscollege.org](http://center.artioscollege.org).

## Continuing to SHINE

The Chiapas, Mexico trip August 24-28 exceeded our expectations in the quality of the relationships we formed and the insight we developed. We met the pastors and their leadership teams from the area and spoke to them about the fundamentals of SHINE. All of our meetings ended with joy and excitement once they understood the goals of the mission.

Our time in Chiapas coincided with an evangelistic campaign in the surrounding churches. A minister from Guatemala, who pastors one of the largest congregations in Guatemala, was there with his wife. The superintendent and treasurer of the Chiapas area were generous in their hospitality and helping us to understand the place



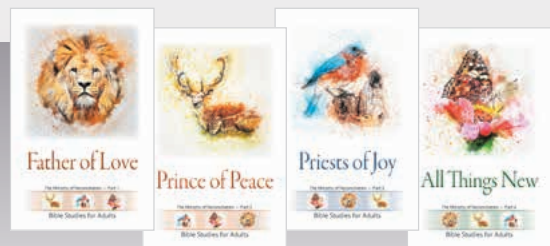
where we will be serving. A lot of the people there speak a dialect other than Spanish, requiring translators for the sermons. On the first Sabbath there we got to preach to the largest congregation in Mexico: the Church of God “La Hormiga.”

We also preached at the Nueva Jerusalem church in San Cristobal de las Casas. Later that night we participated in a two-hour radio program, owned by the area churches, primarily in the local dialect.

We experienced many more blessings that proved the Holy Spirit went ahead of us and touched the hearts of all those we had contact with. While we made plans for housing, food, logistics, and evangelism, the Lord made plans for victory for the souls of the lost, the renovation of the brokenhearted.

The next SHINE trip to Chiapas will be November 24-30 this year. God will be victorious in freeing the oppressed as we **Serve Him in Nations Everywhere.**

— Ronald Rousseau



## New 2020 Adult Quarterly Series

Next year’s lessons are dedicated to “the ministry of reconciliation.” What does that mean? Join us as we explore 2 Corinthians 5:14 – 6:2 and learn how to participate in this essential ministry. Order at [cog7.org](http://cog7.org).



## Now *and* Then

Now and then, I hear someone use the idiom *now and then*. The intended meaning is “occasionally.” If something happens occasionally, it may be said to happen now and then. This term can also describe the kingdom of God. Allow me to explain.

For most of my life, I thought of the kingdom of God in terms of *then*. It was future, yet to come. King Jesus would bring it with Him at His second coming. (Didn’t Jesus teach His disciples to pray to our heavenly Father, “Thy kingdom come”?) During my youth, our church was heavily focused on end time prophecies that, of course, culminate in Jesus’ second coming and the establishment of the eternal kingdom of God on earth. *Then* – whenever that occurred – the righteous would meet King Jesus in the air and the kingdom would commence. Then.

While I waited for King Jesus to return, my responsibility was to prepare myself for His return. “Repent,” says Jesus as He begins preaching, “for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17, NASB). Believe Jesus and receive Jesus, pleads the Gospel of John. “Walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,” urges the apostle Paul (Ephesians 4:1). My completely *then* view of the kingdom of God led me to primarily focus upon myself. My job was to get saved and to stay saved. My evangelistic efforts were to encourage others to get saved and to stay saved. The kingdom of God eventually will come, and we all need to be ready – *then*.

I still hold a *then* view of the kingdom of God that looks forward to Christ’s second coming. But I have also come to hold a *now* view of the kingdom. I understand the Bible teaches both. The *then* aspect of the kingdom will indeed begin

at the second coming of King Jesus, and we certainly do need to be ready for His return.

However, the kingdom of God is also here *now*. King Jesus introduced it some two thousand years ago by His presence, by His claims, and by His actions. John the Baptist proclaimed, “He’s coming!” Jesus proclaimed, “I’m here!” taking authority over life and death and everything in between. He displayed His power over material things and spiritual things. He spoke of His kingdom, not only in future terms but also in present terms: “The kingdom of God is within [among] you” (Luke 17:21); “The kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matthew 12:28). Paul also wrote of a *now* kingdom: “He [the Father] has delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13, NASB).

My *now* view of the kingdom has much expanded my understanding of the gospel and of my opportunities and responsibilities *now* while I wait for *then*. I am saved (now!) by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ (John 5:24; Ephesians 2:8, 9; 1 John 5:13). Second Corinthians 5 tells me that all believers have been given the ministry and the message of reconciliation. We are ambassadors for Christ! Spokespersons for God! Representatives of His kingdom! Workers together with God in His great mission to reconcile the world to Himself in Christ Jesus!

I look forward to *then*, but I’m so grateful to live in God’s kingdom *now*.

– Loren Stacy



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