



September - October 2020

A scenic landscape photograph of a mountain range at sunset. The sky is filled with vibrant orange, pink, and purple clouds. The mountains are rugged and partially covered in snow. In the foreground, there is a calm lake reflecting the sky and mountains, surrounded by evergreen trees.

Becoming



2020: The Ministry of Reconciliation



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Becoming What?

Who knew when we selected the theme of reconciliation for 2020 how relevant it would be. It is hard keeping up. Every BA this year has followed a national crisis: impeachment, pandemic, economy. And then the anguished death of George Floyd. We witnessed it and recoiled in horror, like Isaiah: “He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry for help” (5:7).

George Floyd’s cry was “I can’t breathe!” His dying gasps unveiled our national condition. Protests and riots still reverberate. All cry for justice, but it is clear that “the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (James 1:20). But we have something unique to offer the world. Paul says that we are becoming the righteousness (or justice) of God, His power for reconciling peace through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). This Jesus justice is ours to share.

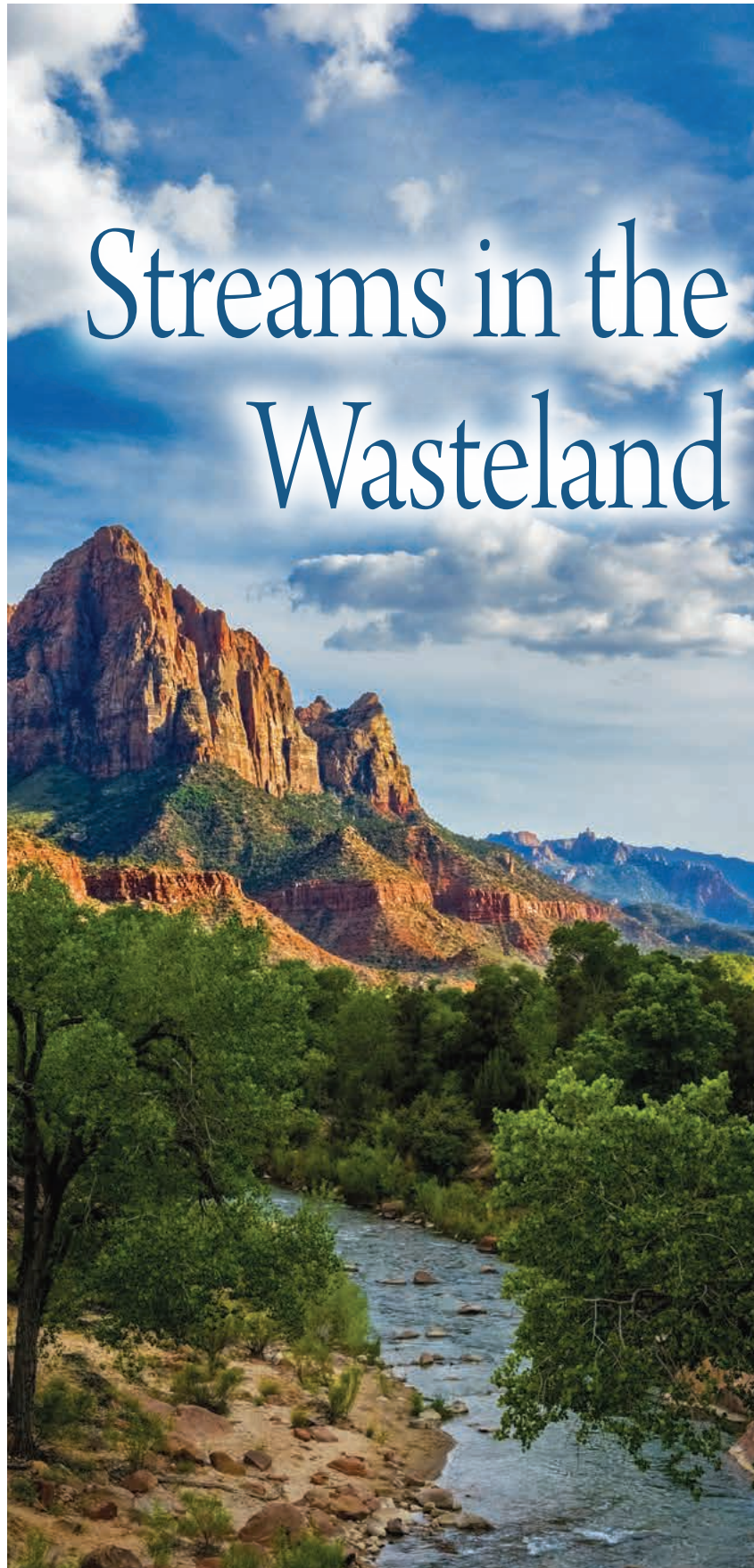
In his book, *Becoming a Just Church*, Adam L. Gustine warns that “justice is a slippery word that gets used broadly in a variety of unhelpful ways.” Biblical justice, however, “refers to the presence of God’s shalom . . . wholeness. . . Abundant . . . life for people and communities as defined by the story of Scripture where what has been broken because of sin is restored . . . by God in Christ.” There’s no justice without Jesus, but justice should be “a way of life for the people of God . . . about becoming a particular kind of people in the world.”

Are we becoming this “particular kind of people”? Shalom people? Racial injustice needs to be set right. We can begin by affirming that black lives *more than matter*: They are precious in God’s sight. We know the distinct history and struggle of the black community in America. Being a people of racial reconciliation means being present with them as Jesus is.

A Jesus-shaped justice will move us out of our comfort zones so that we are near those who cry for help — near enough to listen and lament the injustice, near enough for repentance and new relationships, near enough to feel their pain, catch a breath, bring shalom. For “the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (James 3:18). Resist wrath; do justice!

— Jason Overman





Streams in the Wasteland

Steps to becoming ministers of reconciliation.

by Michael R. Flores

Sometimes I catch myself looking at an old picture of my mother holding me as a baby. A proud, happy smile spreads across her face as she holds me tightly on her hip. I look content, as if I know I am happy and comfortable in my mother's arms. Looking at this picture, I get the impression that we loved being with each other, that we might have been inseparable.

The reality in this picture is so distant from the relationship with my mother that I find myself in today. Too much stands in the way between us. Too many hurtful words, too many broken promises, too many lines that I have drawn in the sand. The result is a functional estrangement. Instead of an inseparable embrace, I maintain a learned avoidance.

I have spent twenty-one years in this pattern: avoid, neglect, ignore. I have been doing this so long and my mindset is so fixed, I can see no other reality for our relationship. Being estranged from my mother has become normal.

New thing

"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland" (Isaiah 43:19).

Israel understood about estrangement. The nation had once been a kingdom with her own

land, her own systems, her own freedom. But when Isaiah makes this statement, it is now a nation characterized by emptiness, corruption, infertility, bondage, and death. This is a nation estranged from her kingdom — a nation in exile. Into this hopeless reality, God promises reconciliation: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine” (v. 1).

God calls out to His people, imploring them to forget the former things, forget all the things in the way between Him and His people. All those things — the past, the actions, the words, the lost moments, the fights, the neglect, the pain — become a barrier that appears impossible to break down. Estrangement is the only reality that can be perceived. Into this fixed mindset God proclaims, “See, I am doing a new thing!”

God is good at making inconceivable realities conceivable. The Scriptures reveal a God who pulls a cosmos out of chaos, who pulls a nation of slaves into freedom. He even makes Himself, the Word who was at the beginning, conceivable by becoming the Word made flesh: Jesus Christ. “See, I am doing a new thing!” For God to step into this world as flesh is something inconceivable, yet we proclaim this as a reality. God became incarnate.

As God incarnate, Jesus is the real manifestation of God’s desire to reconcile with humanity. Jesus is the ministry of reconciliation. Jesus is the new thing springing forth that was once inconceivable. Jesus is the way in the wilderness, the stream in the wasteland.

Through Jesus, God is showing us that any kind reconciliation requires that new things spring forth from realities that seem to us too impossible to ever change. To reconcile, or be reconciled, requires us to become something new.

Living full

“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10).

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Corinthians 5:17).

For twenty-one of my thirty-

mitted to live with my life-limiting weaknesses.

Because I have come to see sin as a misplaced belief in my limits, I am coming to understand that choosing estrangement is my struggle with faith. Do I believe that God became incarnate? Do I believe that God resurrected Christ from the grave? Do I believe that the Holy Spirit can lead me to become someone new who can see a way to love?

If my sin is believing in my limits, then the way forward is choosing to believe that God can, and is, making me new. I may not be able to conceive of the new person I will become, or conceive of a new relationship

“God calls out to His people, imploring them to forget the former things.”

nine years, I have justified my actions toward my mother by believing that I am protecting my family and me from inexorable pain if I choose to allow her into our lives. I struggle to love her. I have let myself believe that my capacity to love her, and the capacity for God to create a new relationship between us, is limited. Simply put, I have allowed sin to rule this part of my life. By placing and reinforcing limits on God’s ability to help me love, forgive, imagine, and act on a different way of living, I have com-

or of the new ways of living that I must learn. But if I believe that God became incarnate, that He raised Jesus from death, and that His Spirit is with me, then I will choose freedom from my life-limiting weaknesses. I will choose to live as Christ intended, to my fullest.

This might be why Paul says, “If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” When we choose to walk in His way, to faithfully head into the wasteland knowing that in the journey we

will find streams, we become new creations by the same power that resurrected Jesus from a grave.

Transformation

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2).

To believe that God can, and is, making me new, I have to be willing to walk.

This act of becoming something new plunges us into mys-

can love and live in a new relationship, is already springing forth. If I choose to think like this, then my actions and attitudes will align to that belief.

If I choose to renew my mind by turning toward the truth that God can, and is, making all things new, then I will see myself committing to new attitudes and actions toward my mother. With this mindset that sees my capacity to love as unlimited, in light of Christ's unconditional love, then I can see my new attitudes toward her: longsuffering, patience,

“God is good at making
inconceivable realities
conceivable.”

tery. It is a process that requires an openness to new ways of living. Our broken relationships, when reconciled, will be different. We will not be the people we are right now, reinforcing this brokenness, when we are reinforcing reconciliation. In Christ, we become something new every time we faithfully move toward Him, with Him, in His way.

This moving toward Christ looks like Paul's exhortation to “be transformed by the renewing” of our minds. In my broken relationship with my mother, I cannot see the new thing — the stream in the wasteland. Despite this, God proclaims it is already here. My new self, the self that

kindness. My actions will follow. Instead of avoidance, I will engage in — even initiate — our conversations by picking up the phone or responding to her texts. Instead of being quick to anger, I will consider her perspective, her reasons, words, and actions, and cultivate a humble posture toward her. Instead of neglect, I will invite her into my life to celebrate with my family. Instead of accommodating my self-interest by seeking to avoid what I call pain, I will constantly remind myself to commit to actions that will grow our relationship.

This relationship will look different from the one that I see in the picture. The one that I miss.

Maybe we will never be like that again: content, comfortable, inseparable. But I am starting to see that we could make something new.

Looking for streams

What are the places in our lives that seem impossible to renew? What relationships seem irreconcilable? What wastelands need streams?

Because God became incarnate, because He resurrected Jesus from the grave, because His Spirit is with us, He can lead us to become a new people who follow Jesus' way of living. We can reconcile with others, despite seemingly impossible barriers. We can never stop looking for the new thing, for the way in our wilderness, for the streams in our wastelands.

May you know that Jesus is the new thing that God has done. May you know that God is making you new as you walk toward Him, with Him. May the Holy Spirit guide you as you become something new. **BA**

Michael R. Flores writes from San Antonio, TX, where he lives with his wife, Victoria, and their three children. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



Online Extras

Have you visited baonline.org lately? Be sure to read this issue's Online Extras by Dr. David Downey and Ken Lawson.



by John Roedel

Me: Hey God.

God: Hello.

Me: I'm falling apart. Can you put me back together?

God: I would rather not.

Me: Why?

God: Because you aren't a puzzle.

Me: What about all of the pieces of my life that are falling down onto the ground?

God: Let them stay there for a while. They fell off for a reason. Take some time and decide if you need any of those pieces back.

Me: You don't understand! I'm breaking down!

God: No — you don't understand. You are breaking through. What you are feeling [is] just growing pains. You are shedding the things and the people in your life that are holding you back. You aren't falling apart. You are falling into place. Relax. Take some deep breaths and allow those things you don't need anymore to fall off of you. Quit holding onto the pieces that don't fit you anymore. Let them fall off. Let them go.

Me: Once I start doing that, what will be left of me?

God: Only the very best pieces of you.

Me: I'm scared of changing.

God: I keep telling you — YOU AREN'T CHANGING!! YOU ARE BECOMING!

Me: Becoming who?

God: Becoming who I created you to be! A person of light and love and charity and hope and courage and joy and mercy and grace and compassion. I made you for more than the shallow pieces you have decided to adorn yourself with that you cling to with such greed and fear. Let those things fall off of you. I love you! Don't change! . . . Become! Become! Become who I made you to be. I'm going to keep telling you this until you remember it.

Me: There goes another piece.

God: Yep. Let it be.

Me: So . . . I'm not broken?

God: Of course not! — but you are breaking like the dawn. It's a new day.

Become!!! **BA**

John Roedel is a comic, husband, and father of three boys based in Wyoming who began talking with "God" in 2015 on Facebook about his ongoing faith crisis. What began as a flippant way of making light of his doubts in the divine turned into something he wasn't at all prepared for: God wrote back.

<https://www.heygodheyjohn.com/>. Used by permission.





Finding lessons in the midst
of fiery trials.

by **Sonya Lopez-Orr**

Suffering, loss, grief, and death are all part of this fallen world. No one is immune; believers and non-believers alike endure them. If we're honest, Bible verses about suffering and trials are not the ones we want to embrace.

It is human nature to avoid pain or discomfort, or even the mention of it. But the Bible has a lot to say on the topic of suffering and how God works through it to teach us vital lessons.

Insights to suffering

Last year I experienced a tough lesson in suffering firsthand when my family faced the hardest season of our lives.

In April 2019, my husband and I endured a third miscarriage. A couple of months later, my beloved mother became severely sick, and our lives came to a complete stop. She was diagnosed with a bacterial infection and was placed in a medically induced coma for almost five weeks. Initially, the doctors offered hope, but as the weeks passed, her condition worsened. "How? Why?" we asked over and over.

While at the hospital, I found myself meditating on many verses that talked about trials, like these: "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces en-

durance" (James 1:2, 3). I humbly and honestly asked God, "How can I count it all joy when my mother is dying?" I wrestled with these verses and would learn more about them later.

In the meantime, I saw that God's Word is not silent about various trials in life. Suffering can be caused by our own doing, and it can simply result from a fallen world. Some suffering, like Job's, is allowed for testing. On *desiringGod.org*, author Tony Reinke quotes Tim Keller's words from *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*:

Some suffering is given in order to chastise and correct a person for wrongful patterns of life (as in the case of Jonah imperiled by the storm), some suffering is given "not to correct past wrongs but to prevent

future ones" (as in the case of Joseph sold into slavery), and some suffering has no purpose other than to lead a person to love God more ardently for himself alone and so discover the ultimate peace and freedom.

The apostle Paul is a good example of someone who experienced much pain, loss, and suffering for a greater purpose. Philippians 3 is filled with truths regarding this — lessons my dad, sister, and I discovered in the darkest of valleys.

Dependence on God

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord . . . for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh (Philippians 3:1, 3).

As the doctors exhausted all treatments for my mother, to no avail, we felt helpless and desperate knowing we could do nothing physically for her. We knew it would take a miracle for her to survive and be restored. So we continued to draw near to God. We rallied our church family, prayed, fasted, and interceded for our mother with thanksgiving and supplications before the Lord day and night.

I learned that when we're facing a hard trial, we see things more clearly. When devastating news hits, we feel powerless, knowing that apart from God, we can do absolutely nothing in our flesh to change the outcome. These crossroads moments are the perfect opportunity to fix our eyes completely on a sovereign, all-powerful God.

I also learned that pain brings opportunity for perspective. Our vision is refocused, and we simply let go of everything in order to completely hold on to God, even when we feel as though we are drowning. He is teaching us full dependence on Him, at all times. How can you ever know Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have?

Knowing Christ

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view

“How can you ever know
Jesus is all you need until Jesus
is all you have?”

of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord . . . that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death (Philippians 3:8, 10).

Through my experience, I saw that the main purpose behind our trials, suffering, grief, and disappointment is to “know Him.” Christ, our perfect example, was a man of many sorrows and acquainted with grief, and He suffered a gruesome death for

us (Isaiah 53:3). So how can we know Him fully and experience His power?

John Piper offers an observation in his devotional “The Seminary of Suffering”:

I have never heard anyone say, “The really deep lessons of life have come in times of ease and comfort.” But I have heard strong saints say, “Every significant advance I have ever made in grasping the depths of God’s love and growing deep with him has come through suffering.”

I saw that in our trials, we intimately know Christ and the truth of His Word like never before. This knowledge can come only through suffering. Christ partook of the cup, and so must we. The question is, can we trust in God even when He chooses not to let this cup pass from us?

Oh, how we all prayed, with supplications before God on behalf of our mother. We were desperate. I was pleading like the woman waiting for a crumb of bread to fall from the Master’s table, or the woman pushing through the crowd and longing



to touch the hem of His garment. I was on my knees begging, “Lord, have mercy!”

Pressing on

Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:12-14).

Our story did not end the way we had hoped. After almost six weeks in the hospital, my mother went to be with the Lord. Our pain at times felt unbearable. On the day of her funeral our family was weak, our hearts broken in pieces. How could we possibly get through the day?

We gathered at my dad’s house to read Scripture. In our hour of great need we prayed

for God’s strength, and He faithfully supplied it. He comforted us and walked with us through the hard days ahead, and He tenderly continues to do so. We had a choice: Become bitter and angry at God for allowing our mother to die, or press on and continue and trust in His perfect sovereignty.

Fresh perspective

Some lessons took me a while to learn. Remember when I asked God about what it meant to “Consider it all joy”? In His grace, He eventually taught me that, in the midst of our pain and loss, we had His promise — the promise of Mother’s salvation, the promise of the coming resurrection. Even through tears, my heart feels joy because I know that on that great day I will see her again — and my three babies.

The importance of sharing the gospel also became clear to me. Though I rejoice in God’s promises, the sad reality is, not everyone has that joyful assurance of eternal life. Oh, that we may see the urgency of sharing with a

perishing world the hope found only in Jesus Christ! How can we not? I still don’t understand fully why my mother and three babies died. But one thing that has given me strength to go on is the hope and glory that lie ahead:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18).

After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you (1 Peter 5:10).

In our pain, sickness, and trials, may we learn from Christ, allowing God to conform us to the image of our Lord and Savior who suffered for us. **BA**



In loving memory of my beloved mother, Margarita Lopez — until that great day.

Sonya Lopez-Orr, her husband, Aaron, and their two daughters, Emily and Elizabeth, reside in Conroe, TX. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.



Questions & Answers



Does being made righteous refer to a status or a process?

The short answer is *both*. Let's take a closer look at this great word, starting with its background in the Old Testament.

In both Hebrew and Greek, the basic meaning of *righteousness* is "conformity to a norm." In its biblical context, the norm that righteousness aims for is God's own just character and will for His people. For both God and Israel, then, righteousness (or justice) amounted to covenant faithfulness. Psalm 11:7 sums up its priority well: "The LORD is righteous, He loves righteousness."

But even as YHWH called Israel to righteousness, He warned her not to boast in it (Deuteronomy 6:24, 25; 9:4-6). Israel's unfaithfulness to the covenant underscored the gulf between God's righteousness and hers. Psalms praises, "I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only," but confesses "In Your sight no one living is righteous" (71:16; 143:2). It is God's righteousness and faithfulness that the psalmist trusts (40:10). As for human beings, "There is none who does good, no, not one" (14:3).

The prophets record the same. "All our righteousnesses are like filthy rags," Isaiah laments (64:6). Daniel too: "O Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but to us shame of face" (9:7). But these same prophets predicted the restoration of righteousness by God's own. In Isaiah 59, God looks for righteousness but finds none, so "His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him" (vv. 9-17). In Daniel

9, the prophet repents for Israel's unrighteousness while rejoicing that God will set things right and "bring in everlasting righteousness" (v. 24).

Coming to the New Testament, we see these promises realized: God's righteousness is revealed in Jesus Christ. This is what Romans 3 is all about. Paul quotes some of the scriptures we've noted above in teaching the gospel: "There is none righteous . . . all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (vv. 10, 23). But in Christ, God's righteousness has been demonstrated for salvation, and through faith in Him, we are justified (declared righteous, set right with God, vv. 21-26).

Justification is our righteous status in Christ. Because we are united with Him, our righteousness is derived from and dependent on His. *Not I, but Christ* (Galatians 2:20). Sounding like the prophets, Paul sees his own righteousness as rubbish in comparison to that "righteousness which is from God by faith" (Philippians 3:8, 9). This righteousness was prefigured all the way back to Abraham: "And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3).

But like Father Abraham, this righteous status is transformative. *A lived faith does righteousness too* (Genesis 18:19). This is the ongoing, conforming process that believers experience in Jesus Christ: "By one Man's obedience many will be made righteous"; the "righteousness of God" (Romans 5:19; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Being righteous *in Christ*, we pursue righteousness and practice it *in Christ* as well (2 Timothy 2:22; 1 John 2:29; 3:7).

— Jason Overman



One woman becomes an ambassador for Christ in a unique place.
by Yvonne Kays

“I don’t know exactly what I want to do,” Tricia said to her friend and prayer partner, Susan. “I’ve been just a mom and housewife, but now that the kids are out of the house, I feel I’m supposed to run a business that will honor the Lord and reach out into our community.”

“Let’s pray about it,” Susan said. “God will show you what to do.” Tricia had been reading books on following your dreams. “Be specific in setting your goals,” one book advised. Believing the Lord had planted this burning desire in her heart, she fervently prayed that night for

clarity. “Lord, would You please clearly direct me to the business You want me to be involved in?”

Answer to prayer

The next morning Susan called her, excitement in her voice. “Tricia, you won’t believe this, but this morning a friend from church called me needing help. Her parents are in a health crisis, and she must leave the state immediately to care for them. She’s been running a Christian thrift store and needs someone to sell everything and close it down . . . or else take over the business. I think this may be the answer to our prayer!”

After praying for wisdom, they toured the shop. A quaint, older building close to downtown Bend, Oregon, the thrift store had been remodeled to house donated clothing and household goods. Susan offered to help Tri-

cia, and together they committed to take over the business.

First, they prayed for a focus for their ministry. They felt led to dedicate the store to the support of the local Pregnancy Resource Center. All baby clothes and toys would be donated directly to the center, along with a portion of their profits. A room was set aside specifically for reasonably priced maternity clothing, and a donation jar on the counter encouraged patrons to give additional contributions.

And, continuing a tradition of the store, all donated Bibles were placed in a basket by the front door to be given away, free. As Susan and Tricia developed a working relationship with other thrift stores in the area, they began swapping larger items for baby clothes, toys, maternity wear, and Bibles.

Expanding ministry

"It's a shame to have rooms sitting empty," Tricia prayed. "How else can we use the building for You, Lord?"

More answers came. A pastor's wife offered to teach an early morning Bible study, and a prayer group started meeting in the evening.

A display was created to feature craft items produced by women who had been rescued from the slave trade in a third world country. All revenue went directly to the ministry providing their support.

When a local prison ministry shared a need for recently released women to have appropriate clothing for job interviews, Tricia created gift certificates for them. The women could shop for two blouses, two pairs of slacks, a dress, shoes, and a purse, all at no charge. Then they were encouraged to give back by volunteering at the thrift shop for work experience and to help develop a job résumé.

A variety of people frequented the thrift shop. Some were homeless or had limited income. Tricia developed a list of local community resources and provided it as a handout on the counter. A sign invited customers to write out prayer requests, and a Scripture card was prayerfully tucked in every bag going out the door.

Every morning Tricia began her day with a simple prayer: "Lord, bring those You intend to the store and guide all conversation to express Your love and grace. Please bless each one. Thank You for letting me see the amazing ways You work in so many lives!"

Spreading the Word

After three months, family needs forced Susan to leave the business, but Tricia continued on with her dream. Each new day brought unique experiences.

One quiet afternoon, the door cracked open. A woman's wavering voice said, "I've lost my Bible."

"Please come in!" Tricia called out. "You are welcome to take a Bible from the basket. There's no charge."

The woman wouldn't come in, but a gnarled hand reached out to snatch up a Bible, and then

like the one Grandpa had," he said. Crossing the room, he laid it on the counter. "I'll buy this, and we'll shop some more," he said.

"Oh, no," Tricia said. "You don't need to pay for it. All the Bibles are free."

"Nope. Give you five dollars for it," the man said over his shoulder as they wandered into the next room.

Tricia picked up the old Bible and opened it. It had a lot of underlining and notes scribbled in the margins. In the front was a personal note addressed to "Jim," with a scripture, and signed by



quickly closed the door. Tricia was pleased to see word had gotten out that Bibles were free here.

Grandpa's Bible

One day something inexplicable happened, confirming that God heard Tricia's prayers and had His hand on this business in a special way.

A young couple strolled into the shop. As he passed the basket of Bibles, the young man stopped and scooped one off the top.

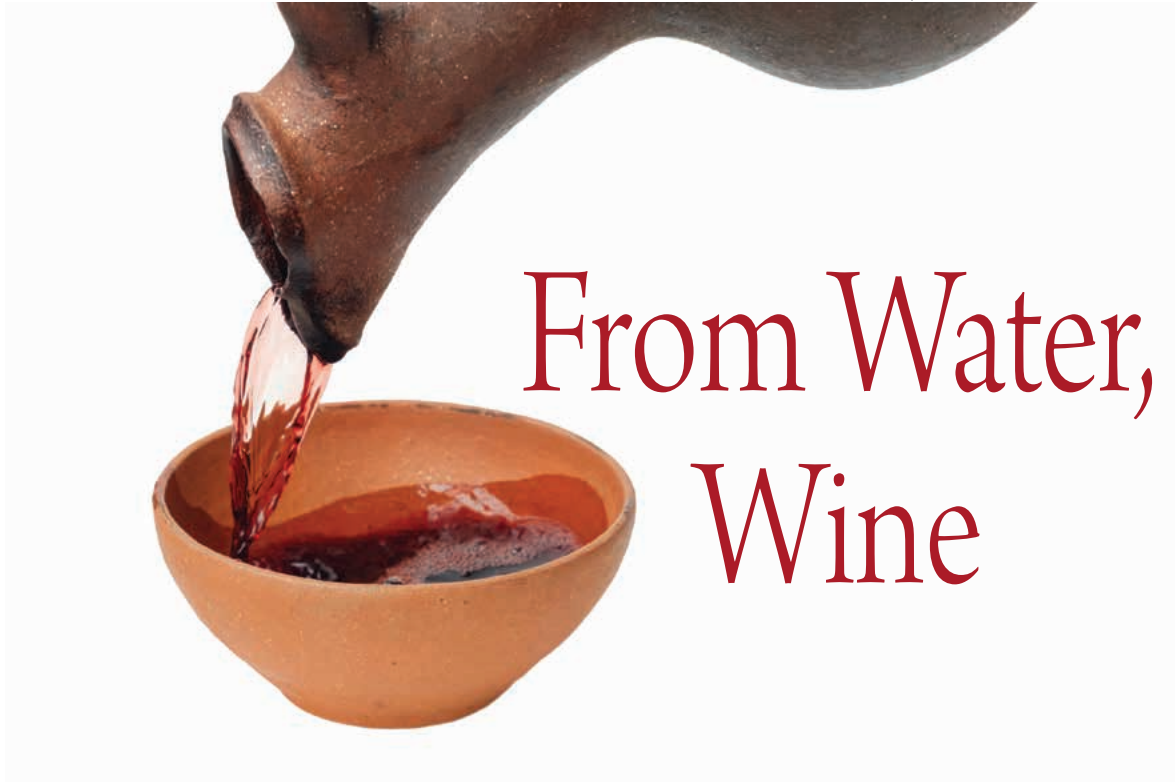
"Hey, look at this. A Bible just

the previous owner. *Hmm . . . perhaps the young man wouldn't want one so well used,* Tricia said to herself.

Soon the couple returned and piled some household items and clothing on the counter. Still holding the open Bible, Tricia said, "I don't know if you really want this Bible because it has a lot of writing in it. But it certainly has a lovely inscription." And she began to read it aloud to them.

As she finished and looked up, she was astonished to see tears rolling down the young man's face. "Where did you get

continued on page 15



From Water, Wine

Temporary tears transform
to eternal delight.
by Chris Carter

With a sincere gust of breath, I blew out the candles on my birthday cake. As seven gave way to eight, I quickly turned from my cake to the nearby present and tore in with youthful ferocity. Though severely weakened by fiery pricks of pain, my mom had wrapped that gift with dear love.

As I cast the wrapping paper to the sterile hospital room floor, my eyes grew wide at the sight of a new X-Wing toy. I excitedly turned to my brother and cousins to show them my new treasure. Dismounting my mom's lap, I thanked my parents profusely and then scurried off to the waiting room. The joy of that present blasted me off into a galaxy far, far away.

Meanwhile on earth, my mom was slowly dying. Profound sorrow lurked just outside her hospital room.*

Grief brought near

Grief and loss are stark realities that sink their icy claws into every heart. No person will escape this life without feeling the cold breath of sadness. Whether it's from sickness, death, uncontrollable circumstances, or bad choices, pain finds us all. The sorrow we encounter, however, will not last through to our journey's end.

King David, a man keenly acquainted with grief, reoriented his gaze when loss struck. "You keep track of all my sorrows," wrote the grieving Hebrew monarch. "You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book" (Psalm 56:8, NLT). David was confident that God was intimately aware of every tear shed.

Formed for joy

David's God had created him, and us, for a purpose more lasting than pain. "What is the chief end of man?" queried the Westminster divines. In answer to their own question, they replied, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever" (*Westminster Shorter Catechism*). The Lord formed our frames to brim over with His delight. Joy in Him is our goal.

This virtue is so essential to our souls because it aligns our steps with the Father's. Pastor Sam Storms defines this spiritual fruit as a "deep durable delight in God." Joy is knowing that no matter how dark the night, the Lord still wills the morning sun to rise. It is confidence that in His presence "there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11, ESV). Through our most poignant griefs God creates our greatest delight in Him.

In John 2:1-11, Jesus and His disciples receive a last-minute invitation to a wedding in Cana. At Jewish marriage celebrations, guests would customarily bring along some wine. For Jesus and His followers to arrive without any beverage in tow would have raised some eyebrows.

Likewise, when we walk through difficult circumstances, we may be tempted to think that Christ has shown up empty-handed to our suffering. If our pain is like the water at the Cana wedding, however, Jesus' hands will work a miracle over the depths of our agony. He will transform our darkest grief into deepest joy.

A God who knows

Jesus can change our sorrow because He himself walked through it. On the cross, He carried our sorrows, was pierced for our grief, and was murdered for our sins. And He conquered them all. He knows how we suffer, and He is using it to lead us to His joy.

Suffering was intended to be only a stopover on the road to delight in God. Pain cannot endure eternity. Reflecting on our profound suffering, G. K. Chesterton wrote:

Man is more himself, man is more manlike, when joy is the fundamental thing in him, and grief the superficial. Melancholy should be an innocent interlude, a tender and fugitive frame of mind; praise should be the permanent pulsation of the soul.

The weeping of our long night will become tears of joy streaming down our faces when the light of Christ eternally rises before us. These very tears He will wipe away and collect in His jar. He will enshrine our sadness as a monument to our unending delight in His presence. His hands — the hands that turned water to wine — will transform our every grief into glorious joy.

**Author's note: In His mercy, God spared my mom. She is alive and healthy today. BA*

Chris Carter writes from Washington, DC.



Following God's Dream

continued from page 13

this Bible?" he asked. "This is my grandfather's Bible. Jim was my father."

He gently reached out to take the Bible from her hand and stared at his grandfather's writing. "But . . . they didn't live anywhere near here."

Tricia could only shrug. "Things are just donated. We rarely know where they come from." With her eyes glistening, she whispered, "Only God could have put your grandfather's Bible into your hands."

He nodded. Clutching the Bible to his chest, the young man shared that they lived in a community over a hundred miles away in eastern Oregon. They were just passing through the area when they spotted the thrift store and, on impulse, decided to stop.

After saying goodbye, the young couple left the store and put their purchases in the trunk of their car. As the young man started to open the door for his wife, he suddenly touched her arm and pointed at the signboard standing beside the front door of the shop.

What drew his attention? The name of Tricia's business: *Once Lost Now Found Resale Shop*. BA

Yvonne Kays writes from Bend, OR.





True Beauty by Dorothy Nimchuk

"Four Eyes, Four Eyes! Here comes Four Eyes!"
As laughter rang out, Lauri's tears welled behind thick, horn-rimmed glasses. Her steps slowed.

"Come on, Lauri!" demanded her twin, pulling her sleeve. "Hurry now, or we'll be late."

"I wish school didn't exist!" exclaimed Lauri. "I hate it!"

"There's the bell. Run!" Linda shouted.

Another year of torture, thought Lauri, feeling very much alone. As her new teacher looked up from her desk, her beautiful smile enfolded her. Lauri returned a timid smile.

Linda appeared at recess, new friends in tow. "This is my sister. Would you believe we're twins?" Laughter. "No one ever thinks so."

"I wouldn't tell if I were you." Giggles! More laughter!

Lauri stumbled back to class, venting pent-up feelings. Comforting arms embraced her. "We can talk, Lauri," said Miss Biggs softly. "I can help."

"Linda's so beautiful. Everyone likes her. I'm ugly . . . kids call me names and. . ."

"You can be beautiful too," said Miss Biggs.

"Me! How can . . . ?"

"Well, you start by being beautiful inside. . ."

That was funny, thought Lauri. She started giggling.

"It's true," assured Miss Biggs. "Doing kind deeds, saying kind words, and thinking kind thoughts, you create beauty within you."

"What good is that?"

"What's inside shines outside. Jesus said man sees the outside, but God looks on the heart. It's important to God that you are beautiful inside."

"Was Jesus handsome?" The answer was important.

"Isaiah wrote that He had no beauty. Jesus' miracles and the things He stood for drew people to Him. He could easily become lost in a crowd. He must have been a plain, ordinary sort of person."

Here was someone Lauri could identify with. "Tell me more about Jesus and being beautiful inside," she pleaded.

Taking Miss Biggs' advice, Lauri found others who could use a smile, a friendly word, help with homework. A few new friends soon ballooned into an ever-widening circle.

"The governor's coming to school next week," Linda told Lauri one day after school. "I'll be chosen to present flowers to his wife. I'll need a new dress. Lauri, you can wait to get new shoes." Sure of her selection, Linda boasted, "I'm as good as elected right now."

The day came to reveal the voting results. "We want someone who's thoughtful, courteous . . . one to bring honor to our school. . ."

"*And beautiful!*" whispered Linda. "Oh, I can't wait to hear my name."

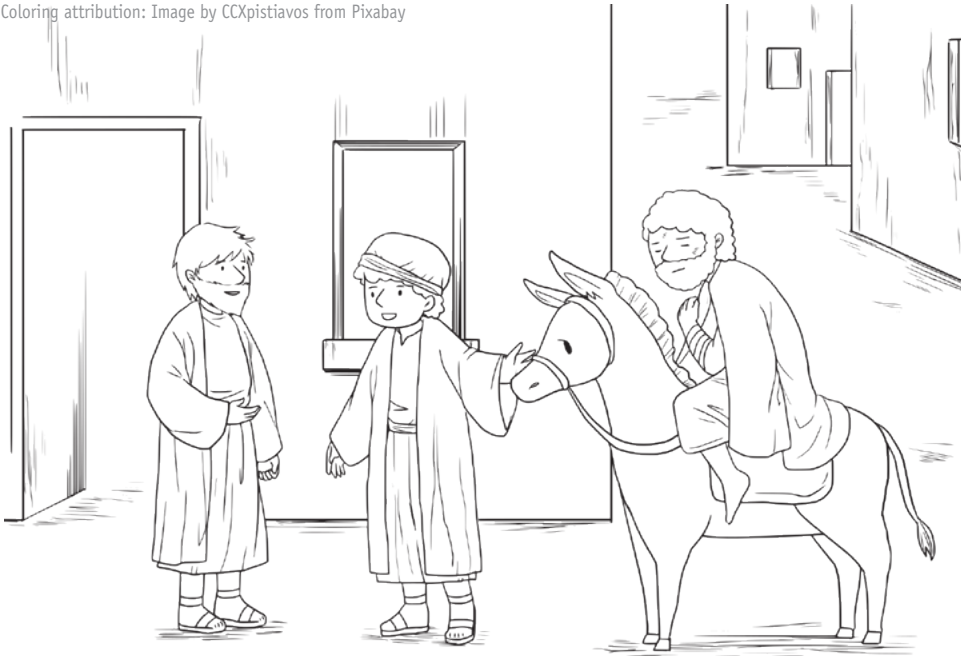
"It's my privilege to present to you . . ." The principal paused, and Linda stood up.

"Lauri Beckett. Come up here, Lauri!"

Linda, red-faced, confused, sank way down into her seat, wishing she could disappear.

Excitement flushing her cheeks pink, Lauri whispered, "I'm sorry, Linda. But you can still have a new dress. I'll wear my church shoes." Linda looked up. When Lauri smiled like that, she was almost pretty.

Lauri marched slowly down the aisle, her smile as big as all outdoors. Lauri Beckett! No beauty! But with such a radiant smile and loving spirit, who cared?



Backward Puzzle

An important Bible verse has been turned backward, and the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22, 23 (NKJV) have been inserted into the text. Cross out all these fruits and then rewrite the text, starting from the last letter and moving backward. Add spaces and punctuation as needed. The first fruit has been crossed out for you.

Growing Gems

Through the gift of God's grace and His Spirit's transforming power in our lives, we can become beautiful in character. Make these crystals to see how plain table sugar can be transformed into beautiful crystals. You will need 3 cups sugar, 1 cup water, cotton string, tape, a pencil, a jar, a pot, and a spoon.

Directions

Cut a piece of string a few inches longer than the height of the jar. Tape it to the center of the pencil, and wind it around a few times. Place the string in the jar with the pencil across the opening. Wind the string around the pencil so that the string hangs about an inch from the bottom of the jar. Lift the string out of the jar and dip it in water. Then, roll it in sugar. Lay it aside to dry.

Measure 3 cups of sugar and 1 cup of water into the pot. Place it on a stove, and heat it until the water boils, stirring constantly. Don't let it bubble over. You may need to lower the heat. Keep stirring until the sugar is fully dissolved. Remove the pot from the heat, and let it cool for about 10 minutes. Add 2 or 3 drops of food coloring if you want your crystals to be colored.

Pour the water/sugar mixture into the jar. Lower the prepared string into the jar, making sure it doesn't touch the bottom or sides. Place your jar in a cool place where it won't be disturbed. Cover it with a piece of paper towel or coffee filter.

Now it's time to wait while your crystals grow. If crystals start growing on the top of the jar, break them off and eat them or throw them away. You should have some crystals on your string in 5-7 days. Not only will you be able to admire their beauty, but you'll also be able to eat them!

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Solution can be found
on page 26.

Kids Time activities are
abridged from the BAP
children's curriculum. Order
at cog7.org/online-store.





Repairing

A history lesson and call to action. **by Whaid Rose**

Previously in this column I wrote about the collapse in 1967 of the Silver Bridge, connecting Point Pleasant, West Virginia, and Gallipolis, Ohio. The bridge had received much attention for being the first eyebar suspension bridge in the United States, which made engineering history. When it collapsed without warning, it raised concerns about our nation's infrastructure, and led to the US Congress passing the 1968 National Bridge Inspection Standards Act.

Though the initial investigation showed that the bridge had been carrying more weight than it could sustain, that's only half the story. A more thorough investigation revealed that the primary cause was the failure of one of the main eyebars, a problem that developed over time, beginning with a tiny crack just three millimeters deep. A small fracture in the bridge's mainframe eventually resulted in what has been described as the deadliest bridge disaster in US history.

Unattended problems

The Silver Bridge incident mirrors a thousand scenarios in

which a small problem left unattended later results in disaster. The civil unrest in our country, on the heels of months of challenging circumstances due to the global pandemic, exposes one such scenario, going all the way back to the founding of this country.

Jim Wallis, a globally recognized Christian writer, teacher, preacher, and justice advocate, calls this *America's Original Sin*, the title of his 2017 book on racism in America. Wallis, a white American, found himself at odds with a white church that considered his attempts to address racial injustice to be taboo. He would have given up on faith entirely, had it not been for discovering a biblical faith that commands us to "do justice." He made this discovery through his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement.

Wallis' full book title, *America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America*, doesn't bode well with staunch defenders of America's impeccable heritage and those wanting to deny any culpability with the history of slavery.

But it takes only a quick look at America's early history, with intellectual honesty, to recognize what the book title implies. The first set of Africans brought

to America as slaves arrived in 1619. This began a long and tragic history of blacks being violently ripped away from their language and culture and brought to America against their will, under the most inhumane circumstances.

Things only got worse once they got here. These traumatized Africans were treated as property. They could be sold on an auction block to the highest bidder, very much the way animals are auctioned at a cattle sale. The treatment of blacks during that era is therefore rightly described by historians as "chattel slavery." This dehumanization was necessary in order to control them. But in a twisted kind of way, it also provided an alibi for slave owners. Blacks needed to be treated as less than human because that's what they were, as the United States Constitution would later define them.

This inhumane treatment therefore became standard on slave plantations, often managed by cruel taskmasters hired by absentee slaveholders to get as much free labor as possible out of the slaves. Thus, within one hundred years after declaring her independence from Great Britain in 1776, America had developed the most powerful economic engine in the world, mostly

the Breach

achieved at the expense of the freedom and human dignity of her enslaved people.

Ongoing legacy

It is this evil that tarnishes early American history. This breach of moral justice, a breach of humanity itself, was practiced for hundreds of years with constitutional backing. Unlike the tiny crack in the Silver Bridge, this is a gaping hole in America's very foundation. Indeed, this is her original sin.

Attempts to right this wrong resulted in a bloody Civil War and the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. But the Thirteenth Amendment was passed in 1865. One newspaper columnist said it "takes out of politics, and consigns to history, an institution incongruous to our political system, inconsistent with justice and repugnant to the humane sentiments fostered by a Christian civilization."

Yet as recent tragedies confirm, our nation continues to suffer from the legacy of slavery and racial injustice. Thanks to body cameras and cell phones, what the black community has long claimed concerning police brutality is now undeniable.

Redemptive responses

So here are the questions. What do we do now? As "the American way" collides with the changing demographics of an increasingly diverse country, how should the church respond? How can we as the body of Christ speak into this national conversation? After all, aren't we the salt of the earth and the light of the world?

Adequate treatment of this topic is impossible in a two-page article, but I'm grateful that we're at least having the conversation. This is a historic moment, and during these unprecedented times, the task of leadership is to help people take their place on the right side of history.

Generations coming behind us will want to know how we responded to the current crisis. Hopefully, we won't have to confess that we stood by and did nothing, or that we became caught up in the divisiveness of it, but rather, that we responded in redemptive ways — that we were "repairers of the breach."

In Isaiah 58, that phrase describes those who *loose bonds of wickedness, undo heavy burdens, free oppressed people, and break every yoke* (v. 6). And they *rebuild waste places, raise the foundation of generations, and restore streets to live in* — "make

the community livable again" (v. 12, MSG).

We will revisit this topic next time with practical suggestions on how Christians can foster healing and reconciliation. Meanwhile, let us listen, care, seek more to understand than to be understood, and pray that through Christ, we will be responsible agents of history. **BA**

Whaid Rose, former president of the General Conference, is dean of the Artios Center for Vibrant Leadership and pastors the Newton, NC CoG7. He and his wife, Marjolene, live in Denver, NC.



For resources on leading your congregation to work together in ministry, visit Artios Christian College's Lead Up section in baonline.org.

Becoming Conformed

The what, how, and why of
God's work in His people.

by Jason Overman

Do you remember your first memory verse? I do. Dorothy Keim taught it to me at a church convention in 1973, when I was seven. It's beloved by many — Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (KJV). I've forgotten plenty in the nearly fifty years since, but not that verse or its message that God is working His purpose in those who love Him.

But *what* is this purpose, and *how* is God working it out in us? Let's allow this popular chapter to answer both of these questions. *Becoming* is what Romans 8 is all about.

Christ is *what*

Not only does Romans 8:28 tell us that we are becoming, but verse 29 tells *what* we're becoming: "For whom He [God] foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren." What a purpose! What a promise that we should be transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ, who Himself is the express image of God the Father (Hebrews 1:3).

Words can scarcely describe the wonder of becoming that God has planned for us. With nothing more than empty hands and weak knees, I can only utter, Yes! in faith, trusting that God is faithful to perform what He has promised.

The Alpha and Omega of our lives is also the Beginning and End of Romans 8. The name of Jesus is in the first verse and last. And in these verses we see not only who we are becoming but also who we already are in Christ: "There is . . . now no

condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus . . . [Nothing can] separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (vv. 1, 39).

We are not condemned because we are loved. God's love was manifest and condemnation cancelled out when God sent "His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh . . . Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen" (vv. 3, 34). We are not condemned, because Christ has condemned our sins in Himself. He is risen, and we with Him. This is the pure love and life that we are becoming.

As we look forward to being conformed to Christ and His resurrection, we cannot forget who Jesus is: the sin offering delivered up for us (vv. 3, 32). The starting line directs us to the goal. We long to be like Him while anchored to what He has done.

ROMANS 8

Spirit is how

But how is our becoming like Him possible? Something greater than I is needed – much greater: God’s own Spirit. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (v. 14). The Spirit follows closely after Jesus in Romans 8:1. Those who are not condemned in Christ are those who walk by the Spirit.

Romans 8 is Spirit saturated. He is mentioned nineteen times in thirty-nine verses. The sanctified life God has for us is “according to the Spirit” (vv. 1, 4, 5). Like the Shekinah glory with Israel and the wilderness tabernacle, the Spirit not only leads us but also dwells in us. This Spirit is life. And the Spirit gives life to those who follow (vv. 9-11).

Romans 8 tells us where the Spirit of Christ is taking us and what we have left behind. Like Israel’s exodus, the long journey of becoming means forsaking “the flesh” and “carnal mind.” These are at enmity with God. They rebel against God’s holy law; they cannot please God. We know that old way but don’t walk that way anymore: “To be carnally minded is death” (vv. 4-8).

We are not in the flesh but in the Spirit. The Spirit is moving us away from death and toward resurrection life and peace because

the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead lives in us. Amazing! We participate with the Spirit of God in this by following His lead and by overcoming the flesh by the Spirit: “If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (vv. 12, 13).

By God’s Spirit we are defeating the flesh and living His righteous law (v. 4). “We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (v. 37).

God is why

I don’t know about you, but I don’t always feel like a conqueror. The good news is that the Spirit is with us every step of the way. When the road is too hard to walk, we cry “Abba, Father,” and the Spirit himself bears witness to us that we are indeed the children of God and heirs of all His promises in Christ (vv. 14-17).

In our weakness, as we groan with fallen creation, unable to even speak and having little more than hope, even here the Spirit is present and makes intercession for us (vv. 18-27). The road of becoming is not always easy. It is often marked by labors and birth pains. But by the Spirit we eagerly, patiently await the delivery to come: “The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the

glory which shall be revealed in us” (v. 18).

Praise the Lord! It’s to that glory and glorification that God has destined us through His Son and Spirit (v. 29). God is why we are and where we are heading. When we arrive, He will be waiting.

So don’t lose heart along the way. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. And if something tries to, remember: “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (v. 31).

I learned it at age seven. By His working, we will become all He has purposed us to be. **BA**



Congratulations, Rose!

Writer Rose McCormick Brandon’s article “The Oh! of God” (March-April 2019 BA) won the award for best Inspirational/Devotional at the Word Guild, Canada’s Christian Writers organization. The ceremony is usually a gala event, but was held on Facebook last June.



Being ambassadors of reconciliation for a broken world.

by Israel Steinmetz

February 23, 2020: An unarmed 25-year-old man in Georgia ran past a house in the middle of the day, catching the attention of two men on the front porch. Suspecting he might be connected to local robberies, the men grabbed guns and chased the man down the road in their truck. Pulling ahead of him, the driver stopped the car, jumped out, and confronted him, shotgun in hand. Things escalated, and in moments the driver fired the gun twice into the runner's chest at point-blank range. It took months and a national campaign on the part of the fam-

ily's lawyers before the shooters were arrested, despite the fact that police had a video of the incident and prosecutors knew the killers by name.

March 13, 2020: An unarmed 26-year-old woman in Kentucky lay sleeping in bed with her boyfriend, exhausted from working as an EMT. Around 2:00 a.m., police executed a no-knock warrant, breaking down the door with weapons drawn. Her boyfriend, startled by the sound, pulled a licensed handgun from his night stand and exchanged fire with the officers through a wall in the home, resulting in his death and that of the young woman. The warrant being executed was for a person who had been taken into custody across town shortly before the raid. Months passed before any substantive efforts were made to address this tragic loss of life or

the police procedures that instigated it.

May 25, 2020: A teenage store clerk in Minnesota called police, suspecting a customer had given him a counterfeit \$20 bill. In response, officers detained the unarmed 47-year-old man, handcuffing and laying him face down in the street. With onlookers filming on cell phones, the arresting officer placed his knee on the back of his neck and held the man to the ground for nearly nine minutes. The man repeatedly begged to be let up, saying he could not breathe and calling for his mother. He lost consciousness. When the paramedics arrived and the officer finally took his knee off of his neck, it was too late to save his life.

Whose justice?

Senseless. Tragic. Horrific. Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor,

and George Floyd were all black Americans killed by white Americans. It is the latest chapter of a four hundred-plus-year history of slavery, oppression, discrimination, and injustice perpetrated against blacks in the United States by a government that claims the ideals of liberty and justice for all and a citizenship in which three out of four people claim to be Christian.

Even in the midst of a global pandemic and natural disasters, wars, political unrest, violence, disease, and dysfunction, the injustice highlighted in these three deaths has caught the attention of people around the US and the world protesting racism and police brutality. Yet many US American Christians turn away in disinterest and find a way to blame the victims for their oppressors' crimes. The oppression and exploitation still at work in the world today – even among God's people as we go about our religious rituals – are reminiscent of the dark days of the minor prophets. These men cried out against injustice in God's name, and their cry is as relevant today as it ever was: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24).

In the deeply divided partisan politics of the US today, the word *justice* is often wielded as a weapon by Democrats and scoffed at by Republicans. *Social justice* is a banner under which liberals attempt to impose their own secular morality on American culture, while conservatives reject social justice even when it echoes the wisdom and words of God.

God's justice

The word *just* and its cognates occur over five hundred times in English translations of the Bible in words as seemingly varied as *justly*, *justice*, and *justification*. But these words all have something central in common. In contrast to some modern concepts of justice and judgment relating to punishment for crimes, God's vision of justice is far broader and deeper. Justice captures an entire vision of things being the way they ought to be: love, equality, com-

have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one."

Injustice covers the earth because people cover the earth. And injustice breaks the earth and all its peoples, creeping into every nation, city, community, home, and heart. Humanity is broken by injustice. It comes in many forms – too many to count. Oppression and exploitation of the weak and vulnerable. Hatred of the stranger and of the immigrant, the refugee, and the

“God’s vision of justice captures an entire vision of things being the way they ought to be.”

munity, and peace. The *just* word family expresses a concept in biblical thought that flows from the very heart and character of God.

God is a just God, holy, righteous, merciful, and loving. The opposite of these things, *injustice*, is the work of people who are *unholy*, *unrighteous*, *unmerciful*, and *unloving*. Before we imagine someone we believe meets this description, let us all pause and confess Romans 3:10-12:

“There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all

poor. Racism and pride, sloth and envy, sexual immorality, and idolatry. Anger and war; selfish ambition and greed; envy and inequality. Injustice is any form of *unrighteousness* – any way in which things are not as they ought to be in God's eyes.

Isaiah 59 paints a bleak picture of injustice running rampant, but God does not leave us in despair with justice trampled underfoot. God's final word to injustice in Isaiah 59 is

“A Redeemer will come to Zion, And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,” declares the Lord. “As for Me, this is My covenant

with them," says the Lord: "My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring' . . . says the Lord, "from now and forever."

God promised a Redeemer and a covenant that would restore His justice to the world, a Spirit that would come upon His people and words of righteousness that would be theirs forever. Centuries later, Jesus would stand up in a synagogue in Naza-

good news brought hope to the poor, sight to the blind, freedom to the captives, forgiveness to the sinful, life to the dead. Justice triumphed over injustice as the Prince of life died and rose from the grave, conquering sin, death, and every injustice caused by them. As promised in Isaiah 59 (and Joel 2), God then poured His Spirit out on the world, indwelling and empowering Jesus' disciples to become His witnesses (Acts 1:1; 2:1-36).

gers and ministers of reconciling justice.

Like God's people of old, we too often take on the unjust words and works of our culture, and need to be reminded of God's heart. Micah described it as doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God (6:8). Jesus highlighted the same things as the weightiest matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faith (Matthew 23:23). Both spoke to religious people who claimed God's name but abandoned His heart.

Injustice covers the world today, but the injustice of racism is one that must be faced head-on by Christians who have all too often been complicit in it. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote to white clergymen in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (1963), "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Today, if you'll hear God's voice, don't harden your hearts. Don't allow politics and pride and power and privilege to prevent you from doing justice as ambassadors for Christ, with a message and ministry of reconciliation. Be the heart and hands and holy voice of Christ in our world. Bring reconciliation to the brokenness of racism that holds tight in our nation, communities, churches, homes, and hearts.

“We often take on the unjust words and works of our culture, and need to be reminded of God's heart.”

areth and announce His identity as this Redeemer with the words of another prophecy from Isaiah:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18, 19).

In the ministry and message of Jesus, this promise began to be fulfilled as He brought justice to the earth in the redemptive rule of His kingdom. Spirit-anointed preaching and practicing the

Do justice

Paul calls upon the Spirit-empowered witnesses of Jesus to be love-motivated ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14-21). God has entrusted us with the *message* and the *ministry* of reconciliation. In a world broken by sin and death in all their forms, Christians are commissioned to speak the words and do the actions that bring reconciliation with God and with one another. Christians are justified by a God of justice and commanded to be people of justice. As Christians we say "Yes and amen," but all too often we fail to embrace our identity and calling as messen-

Israel Steinmetz is dean of Academic Affairs for Artios Christian College, and he pastors New Hope United congregation. Scripture quotations taken from the *New American Standard Bible*.



A Glimpse

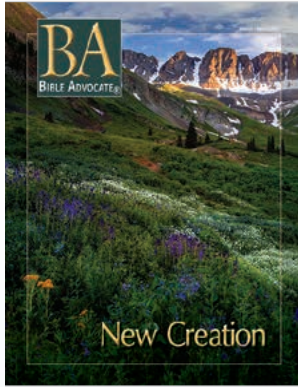
I catch a glimpse of who I was —
who I used to be.
A stranger now, but still so close,
lurks inside of me.
The invisible God is changing me
into someone new.
When He began I cannot say;
I only know it's true.
The stranger inside — my sinful self —
desires to rise again.
To her I must not cede control,
to live now as back then.
By the law I was condemned,
now in Christ stand free.
This new creation God has made
is all I desire to be.
Like a gentle comforter,
He gives me life anew.
His Spirit helps to live each day
obedient and true.

Linda L. Kruschke





Readers Write



Inspired theme

Thank you for all your efforts in producing the *Bible Advocate*, as well as the Bible Studies for Adults and the various other material you put out. . . .Your selection of reconciliation as the BA theme for 2020 [is] surely Holy Spirit inspired, given what has occurred in Minneapolis but also the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its profound negative effects upon all nations. . . . Keep on keeping on in your efforts to put out truly Holy Spirit publications.

R. M. R.
Cape Coral, FL

Salvation plan

I would like to draw your attention to the Nov-Dec 2018 issue of the *Bible Advocate*, "Statement of Faith 12: The Millennial Kingdom of Christ." You say that the unrighteous will be resurrected to eternal death. All humanity from the time of Adam [has] their first chance for eternal life. What about young children who die, or people in strict Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia, where Christianity is forbidden . . . ? They will be resurrected after the millennium and given their first

chance to accept Christ (Revelation 20:11, 12). God in His wisdom does not call everyone during this lifetime (John 6:44, 45). God calls whom He pleases. The majority of mankind will be resurrected after the millennium. Those who chose life will be given eternal life after accepting Christ. Those who, after being shown the truth and reject Christ, will be cast into the Lake of Fire and totally destroyed in the second death.

Thanks for looking into this matter, since the Church of God (Seventh Day) does not fully understand God's plan of salvation.

W. L.
Edmonton, Alberta

Editor's note: Your concern is one that has long vexed the heart of Christians. "But what about the . . . ?" I don't think the scriptures you cite support the specifics of your claim, and we must be careful not to speak too loudly where the Word is silent. But in the matter of His salvation and last judgment, we can rest assured that our Savior and Lord is loving, good, and true. Where we don't know, we can trust the just Judge to do what is right.

BA memories

I hope you can read this. I am eighty-six years old and a bit shaky today. . . . I love getting the *Bible Advocate* and look forward to their arrival. You know, my mother Edith Lippincott ran the linotype that printed the BA in Stanberry many years ago, so I have been reading for many years. I remember the old press . . . I am very low income so haven't had much money to donate, but with the stimulus, I can

donate to the BA. God blesses me greatly. I have unbelievable stories to tell of blessings that if you don't know God's power, you wouldn't believe them. Christian love and God bless.

M. A.
State, MO

Call for prophecy

As I read the BA, I see very little prophecy written in it and I wonder why — good pieces and articles, but very little biblical prophecy of what's going on today. . . . Maybe you could urge many CoG7 ministers to concentrate on doing that! I think it's a very important part of God's message to the world today. It's being neglected!

G. H. F.
Auburn, WA

Editor's note: You are not alone in your desire to see more prophecy in the pages of the BA. A regular prophecy column would be a nice addition as we navigate these troubling times, and anticipate the return of our Lord Jesus and a New Jerusalem. Ministers, here's the invitation.

Solution to puzzle (p. 17): "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18).



Thelma Willhelm

1929 - 2020

Thelma Dell Willhelm (90) of Campbellsville, Kentucky, was born October 17, 1929, in Bloomer, Wisconsin, to Louis and Cleone (Allmon) Harris. She departed this life on June 28 at the Grandview Nursing and Rehab Center in Campbellsville.

Thelma had made a profession of faith in Christ and was a member of the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Denver, Colorado. She was a beloved staff member serving the General Conference office for many years.

Thelma enjoyed creating lasting heirlooms; her crocheted and knitted keepsakes are dearly treasured. She had a strong work ethic throughout her life, and loved to travel and sing with her family.

Thelma is survived by her husband, William Harold Willhelm; two daughters, Lawanna Abell and Virginia Uhlir (Mike); four grandchildren (Jeff Uhlir, Cheryl Westfall, Willie Abell, and Amanda Kelley); ten great-grandchildren; and a host of other family and friends. She was preceded in death by a son-in-law, Greg Abell, and seven siblings.



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Want to know who won
the Young Writers Challenge
Contest? Find out in the
November-December BA!



On Mission ... In Portugal

by Paulo Jorge Coelho

The Igreja de Deus do Sétimo Dia de Portugal (ID7DP, or Church of God of the Seventh Day of Portugal) is a merger of two Sabbatarian Christian organizations: the Igreja Universal de Jesus Cristo (IUJC, or Universal Church of Jesus Christ), founded in 1931, and the Congregação Cristã de Portugal (Christian Congregation of Portugal), founded in 1941.

During the 1950s, there were contacts between the IUJC and the Church of God (Seventh Day) based in Denver, Colorado. For an unknown reason, that connection was lost. But thanks

to God and to previous contacts, a letter was sent in the 90s from Lisbon (Portugal) to the old address in Denver. After a few months of delay, the president of CoG7 at that time, Calvin Burrell, replied to the letter, restarting contacts between the two countries.

In 2002, the Church of Portugal became a member of the International Ministerial Congress (IMC) and participates actively in it, with human and financial resources. Since 2018, the ID7DP has obtained the status of Igreja Radicada (“rooted church”), the highest administrative status given by the Portuguese State to religious communities.

Church challenges

For several decades the number of ID7DP members has decreased. This happened for various reasons: a lack of evangelistic strategy and training adapted to the rapid changes in society, a “turning inward” of the Church, the internal divisive influence of former members influenced by liberal theology, and others involved in Judaizing messianic movements. In addition, the Church aged and did not know how to deal with adolescents and young adults, showing a lack of generational renewal.

This negative context led to a more than 50 percent loss of members compared to the

organization's "golden years" (1950-1970) that gave rise to the ID7DP.

However, despite this decline in human resources, the past few years have been characterized by an administrative consolidation of the Church in Portugal.

Strategic vision

God teaches us that we should not despise small things (Zechariah 4:10) and that even from stones He can produce children of Abraham (Matthew 3:9). So instead of lamenting over what the Church's existence in Portugal had become, one day, empowered by God, we would rise and rebuild what had been torn down (Nehemiah 2).

After prayer, group analysis, and reflection, the ID7DP adopted a new strategic vision in 2019. It is developed in the following concepts:

- Adopt a new leadership model that evolves from the traditional institutional and clerical model to a leadership model that equips each member to be active in the life of the Church. This transition requires a permanent commitment to formation so that mentality changes, starting with our national leaders.
- Extend the Church's vision to the life of each believer, thus expressing in their daily lives the presence of God's kingdom among us. This includes the creation of family and domestic groups, where they can live out kingdom principles.
- Increase usage of new technologies and social networks in the work of evangelization.
- Give greater attention to the younger generation.
- Provide salary for pastors. By

Portugal

Population: 10 million

Capital: Lisbon

Total area: 92,090

km /35,556 mi —

the most western

country in Europe (mainland Portugal, and the Azores and Madeira archipelagos in the Atlantic Ocean)

Political system: Parliamentary Democracy - Republic; member of the European Union (1986) and of the Eurozone (1999)

Language: Portuguese

Dominant religion: Catholic (80 percent)

Church of God - Seventh Day of Portugal

Pastors: 4

Active baptized members: 76

Local congregations: 5; domestic/family groups: 3

President: Paulo Jorge Coelho

Website: www.id7dp.pt

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ID7D.PT>

Email: aid7dp@gmail.com



tradition, all pastors of the Portuguese church throughout history were and are non-salaried.

- Reinforce the integration of the Church of Portugal into the Church of God (Seventh Day), united and global. The Portugal church is a member of the body

of Christ, based on her active and deep participation in the IMC. The Church should also take full advantage of all the resources and instruments (literature, training tools, etc.) made available by the larger churches





that are members of the IMC. These can be adapted by a small community like the Portuguese.

- Extend our evangelistic vision in relation to the Portuguese language (the ninth most spoken language in the world). We would also collaborate in creating the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Angola and Mozambique, as well as develop contacts in the other Portuguese-speaking countries (Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, East Timor), integrated in the international global vision of the Church of God and of the IMC.

The current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the speed and means

of implementing our projects in the short term. However, we give thanks to God because the Church had no members diagnosed with the virus, and the members remained spiritually united through using alternative means of communication we had available.

Special thanks

As one of the members of the global church, the Church of God (Seventh Day) of Portugal thanks the Church in the US and Canada. We also thank the other sister churches of all countries for their work for the kingdom of God. The integral health of our members and churches around the world reflects the work of

everyone. We are all part of one another in Christ Jesus. We count on your love and your prayers.

The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12, NLT).

Paulo Jorge Coelho

lives in Lisbon, Portugal, with his wife, Luísa. He pastors and is the president of the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Portugal.



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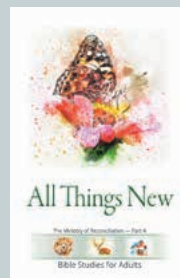
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Fourth Quarter Lessons

Have you enjoyed the Ministry of Reconciliation theme of this year's quarterly studies? With the fourth quarter lessons, *All Things New*, we come to the end of our series. The lessons stress that the purpose of God's ministry of reconciliation is nothing less than the new covenant and a new creation: "old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). We'll learn how as workers together with God, salvation dawns every day (6:1, 2).





Becoming

Part of the chorus of an old song pleads for patience, because God isn't finished working in me yet. That thought is biblical and reminds us to be humble as we faithfully focus on Jesus and follow His plan for our lives. No matter who we are or how long our experience in following Christ, we have not arrived. We don't yet know all that we need to know. We have not become all that we can become in Christ if, by God's grace, we continue to live in Him. We are still learning. We are still growing. We are still being changed. We are still becoming.

This wonderful and comforting truth about us and our brothers and sisters in Christ is suggested, or stated outright, in various New Testament scriptures. Two of my favorites are 1 John 3:2 and 2 Corinthians 3:18.

First John 3:2 reads, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (NASB throughout). In context, these thoughts are introduced by verse 1: "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God."

The word *bestowed* might better be translated "lavished." The word *see* is a call to join John in amazed contemplation of God the Father's expression of His love for us. What is that amazing expression? Verse 1b: "that we would be called children of God." Even more amazing (v. 1c): "and such we are."

"Think about it!" exclaims John. God calls us His children. And we are God's children! We aren't everything we eventually will be. We aren't fully like Jesus yet. But we will be. When Jesus returns, we will be like Him.

We are, but we aren't. We're on our way, but we haven't arrived. There is more we look forward to. We are becoming.

Second Corinthians 3:18 reads, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit." In context, this verse is the triumphant conclusion of a passage comparing the mindset and conditions of those trying to continue living under the old Mosaic covenant and of those embracing Christ and His new covenant. The former are restricted by hardened minds and veiled hearts. The latter are freed from those conditions and are being transformed, degree by degree, into the likeness of Christ. From glory to glory! From degree to degree! We aren't there yet, but as we focus on Christ and His glory, we are being transformed into Christlikeness ourselves. We are becoming.

The eternal kingdom of God is sometimes described in terms of "now, but not yet." It was announced, inaugurated, and demonstrated by Jesus Christ during His brief time on earth as a man. But the promised kingdom has not yet fully arrived. For that, we wait. We are citizens of a kingdom that is now, but not yet, and we are citizens who ourselves are now, but not yet. We are being transformed more and more toward what we finally will be when Jesus returns and we are glorified.

This is reason for confident hope and patient love. When Jesus returns, we will be like Him. In the meantime, we are becoming.

— Loren Stacy



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