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BA
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Faithful Friends



2021: Faithful



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My Friends!

“I have called you friends” (John 15:15). That’s what Jesus said to His disciples the night before His crucifixion. If you think about it, this calling is profound. If we are made friends of Jesus, by the cross, then how can those who obey Him be anything less than friends one with another? It’s a divine privilege to call you “my friends”!

I’ve been thinking a lot about friendship lately. This old world is determined to tear itself apart. Is there a friendship that can withstand it? Over the past year and under the weight of differences significant and trivial (politics, race, sex, vaccines, masks, social distancing), I’ve seen friendships grow tense and even snap. It’s not confined to the world; the contentiousness has sadly infected our churches too.

As I write, I am celebrating six years as BA editor. Without question, the best part has been visiting churches from all over, making new friends, and seeing old ones. These friends are different in so many ways, it’s a wonder we call ourselves friends. We do because Jesus called us to Himself as friends. Knowing we are created and redeemed by Him, our identity *in* Him surpasses all other identifiers and allows us to know one another as equally valued and forgiven. As meaningful as some differences may be, if our focus is on Jesus, there is no barrier to the friendships available through Him.

Do not let the world’s hostility ravage the reconciliation we have in Christ. Instead, may the church model Christlike friendship to a confused and conflicted world. In Proverbs we find key characteristics of our special friendship: “A friend loves at all times [and] sticks closer than a brother. . . . Faithful are the wounds of a friend . . . As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend” (17:17; 18:24; 27:6, 17). Faithful friendship! Ours is truthful, trusting, accountable, and restoring.

This last year separated us from the fellowship that nurtures friendship. I missed our campmeeting in Jasper, Ministerial Council, GC convention, and more. But as we re-gather as God’s people, let us focus on the miracle of what He has made us in Christ — *friends!* — and what that loving witness might mean for the world.

— Jason Overman





Practicing Hospitality

The art of opening your home and heart to others.

by **Becky LeRud**

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the multifaceted grace of God (1 Peter 4:8-10).

Hospitality seems to be forgotten or neglected in today's hectic lifestyles. Few people host dinner guests, prefer-

ring instead to eat out, or they allow busyness to keep them from doing anything at all.

Being hospitable is different from social entertaining, which focuses on the hosts. Such entertaining requires the hosts be relaxed and good-natured, the house spotless, the food tasty and abundant. Some may entertain, expecting a return invitation.

Hospitality, on the other hand, focuses on the guests and their needs. It involves warmth, friendliness, and generosity, and can take place in a messy house with a bowl of soup. We don't need an immaculate home and an elaborate menu that's taken hours to prepare.

Sometimes we're unwilling to offer hospitality because we're tired. Maybe our budget is tight or we don't think our home is good enough. But Peter speaks of hospitality as a strong expres-

sion of love and of a generous and uncomplaining spirit.

Early believers

Acts 2:46 describes the early church meeting in homes and sharing their meals: "Day by day continuing in one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart."

Travelers in Peter's day depended on fellow believers to give them a place to stay. The first churches were house churches, so church meetings were impossible without a willingness of people to open their homes.

Times of worship often centered around a meal. In that case, the burden of hospitality went beyond providing a room, even though many travelers

carried provisions with them. Hospitality drew people together and allowed them to get to know one another. The young churches Peter wrote to needed that interdependence, especially in a culture hostile to faith.

Attitude adjustments

Showing hospitality can be particularly demanding, so Peter adds the phrase “without complaint.” Guests eat up our food, our emotional energy, and our time. Especially unexpected guests can be inconvenient for many reasons. They may even be awkward, picky, or demanding people.

Still, Peter emphasizes that Christians must give hospitality without grudging and grumbling, whether secretly or openly. We don’t have the option of picking and choosing to serve only those who are charming or have the same interests.

While living in Africa, and later in Alaska, I identified personally with this verse from 1 Peter. In remote mission stations and in Eskimo villages where we lived, there was no alternative to having houseguests, since no hotel or restaurant existed. We were it. I learned the importance of offering hospitality in love, without grumbling, convenient or not, whether I felt up to it, and whether we were prepared or not. With both believers and non-believers in our home, I realized my testimony for the Lord was on the line.

Many food supplies were unavailable locally, so they had to be shipped in. Fresh foods were a luxury in Alaska. During our first year there, I wore out two can openers. We had to plan

carefully to make sure we didn’t run out of essentials. At first we refused to accept any sort of reimbursement for lodging and supplies, but we soon discovered that our budget needed a boost from frequent flyers. I learned to keep on hand a collection of tried-and-true recipes that I could quickly whip together. Baking large batches of bread was an important part of my schedule.

Meal preparation could be quite involved, since all our drinking and cooking water had to be boiled and filtered — a time-consuming process. One had to plan several hours in advance. This was true both in Africa and Bush Alaska.

One of our houseguests had four legs. When we lived in a small apartment in Brussels, Belgium, during language study prior to leaving for Africa, a missionary couple asked if we’d keep their poodle for a few days. The poodle turned out to be a full-sized canine, and the owners were gone for two weeks.

Our boys were delighted, but I was exhausted trying to keep peace with our landlord, who exploded at the thought of such a monster in the apartment. I heard words I didn’t think I needed to add to my missionary vocabulary.

During our first year in Africa, six European missionaries arrived at our mission station dur-

“ With both believers and non-believers in our home, I realized my testimony for the Lord was on the line. ”

Facing challenges

I had often been told that my gift was hospitality, but after entertaining some of our visitors, I began to doubt that. Guests ranged from the delightful to demanding to downright disreputable.

Not all visitors were clean. Nor did overnight guests keep their rooms clean. Clothing strewn over every surface, dirty bathrooms, and huge amounts of clutter invaded my comfort zone.

ing the dry season. This posed a problem, since our water supply came from barrels of water saved during the rainy season. We carefully rationed it because any additional water had to be carried up a steep hill in five-gallon buckets.

Most guests were thoughtful regarding water usage. However, one fellow decided it was time to wash his Land Rover. I gasped to see him lavishly splashing water over his dirty vehicle, especially

since he had driven up from the lake area the previous day where he had ample water. Being hospitable without grumbling challenged my resolve.

When we lived in Kampala, Uganda, things were less complicated as far as getting supplies and doing laundry for guests. We tried to be welcoming to all who came, including a half dozen Peace Corps workers. They definitely seemed ill at ease when we insisted they join the evening vesper time with other missionaries in our home.

However, they hummed along when we sang, and they listened

rants, most missionaries lived on tight budgets, especially those supported by faith missions. It soon became known that the welcome mat was out at our home. Out of curiosity, I once kept a log of the number of meals served. During a two-week period, we set ninety-four extra places at the table. Some were repeat boarders, but still, work and planning were involved.

Shared blessings

The admonition to offer hospitality without complaining was vividly conveyed during our Kampala stay. A missionary couple in

our lives were enriched by those dear people who had spent over fifty years in African villages. Their stories of God's faithfulness and provision, and the impact of the gospel in tiny communities where the name of Christ was unknown, encouraged our own desire to serve.

We loved having people in our home and considered it a gratifying ministry. I often said we held an open house for forty years. When we came back from Africa and built a new home in Oregon, we designed a guest room with an outside entrance and called it our "prophet's chamber," as with Elijah in 2 Kings 4:10. Missionaries still make it their home away from home.

Practicing hospitality can open doors for sharing the gospel. In the relaxed atmosphere of our homes, conversation can easily turn to God. Yes, it can be difficult and inconvenient, but the rewards are incomparable. **BA**

“During a two-week period, we set ninety-four extra places at the table.”

politely to the devotional. When bedtime arrived, we weren't sure who normally slept with whom, though it was obvious they were used to sharing rooms and bed partners. But we gave them little choice: "Gals, this is your room. Guys, you're down the hall!" The next morning was a flurry of warm hugs and thanks. We trusted God would use our hospitality in their lives.

Our two years in the city was a wonderful time of exercising the gift of hospitality. Although there were hotels and restau-

their early seventies was in the city for six weeks and needed lodging. Their son and his family lived nearby, but the daughter-in-law was adamant that their stay was to be brief. So we invited the older couple to our home. What a delight.

They blessed us far more than we could ever have blessed them. I thought it was sad that their daughter-in-law missed such a unique opportunity to have her children spend time with their grandparents. Her negative, complaining spirit bruised a relationship. On the other hand,

We are saddened to report that **Becky LeRud** passed away the year following her submission of this article to the BA. Living in Lebanon,



OR, she was a prolific writer, with her work appearing in a number of Christian publications. We thank God for Becky's faithfulness in ministering not only through her home but also through her writing. Scripture quotations are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*.

Abandoned

by **Fiona M. Jones**

In Kelso, Scottish Borders, you can buy a church — this church — for the price of a one-bedroom flat without a garden. All this could be yours: the gothic stonework, gargoyles, stained glass windows, and the cold echo of your footsteps as you walk inside. You could kneel in here alone like a hermit and pray for the world, or gather whoever will join you and try to fill this soaring space with candle smoke and hymns.

You won't buy it. Nobody will. Who wants the burden of repairs and maintenance on a listed building that cannot be altered from its origins?

And so, it stands, empty and unsought. The mosses and weeds have already claimed their places. The rain will find holes in its roofing, the birds will learn where they may nest, and the stones will erode and crumble here and there. In the end, the building will be deemed a hazard and be demolished, like an ancient temple sacked by invading armies — except that these are not armies but the years, decay, legalities, and logistics.

The town of Kelso has grown, but one imposing church after another stands empty now. She has endured centuries and erosion, dry rot, and the shrinking of the faith that carried her people through lives and deaths and wars and plagues, but she struggles, somehow, with the twenty-first century. One church entity, a small, shrunken group of aging members, wears out its knees in a tiny, rented building, a converted toilet block at the edge of a car park. The gates of hell cannot prevail against creation, and prayer is creation (God has said so). Perhaps all Christendom has sinned, and the candlestick is removed from its place. But He promised He wouldn't quench a smolder in the wick. And so, the prayers rise, still in expectation as they did from the people of the Exile in the Bible.



Photo courtesy of Fiona M. Jones

When these people finally get a new building of their own, smaller than the towering red stone edifice of their past, it will be the same story. Some will shed tears of gratitude, and others, who remember the glory of former times, will shed tears of sadness. And no one will know which is which.

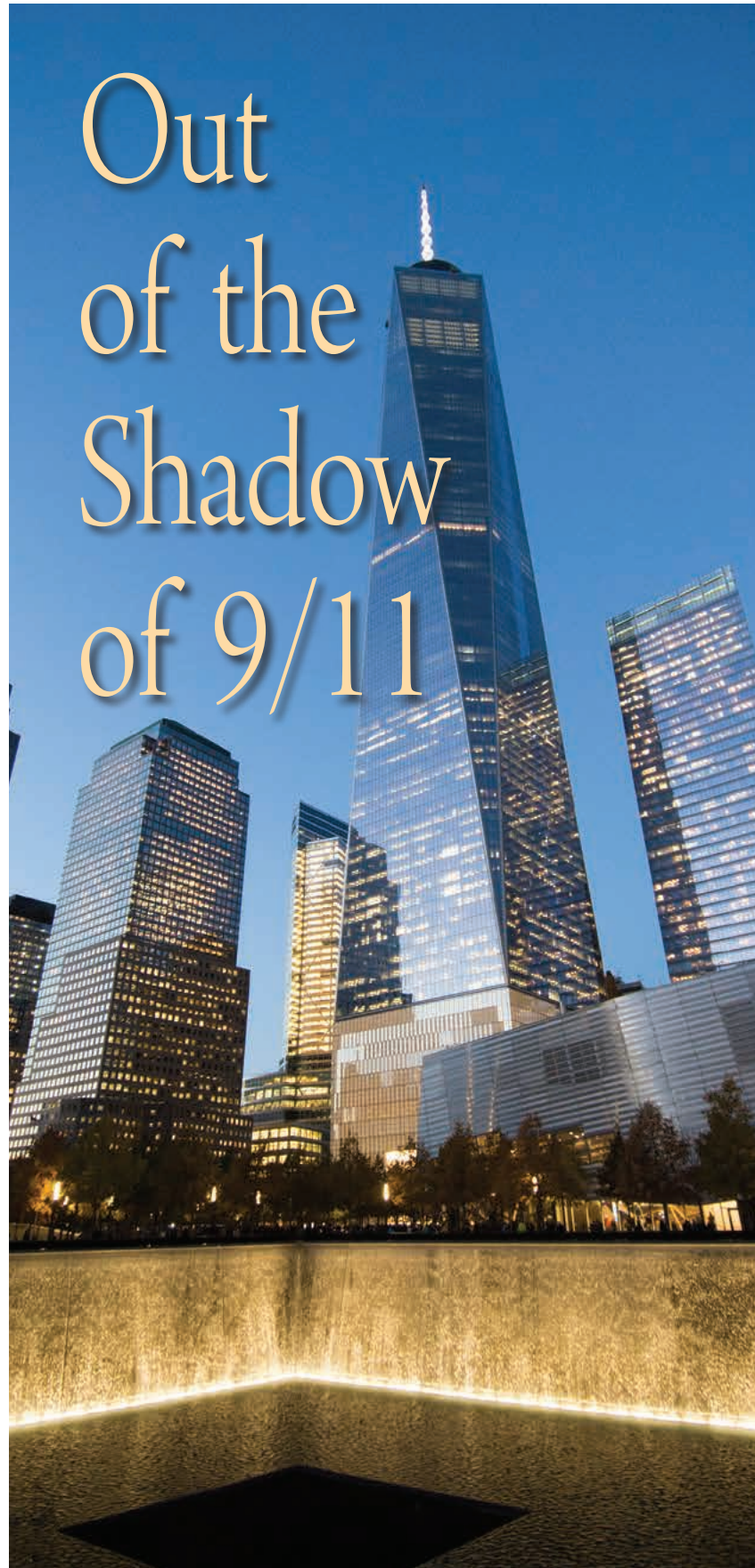
Because that's what happened in the Bible (Ezra 3:12, 13). The original temple of Solomon's design had been so much larger, more beautiful — ornate and luxurious, covered inside with pure glowing gold. The new one, more hastily built and with poorer resources, could never come close.

But — and this, after all, is what matters — that was the temple that would stand at the coming of the Son of David. That was the temple where the aging prophets blessed the newborn Child. The temple that Jesus visited, threw out the profiteers, and read out the words of the prophets. The temple where the curtain tore from top to bottom when forgiveness came.

It would have been nice if the original building had stood there in all its opulent glory. But when that doesn't happen, it's not the end, because the end is already written — and it's better than that. **BA**

Fiona M. Jones writes from Kelso, Scottish Borders.





Out of the Shadow of 9/11

Looking back and looking
forward with Jesus.

by **Christina Ray Stanton**

In September 2001, I was thrilled to be living again in New York City after a few months away. The city was booming. I rode the subway and walked through Central Park alone, feeling more confident and comfortable than when I first arrived in 1993 as an idealistic 23-year-old from Florida.

Barely past our first anniversary, my new husband and I had just settled into a new apartment, six blocks from the World Trade Center. As I stood on my twenty-fourth-floor terrace and gazed out at the bustling city, I knew all my dreams of success and an exciting life were finally coming true.

Attack

But those dreams came crashing down around me when Brian and I stood on that terrace and watched a passenger jet fly directly into the South Tower on the morning of September 11. The impact blew us back inside our apartment and frightened us so badly that we ran down 24 flights of stairs, still in our pajamas. I didn't even stop to put on my shoes.

We sought refuge in Battery Park at the tip of the island of Manhattan, but the area turned out to be anything but safe when the Twin Towers collapsed, smothering us with dust and debris. All around us, panicked people were running haphazardly, searching for an escape from

the chaos and devastation. Brian and I took cover by an old fort. Thinking we might not survive, I held Brian's hands and began to pray, hoping God would spare our lives. Although I had always considered myself a Christian, I knew I had never made Jesus the center of my life. Why would He answer me now?

But God did answer, and we did survive. We escaped Manhattan by boat, and friends — and strangers — offered us shelter when we couldn't return to our apartment. We were homeless for a couple of weeks and unemployed for much longer. The uncertainty stretched into weeks, and then months.

Aftermath

Immediately after the attacks, we started exhibiting signs of PTSD. Everything felt dark and oppressive. Brian spent his days sleeping. His body responded to the stress by shutting down and shutting off.

My body, however, reacted by going into a constant "high alert" zone. I was hyper, loud, and couldn't quit talking. Totally manic, I could hardly sleep. I was in a constant funk, affecting my relationships with friends and family. Aware of my increased anger and edginess, I disconnected and isolated myself from everyone and turned inward for a sense of protection. Even Brian and I communicated less, limiting our conversations to our agenda for the day.

As more and more facts about the attacks were revealed in news updates, I agonized over what I discovered. I scanned the papers daily for pictures and profiles of the dead and missing. The

median age of those who died was 35-39 years — only a few years older than me.

I learned about their lives, their hopes, their dreams, and those they left behind. Employees of 430 companies from 28 countries were doomed. Many of these people remained unharmed in their offices, even until the very end. They radioed for help; they called their loved ones. They used their Blackberry devices to ask family members what they were hearing on CNN.

They sent faxes and emails. They walked to the windows and looked out, talked on the phone, and turned to their fellow employees for comfort before fi-

I began to over-identify with those who died, and obsessed over the horror of their fate. It pushed me further into the dark hole I had already climbed into.

Seeking help

Never one to look at injustice or cataclysmic events and feel compelled to blame God, I still felt surprisingly detached from Him. In my struggle, I turned often to Psalm 116 and connected with the psalmist's experience: "The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came over me; I was overcome by distress and sorrow. Then I called on the name of the Lord: 'Lord, save me!'" (vv. 3, 4).

“ I knew I had never made Jesus the center of my life. Why would He answer me now? ”

nally succumbing to the growing flames, smoke inhalation, or the building's implosion. They fought to live the entire time while the towers were slowly dying.

I couldn't imagine the fear and anguish they must have felt in the long minutes between the attack and the demise of the towers — 56 minutes and 102 minutes. What a painfully long time to know you were doomed. Even a minute contemplating my own death seems too long.

As more information emerged,

I wasn't thinking in terms of how the Lord could help me personally in and through this crisis. I felt detached in general. I just couldn't ponder anything deeper than issues like where I would pick up donations that day and what we were going to eat for dinner that night.

Since I was having such a hard time expressing myself during this period, I felt I couldn't expose my vulnerability in therapy sessions. However, I slowly became aware that I needed help. A Christian friend from my home-

town was also a therapist, and I felt safe being myself with her. I contacted Carmela and set up a phone session. Once I started talking, I couldn't stop.

She told me that 20 percent of people living within a one-mile radius of the Twin Towers were suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, including me. I was shocked. I thought PTSD affected just soldiers returning from war.

faith and become a part of a faith community.

Trusting her judgment, I followed her instructions. As I healed and my faith grew stronger, I discovered a change in myself. The suffering and pain I'd experienced after the tragic events of 9/11 gave me compassion for others who were going through difficult times.

Most profoundly, Jesus met me at my darkest point, restored

I'm not. When I faced my hardest test on my own, I had no bedrock to keep me standing and no strength to endure.

I truly believe good things can come from extremely difficult circumstances. As I write this, I'm going on a year of unemployment due to the pandemic, and I am suffering long-haul syndrome from battling a case of COVID-19 that hospitalized me twice and threatened my life. But I know I can face these new challenges with a strength and an awareness I didn't have before.

If I had *not* been caught up in the destruction of 9/11, I might not be where I am today, and I might not be who I am today. Because of that experience, I was molded more into Christ's image, as Paul expresses in Galatians 2:20:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

I enjoy a deeper relationship with Christ. I have freedom to give away in increasing measure to others as a result of my trauma that day.

I now live with the assurance that through faith in Christ, I don't have to fear anything. My brokenness is where He meets me in His strength so that I may offer His strength to others. **BA**

“Jesus met me at my darkest point, restored me, and started me on a new path in life.”

“The attacks of 9/11 threw a wrench in your worldview and sense of safety,” my friend/therapist explained. “It tore the fabric of your daily lives. It's not like you witnessed a traumatic event in another country. It's where you live. It's where you go shopping and walk your dog and take tourist groups. Places you see everyday. Your mind is having a hard time accepting.”

Restored

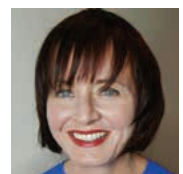
I continued our therapy sessions to address my PTSD, but Carmela had a spiritual checklist of things she wanted me to do as well. She encouraged me to open my Bible and meditate on Scripture, pray daily, and attend church so I could grow in my

me, and started me on a new path in life. Through my new hope in Christ and with help from a therapist, I was able to grapple with personal issues stemming from the attacks and other burdens I'd long been carrying around. I was forced to look inside myself and face the past. That journey brought me to a place of peace when I learned that I could build my foundation on Christ and His promises.

Broken and blessed

As I look back on the last twenty years, I am more aware than ever of the lasting effects 9/11 has had on my life. But while facing life-changing challenges, I learned more about who I am with Christ, and who

Christina Ray Stanton writes from Tallahassee, FL. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



Questions & Answers



How should we view 1 John 3:17, 18 and try to obey it? “But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”

We view this passage as one among many strong challenges given by Jesus and His apostles, urging Christ’s followers to love others as He loved us and to put that love into daily action as He did. How did Jesus love us and others? He went about doing good (Acts 10:38) — serving, teaching, touching, healing, helping, giving, and forgiving all the people He could for as long as He lived among us.

None of us are as capable of and consistent at loving others as Jesus was, but His example remains our goal and model. We do not love people to earn God’s merit for salvation or to prove how much like Christ we are. We practice love because masses in our world are hurting and because the Spirit of Christ in us urges us through the Word to do what we can to help. God so loved the world’s people that He gave. We’re learning to love them as well by sharing our time, talent, and treasure to lift heavy loads for all who bear them — around the corner and around the world.

A good first step may be for us to become more intentionally aware of the hungry, homeless, hurting, and hopeless in our churches, communities, and cities. Loving, giving, and serving begin at home, or not far off. Some of Jesus’ people have the courage and conviction — often with a small group linked through the church — to seek out and assist those whose need is most obvious in public places. Others will choose to offer their support through a rescue mission, Salva-

tion Army, Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity, etc. Based on the love and truth of our Lord, none of us should be content until we have found a way to put our feet, our hands, and our dollars into this struggle to assist the poor with their basic human needs for food, raiment, and shelter.

Your question focuses more on the priority of giving to brethren first. Most church organizations have a central office through which they receive funds to help believers in other countries and channel those funds through trusted indigenous brethren to those who need it most. In the Church of God (Seventh Day), that office is GC Missions (Abroad). We also maintain a Disaster Relief Fund that passes on 100 percent of donated dollars to relieve victims of recent natural or human disasters.

In addition to donating through the church of their choice, many Christians also support larger, non-denominational efforts that do much good around the world: Bread for the World, World Relief, World Vision, Samaritan’s Purse, etc.

For us, the task of loving and supporting people in need, beginning with our brethren (Galatians 6:10), is of the highest priority — right up there with taking the gospel of Christ’s kingdom to the world. At the same time, we readily admit that this work is too big for any one church or organization to accomplish on its own. Therefore, we gladly join our hands, hearts, and resources to collaborate with others who are committed to the same Word in obedience to the Lord Jesus.

To talk, to write, and even to agree about loving, helping, serving, and giving to the needs of others benefits no one — until our words become our deeds.

It’s our move.

— Elder Calvin Burrell

Faithful in the Wait



Choosing a life of sexual purity as a single.
by Sarah Buckland

On the outside, I am probably what many would deem an average millennial youth — aiming to get established into my career and learning to navigate the nuances of adulthood. However, those in my inner circle would attest that I have made some different choices from most youths around me. For one, I am 27 and a virgin who has also decided not to engage in peri-sexual activities.

I want to encourage others who may be on a similar journey or contemplating rededicating their life for purity. I attest that God's faithfulness in the wait

can manifest itself in unexpected ways.

Early conflict

Over the years, my decision to wait for sex until marriage received mixed responses among my peers. While some supported the idea, others in my circle seemed even more determined to break out. Attending an all-girl Catholic high school, I learned from others that having a boyfriend meant gazes of admiration, excitement, and increased popularity.

Friends in my circle spoke freely of intimacy. All the while, those like me who chose to wait often dealt with loneliness, rejection, and misunderstanding. Frequently seen alone in my outings, including my graduation prom, I questioned whether being alone would remain a never-ending struggle.

Blessings of obedience

In today's world, the commitment to purity remains unpopular, even to the point of ridicule, especially among many youths. With all the ideologies glorifying sexuality in our music, movies, advertising, and school curricula, it is not surprising. Despite the intermittent discomfort that celibacy can bring, this season has cultivated faithfulness through my decision to honor God with my body.

One of the biggest blessings I have experienced in the wait is heightened clarity of mind when dealing with temptations. Just as prolonged physical exercise strengthens the muscles, a conscious choice of celibacy brings heightened levels of patience and self-control. In my life, friends have told me of decisions they regretted. This proves that when a person takes one step

toward the edge, the pull of gravity becomes more evident, and resisting a fall becomes more difficult.

As the Bible illustrates in the story of David and Bathsheba, the creep of sin into a person's life is a real problem. David's lust for Bathsheba while she bathed led him to commit adultery, then murder (2 Samuel 11). This teaches us that making a conscious decision to flee from tempting situations goes a long way toward avoiding unnecessary entanglement and regretful actions. It's too bad David didn't do this.

When it comes to the lust of the flesh, depending on human clarity of mind may not be enough. I have found that when God sees your heart and intentions, He will block situations that can potentially derail your life.

Faithful God

One of the recurring experiences where I have seen proof of this is what I interpreted as unrequited love. My feelings were ready and high, but I felt invisible. In the moment, frustration and hope erupted like a twisted internal geyser — frustration over feeling invisible and hope that one day things would change, that the admired party would confess mutual feelings.

However, I have seen time and again how God's faithfulness is even manifested through short-term storms of aggravation and uncertainty, sparing me a potential lifetime of pain. Each of these unrequited love moments I soon found out worked for my good.

Through this season of singleness, God has also been faithful

in allowing me more time to truly understand myself — my purpose, my goals, and my vision. Accomplishments in ministry would likely have been delayed had I made different decisions regarding my sexual purity.

While the prospect of celibacy may be daunting to some, I continually strive to honor God in what I do with my body. It is a doable task in the twenty-first century — and certainly a fulfilling one. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:

“Although not always easy, the sacrifice to wait for God's best makes the wait a process with purpose.”

Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's (vv. 18-20).

Following Jesus

The journey continues, and although not always easy, the

sacrifice to wait for God's best makes the wait a process with purpose. As a Christian, my union with Christ makes me complete, with or without a spouse. And as the Bridegroom is always faithful in His promises to us, I have learned to humbly follow His leading.

For those who, like me, are on the road of celibacy, keep persevering! God's reward for faithfulness is sure, even if not manifested in ways we expect. For those whose life choices may

not have been similar to mine, living a pure life is one that has much fewer regrets. The faithfulness of God is so marvelous that each day is an opportunity to make a renewed effort to serve God with all we can.

I challenge you to try this road. Our faithfulness to God in daily life is the least we can give to such a faithful God! **BA**

Sarah Buckland
writes from Jamaica, West Indies.





Restless

by Alyson Rockhold

I look back over a year of roadblocks, missteps, failures, and frustrations.

I look ahead to a future shrouded in fear and uncertainty.

And all I want to do is sit down in the middle and cry.

Yet a nebulous sense of guilt keeps me from taking the rest I crave. The state of the world is so overwhelming: a global pandemic, a political battle, a fight for racial equality, an environmental tipping point. How dare I ask for rest? Surely all of these problems require me to do more, be more, act more, struggle more. Plus, I can't stop when I know ten people who deserve a break more than I do.

So instead of asking for help, I just keep dragging my burdens along with me. *No need to trouble Jesus over my pesky little problems!* I tell myself.

Amid this charade, I open my Bible and read

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30, NIV).

These wise, comforting words hit me like a slap in the face. I come to Jesus in prayer every day, but I am still weary and burdened. I must be doing something wrong. *If Jesus offers me rest, why do I feel so restless?*

I wrestle with this question for months, until one day God brings this insight: Choosing to rest is an act of trust. In fact, there is something in the way that the word *rest* nearly nestles itself in *trust* that makes me think one is a part of the other. Entering God's rest involves letting go of my imagined control over the details of my life (and the state of the world!) and trusting that He will lead and provide.

My arms can rest by my sides only if my hands release the reins to someone else. My mind can stop its anxious calculations, worries, and planning only if I truly believe that God is in control. My body can release its burdens only if I allow myself to be led.

When God led the Israelites through the wilderness, He insisted they stop and rest every seven days. They were desperate to reach the land God had promised them, but God deliber-

ately slowed their progress. They finally reached their destination after 40 years of wandering. Do you think they were tempted to look back at the 2,080 days of Sabbath rest they took and imagine how nice it would have been to reach their goal five-and-a-half years earlier?

I know I would've been doing that mental math, because I make similar calculations once I commit to taking a Sabbath rest each week. It hurts my workaholic, consumeristic heart to lay aside my important tasks for twenty-four hours. When my mind strays to my "to do" list on the day of rest, I remind myself that the outcome is in God's hands. His will shall be done no matter how I fill my time.

I am like a babe just learning to walk in this way of trust. I fight and buck against the yoke that is easy and the burden that is light. Some days I trust more in the terror I read in the news than in the truth of God's Word. However, God doesn't give up on me. Like a patient, loving parent, He keeps leading and guiding me.

With Saint Augustine, I am learning to press into the truth that "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless, until they find their rest in you." **BA**

Alyson Rockhold writes from Houston, TX.





Cheeses and Crackers

by Mike Wallace

In 1959, my family moved thirty miles across Los Angeles. We brought our two cats with us — Cheeses and Crackers. After a few days in our new home, Cheeses disappeared and never returned. But Crackers seemed content with her new surroundings and stayed with us for the next ten years until she passed away from old age.

About a month after Cheeses disappeared, my mother received a phone call from a former neighbor where we used to live. Cheeses was at their door. She had traversed thirty miles across Los Angeles roads and freeways and went back to our old home. Amazingly, Cheeses traveled about a mile a day, leaving her family for her former life. Like Lot's wife, she looked back. But Crackers stayed with us and remained faithful to her family.

When it comes to our faith,

are we Cheeses or Crackers? Do we have the faith to stick with the family God has called us to, or do we long to return to our old neighborhood the way Cheeses did? Paul tells us in Romans 8:14-17 that we are God's children and have been adopted into His family. How magnificent is that! But it isn't easy being in the family of God. Distractions set before us every day can cause us to return to our former lives if we do not remain faithful.

Do not allow yourself to be distracted from seeking first His mighty kingdom and remaining in His family (Matthew 6:33). Hebrews 12:1, 2 reminds us that we will have snares and heavy weights in our daily lives, but we must "run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." It takes faith to stay the course.

Jesus tells us that in the last days "he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel

of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:13, 14). We have a job to do: endure to the end and preach the gospel of the coming kingdom of God to *all* the world. It is not an easy job.

To "endure to the end" takes faith — faith in God and faithfulness to His family. Life is a long-distance race, and we must keep running no matter what happens, not being distracted from our calling.

As the return of Christ nears, are we going to be Cheeses and return to our old lives? Or are we going to be Crackers and stay with the family God has given us? I choose Crackers! **BA**

Mike Wallace
writes from Florence, MT.



■ [Focus on the Faithful]



by Jason Overman

You may be wondering *which* Mary this article is focusing on. You have probably noticed that there are many Marys in the New Testament. At the cross, we are told that “many women” followed Jesus (Matthew 27:55), but of those named, Mary is the most common. John indicates the popularity of the name when his list of three ladies at the cross were all Marys (John 19:25).

Why focus on just one Mary when each is a portrait of faithfulness and model for the church? Here, we’ll look at all of them.

Many Marys

But first, why are there so many Marys?

Mary is derived from the Greek *Maria*, which translates the Hebrew *Miryam*. The deep regard for the name among first century Jewish parents likely came from its association with one of Israel’s greatest heroines of faith, Miriam the prophetess,

the sister of Moses and Aaron (Exodus 15:20). So popular was the name among the Palestinian Jews of the period that historians like Richard Bauckham — surveying burial inscriptions, papyri, and literary sources — estimate that as many as one in five females were called Mary.

This historical curiosity explains why we see so many Marys in the New Testament record. The name resonated with Israel’s memory of and hope for deliverance. Jesus is God’s answer to those hopes of salvation. So only He can account for the picture of faithfulness these many Marys paint for believers to imitate. Let’s look briefly at each one. I count seven in all.

Mary, the mother of Jesus
(Matthew 1:16)

Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:2)

Mary of Bethany (Luke 10:39)

Mary the mother of James and
Josés (Mark 15:40)

Mary, the wife of Clopas (John
19:25)

Mary, the mother of John
Mark (Acts 12:12)

Mary, the co-worker of Paul
(Romans 16:6)

Mary of the Spirit

The most famous Mary of all is the mother of Jesus. We could write many articles on her alone. Her presence brackets the entire gospel story, from the good news of the angel Gabriel regarding the conception of Jesus to the birth of His church on the day of Pentecost (Luke 1:27; Acts 1:14). Notably, where we find Mary, the Holy Spirit is present and working (Luke 1:35; Acts 2:4).

Gabriel said to Mary, “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!” (Luke 1:28). And she was *with the Lord* in His most intimate moments: birth, circumcision, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension. The mother of Jesus is Mary of the Spirit because she was willing to be led, moved by God. Her faithfulness is heard in her submissive reply to Gabriel’s announcement: “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word” (v. 38).

Mary the Witness

Maybe the most well-known and one of the earliest of Jesus’ female disciples was Mary Mag-

Mary

dalene. She experienced the good news in the most dramatic way, when Christ cast seven demons out of her (Luke 8:1, 2). From this life-changing moment onward she would stick faithfully by His side. For her love and loyalty to Jesus, all four Gospels recall this Mary as the preeminent witness of His crucifixion, burial, and resurrection (Matthew 27:28; Mark 15:16; Luke 23:24; John 19:20).

Mary the Witness was the first to see the risen Lord (“He appeared first to Mary Magdalene,” Mark 16:9). And, once Jesus called her by name, she was the first to be *sent* by Jesus as a witness of the good news to others (John 20:11-19).

Mary of the Feet

Another well-known disciple of Jesus was Mary of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus and Martha. This Mary is special among Jesus’ female followers, being twice praised for her devotion to Him and, with Martha and Lazarus, called “loved” by Him (Luke 10:42; John 12:7; 11:5). But it is a specific posture that demonstrates Mary’s faithfulness and why she was so special: Ev-

ery time we see Mary, she is at Jesus’ feet.

Mary sat at Jesus’ feet to hear His words, Mary fell at His feet in grief at Lazarus’ death, and, most extravagantly, Mary knelt at His feet to anoint them and dry them with her hair (Luke 10:39; John 11:32; 12:3). Her position of humble devotion makes Mary of the Feet a model of faithful discipleship for women, and men, to this day.

Marys of the Cross

Other than their names, not much is known about the wife of Clopas and mother of little James and Joses. Some think that they’re the same person (Mark 15:40; John 19:25). Maybe. What is important is not so much who they were than where they were. We find them at the cross with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene — a company of faithful friends and followers of Jesus to the end. It’s significant that the name Mary is clustered most densely in the Gospel accounts of the cross.

Marys of the Church

We get only one intriguing sentence each for the remaining two Marys of the New Testament. At the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, the church gathered in earnest prayer when Peter arrived after escaping from prison. She is the picture of hospitality for the church assembled (Acts 12:12).

Of Paul’s beloved co-worker in the gospel we have a single line: “Greet Mary, who labored much for us” (Romans 16:6). She is a good conclusion to what it means to be a Mary. Being with Jesus, transformed by Jesus, being witnesses of God’s word and work in Jesus, Mary is representative of a faithful disciple who rises from their feet at the cross and, through the power of the Risen, works by faith, laboring in love for others.

The church is often likened to a woman, a wife, a mother. If we were to give her a name, I would call her Mary. **BA**

by Whaid Rose

Genesis and Revelation are bookends to God's big story. Genesis tells us how everything got started; Revelation explains how it will all end.

Their similarities and contrasts are intriguing: creation of heaven and earth, creation of new heaven and new earth; a garden, a city; tree of knowledge, tree of life; death pronounced, death destroyed; marriage of first man and woman, marriage supper of the Lamb.

But Genesis is more than just about how the world began. Its backstory of the world God first intended can teach us about how life works, and how it doesn't.

For example, the creation narratives remind us that we can be creators of order and beauty in a world that tends toward chaos and disorder. God's speaking the world into existence underscores the power of our words, a principle almost lost in today's culture of lies and conspiracies. We also glean that our lives are more productive when we yield to the rhythms and patterns God established at creation, including

"morning and evening," "it was good," and "God rested."

Joseph's dreams

In view of all this, the fact that the author of Genesis spends more time on Joseph's story than on any other should give us pause. No one else in Genesis — not even Abraham — gets as much screen time! Furthermore, unlike the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, where God was actively and obviously present, His presence in Joseph's story is implied. He is definitely there but operates from the shadows.

Most significant, at least for me, is that Joseph's story pivots around dreams. God gave Joseph a dream not only once but multiple times (Genesis 37), and around the fulfillment of those dreams God wove the story of the birth of the nation Israel.

Each of us has a dream, a desire to fulfill some special purpose in life. We dream because we bear the image of the original Dreamer. Standing on the balcony of space long before creation, God dreamed of a beautiful world inhabited by people like you and me.

So we can't help but dream.

God fulfills some of our dreams, demonstrating that even those that are bigger than life are not beyond the reach of His wise providence. This is Joseph's story. His brothers hated him because of his dreams and the favored status Jacob gave him, and because Joseph's sincerity of character outweighed their own (Genesis 37:2, 3). It is true what James Thomson said: "Base envy . . . hates the excellence it cannot reach."

God's purposes

One day when Joseph came to see about his brothers' needs (v. 14), they carried out a plot to rid the family of "the dreamer" (vv. 18-20). Heeding the counsel of Reuben and Judah, instead of letting Joseph die, they sold him to a band of Midianite traders, who took him to Egypt (vv. 21-28).

Here the overarching lesson of Joseph's story begins to emerge: God can turn our disappointments into His appointments, our pain into His purpose.

We see this in what happened to Joseph in Egypt. First, he was sold to Potiphar, captain of Pharaoh's palace guards (v. 36).

to the Vision

This began a series of tests of Joseph's faithfulness to God's vision in his heart. He became ruler over Potiphar's house, but when he resisted Mrs. Potiphar's advances, he was thrown into prison (39:19, 20).

Second, this stumbling block became Joseph's stepping stone:

But the LORD was with Joseph in the prison and showed him his faithful love. And the LORD made Joseph a favorite with the prison warden. Before long, the warden put Joseph in charge of all the other prisoners and over everything that happened in the prison (vv. 21, 22, NLT).

Suffice it to say, through these relationships and a God-directed set of circumstances, Joseph became ruler over all of Egypt, second in command to Pharaoh (Genesis 40-41).

Third, with incontrovertible evidence that his dreams were from God, and having at his disposal the wealth and power from being ruler over the world's greatest empire, how would Joseph fare as a leader? Would he pass the character test?

Ultimate character

Andy Stanley is credited with saying "Your character is the internal script that will determine your response to failure, success, mistreatment, and pain."

This played out in Joseph's story when a worldwide famine brought his brothers to Egypt (Genesis 42-45). Here at the zenith of the story lies Scripture's most heart-warming account of genuine forgiveness.

As Joseph explained to his brothers, what they meant for evil against him, God meant for good (45:5). This is providence, the classic Christian doctrine affirming that God is active in all the affairs of this world, superintending all things according to His divine purpose. And it is beautifully illustrated in a dysfunctional family.

Providence puts life in a hopeful perspective, especially in a world that is falling apart. It speaks to Joseph's faithfulness, both to the vision and to God, which seems to eclipse any regard for the wealth and power of Egypt. This is seen in Joseph's deathbed instruction for his family to carry his bones to Canaan with them when God delivered Israel (50:25).

So remember that Genesis, the book of primary reference, highlights the power of vision and that as a leader, you are a steward over that vision. Faithfulness to it will merge your story into God's big story.

Scripture warns against the danger of vision-less leadership (Proverbs 29:18). Too bad our dreams often get lost in the clutter of life and ministry. Some people simply forget to dream. But Joseph's story beckons us to dream again and shows how dreams are born, tested, and realized.

Therefore, through the power of Him who is able to do exceedingly more than we can imagine (Ephesians 3:20), let's keep our dreams alive! **BA**

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





A Faithful Friend

King David was running for his life — again! The first time, he fled from King Saul, his father-in-law. David had been a favorite in his court. As Saul's influence lessened and the young David gained in popularity, Saul's feelings changed to envy, then hatred, and he tried to kill David.

David sought refuge in the court of King Achish in Gath. The king's advisors warned, "Don't trust David. Remember the women who sang 'Saul has killed his thousands and David his ten thousands?'" King Achish began to look at David with mistrust. David's earlier welcome was wearing off, and the king was afraid. Pretending to be a mad man, David escaped.

This time, David was running from his own son. Absalom held a grudge against his father and plotted to take over as king in Jerusalem. Leaving the outcome in God's hands, David gathered his household and fled, fearing for the safety of the city if he remained.

Ittai (pronounced "IT-uh-eye," meaning time-ly) was a Gittite and refugee from Gath with six hundred men, and he had recently joined David. Perhaps Ittai and David had met in Gath. Now he prepared to flee with David.

"Why?" David asked him. "Go back! Stay with Absalom! This is not your fight. Why wander the countryside with me? I have no idea where we're going. May mercy and truth be with you!"

Ittai responded, "As the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, surely in whatever place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life,

even there also your servant will be" (2 Samuel 15:21).

David was overcome with this affirmation of friendship and loyalty. "Go, and cross over" (v. 22). So Ittai and his men joined the long line crossing the Kidron Brook.

Absalom and his followers took pursuit. A fierce battle took place, and Absalom, who had wanted to be king, was killed. Hearing the news, David hid and cried because he still loved his son: "Be kind to Absalom. Spare his life." The soldiers should have been happy at the victory. Instead they felt ashamed and slunk back to their tents, the victory feeling more like a loss.

Joab told David to quit crying. "If you don't show up and talk to the soldiers, they will all go home and leave you alone. They were faithful to you. Now you do the right thing and be faithful to them." So David dried his tears and went out to the soldiers who all gathered around him.

We know nothing more about Ittai; he may have lost his life in the battle. We do know he was faithful to David. Remember his promise to David? "As the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, surely in whatever place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also your servant will be." Ittai was a faithful friend.

Other friends may turn on you, but Jesus is the best friend you can ever have. He knows how you feel. Read about Him in your Bible, and talk to Him when you pray.

Code
Chart
Puzzle

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
2	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
3	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U
4	V	W	X	Y	Z		

$\overline{11}$ $\overline{61}$ $\overline{43}$ $\overline{22}$ $\overline{51}$ $\overline{72}$ $\overline{41}$ $\overline{52}$ $\overline{13}$ $\overline{14}$ $\overline{51}$ $\overline{53}$ $\overline{11}$ $\overline{63}$ $\overline{11}$ $\overline{52}$ $\overline{52}$
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Use the code chart above to match the number codes with letters. The solution to this puzzle describes a true and faithful friend. The numbers in the top and left rows of the chart represent the double-digit numbers in the codes. Write the letters that appear in the

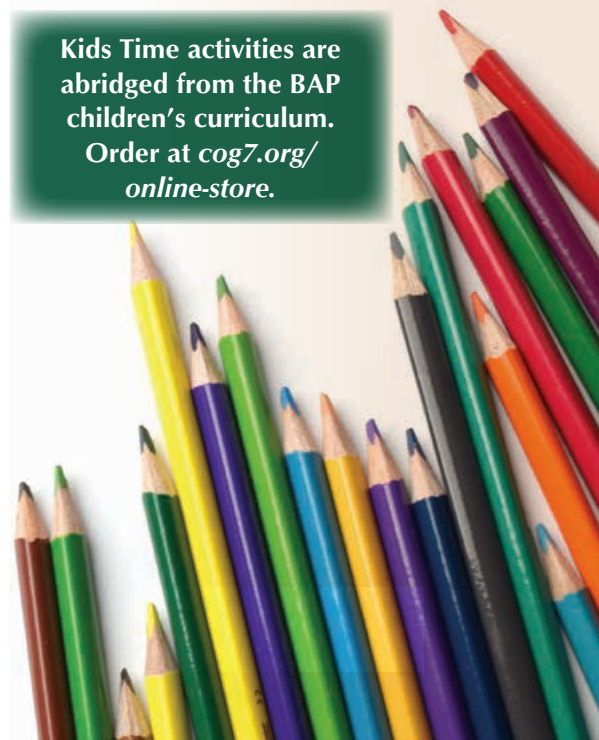
intersecting squares of those numbers in the corresponding blanks above. For example, the letter "F" is in the square for code 61.

The solution to this puzzle may be found in Proverbs 17:17 (NIV). See page 26.



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





Living Water

Thriving in the Holy Spirit.
by Shirley Brosius

Winter weather chapped my hands. Even though I wore gloves and applied lotion, my hands remained rough. Then one day a heart condition prompted an ambulance ride. As a medic attempted to insert an IV needle, he remarked, “You’re dehydrated! That might have triggered your heart condition.”

All my life I drank whenever I got thirsty. But that was the problem: I rarely get thirsty. So I bought an insulated water bottle that holds two cups, and I now drink three bottles of water each day, besides what I drink at meals. It’s taken a lot of discipline to keep drinking, but staying healthy makes the effort worthwhile.

My increased water consumption brought a delightful surprise: My hands rarely chap. Water on the inside of the body evidently

benefits the outside of the body.

That reminds me of the benefits of the living water Christ offered to the Samaritan woman. Too often we think we can be happy only if we draw a good salary, own a nice house, and enjoy luxurious vacations. But like my gloves and lotion, those are external influences. True contentment and happiness come from an internal source: the living water Christ offered to the woman at the well, recorded in the Gospel of John. That living water is God’s Holy Spirit.

With the Spirit within us, we find contentment in a hovel or a hotel. We enjoy a hamburger as much as a steak. We appreciate God’s grace each moment of the day.

Things may not always go right. We might lose a job, lose a loved one, lose our health. But we know that Christ walks with

us and that His Spirit of grace sustains us. That living water is as vital to our spiritual life as water from the tap is to our physical life.

Physical and spiritual water

Did you know the body is composed of 60 percent water? We need to constantly replenish what we lose through perspiration and other bodily functions. Water helps regulate our body temperature, flushes out wastes, and lubricates joints. It also helps our brains to function, fights off illness, and improves circulation. Without water, we cannot live long.

In the same way, we need the Holy Spirit for healthy souls. Jesus told the disciples it was good for Him to go away because He would send the Holy Spirit. Jesus then would be with His disciples, and His Spirit would indwell the life of every believer down through the ages.

As I ponder this truth, I realize how the Spirit faithfully nourishes every area of my spiritual life, just as water nourishes my body.

Spirit's role

Assure of salvation. "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory" (Ephesians 1:13, 14, NKJV).

I grew up in a Christian home, and I read Scripture and prayed pretty regularly. Raised on a farm, I had a strong sense of

God through nature. But I wondered, if Jesus really was God's Son, why did He have to suffer and die? Then after watching Christian television crusades as a young adult, I took a step of faith and told God I acknowledged Christ as my Savior.

That step brought the Holy Spirit, God's divine Helper, into my life and opened my eyes. Scripture suddenly made sense. God is holy, and only those who are pure and perfect can come into His presence. I needed a perfect Savior to represent me before the Father and secure my salvation.

Convict of sin. "So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man" (Acts

them in context. Of course, the Spirit may also teach me through commentaries and books by scholars who have studied Scripture and the cultures of Bible times. My part is to pray and be discerning.

Guide in prayer. "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans" (Romans 8:26). The Spirit prays through me when I'm at a loss for words and overwhelmed with the cares of this world, or when I simply don't know how to pray for a difficult situation.

Comfort in the night. "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that

“With the Spirit within us, we find contentment in a hovel or a hotel.”

24:16). I feel guilty when I gossip about someone or do anything that displeases God. The Spirit wants my life to honor God.

Explain Scripture. "The Holy Spirit . . . will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). As I read Scripture, the Holy Spirit helps me understand passages and reminds me to read

he may abide with you for ever (John 14:16, KJV). When I grieve or worry about life's circumstances, the Spirit comforts me in the night by bringing to mind memorized Scripture. He quiets me as I read psalms that help me express my emotions.

Help to bear fruit. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness,

goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22, 23). As I call on God, the Spirit equips me to show gentleness and self-control when I lack patience and want to snap at my husband or children. The Spirit equips me to face the day so that my life blesses others by serving them spiritual fruit.

Guide in serving God. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the

her as the Messiah she searched for. So did mine.

She must have taken His claim seriously for, leaving her water jar behind, she ran back to her town to invite others to come meet this special Man. The water jar may represent not only her old lifestyle but also her shame, guilt, and rejection. The woman discovered that the very One who had the most right to reject her was the very One who loved her most. She drank of that living water and immediately shared it with others.

“The Spirit faithfully nourishes every area of my spiritual life.”

Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19, 20).

When my children were young, the Spirit nudged me into leading after-school Bible clubs. As they matured, I served as a director of Christian education. Now that I can’t be as physically active, I write inspirational articles. The Spirit has always led me into service for which I’m suited physically, socially, and mentally.

Changed life

I believe the life of the Samaritan woman changed dramatically after Jesus revealed Himself to

Drinking water satisfies me physically and keeps my hands from chapping, and the living water that Christ offers satisfies me spiritually. God’s Spirit whispers to my spirit, “You are My child, My loved one.”

Ask God to make you thirsty for living water, and then thank Him for the faithful ministry of the Holy Spirit that satisfies your thirst. **BA**

Shirley Brosius writes from Millersburg, PA. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise noted.



You can pull up articles from our Online Exclusives (English and Spanish) anytime on your device. Here are some features you may have missed.

Amazing Grace by Oscar Mata. As a CoG7 pastor and hospital chaplain, Oscar shares insights from his contact with COVID-19 patients who need the touch of Jesus.



Three Keys to Enduring Suffering by Marcellus George. Jesus said that we can expect trouble in this world while we’re waiting for His new kingdom. Marcellus turns to 1 Peter for ways believers can survive their trials.

Reconciliation in God’s Time by Abel Zaragoza. The author takes us back to the story of Jacob and Esau and the amazing ways God can heal feuds among family members.

Visit baonline.org for more Online Exclusives, including this issue’s on whether Christians should go to war.

Defiant Faith

Oh give me, Lord, a faith unbound
By doubts and fears that may assail.
Grant me, I pray, a faith that's more
Than what's behind, or what's before.

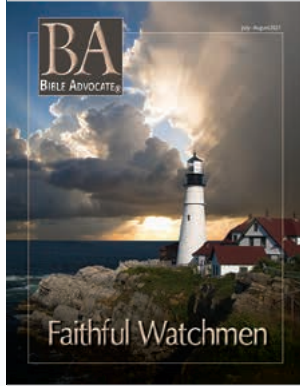
A heart that longs to see Your face,
A soul unchanged by time or place.
Oh give me, Lord, with all Your grace
A strong and still defiant faith.

Nathanael Reed





Readers Write



Sin and salvation

Editor's note: Below is a follow-up question in response to the Q&A in the July August issue: "Do Christians lose salvation when they sin?"

What about Hebrews 10:26?

K. G.
Email

Response from Elder Calvin Burrell: Hebrews 10:26 is one of many Bible texts that caution us about presuming upon God's grace, either by turning away from the Savior who gave His all for our redemption at the cross or by intentionally and continually walking in sin after being once cleansed by Jesus' blood. Several of these texts are in the book of Hebrews, where the writer's main concern is for those Jewish (Hebrew) followers of Messiah who were experiencing severe trials and suffering for their faith in Christ. They

were being tempted to turn away from their Christian faith and return to Moses and the old covenant faith of Judaism. The entire last half of Hebrews 10 repeats the warning again and again: No turning back from Jesus to Moses. Such a turn means a complete and total loss of all the advantages and benefits of the new covenant that was won for us at the cross, at the empty tomb, and by Jesus' intercession for us in heaven.

*The key point to learn and remember from Hebrews 10:26 and similar warnings is **not** that we lose our salvation through human weakness or the daily faults (sins) that easily beset us. Comparing this verse with 1 John 1:9, for example, leads us to conclude that Hebrews 10:26 must refer to the sin of apostasy — of turning away from Christ as our Savior and going back to our old ways of rebellion and unbelief. This is implied by the words sin willfully — intentionally and continually, with no more regard for the sacrifice Jesus made. That is a return to darkness and death.*

Compare this also with Numbers 15:30, where a similar warning was given to the children of Israel. They must not sin "presumptuously" or "with a high hand" (ESV, or "defiantly," NIV) because to do so puts them in danger of apostasy and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, for which there is no

forgiveness, according to Jesus' teaching.

Concerning Hebrews 10:26 and other similar texts, yes, they do warn us that losing our salvation is possible. But they also comfort us that we do not lose it easily through our human frailty. To the contrary, the only thing that results in a loss of our redemption in Christ is to cease believing and trusting in Him, turning our back on Him, rejecting the salvation that came by God's grace through faith in the only Son, our Savior. When we came to Christ at the start, our good deeds did not secure our place in His family; faith opened salvation's door for us. Similarly, if we are to lose our place in God's family, our individual misdeeds or flaws or failures do not push us out of the house; failure to continue in faith does. Read this in Hebrews 3:12 — 4:11. Read it again in Hebrews 7-10. Hebrews 11 sings the praises of faith for all of the redeemed. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world and secures our future in God's kingdom.

Puzzle Solution

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for . . . adversity.



David Ross

1981 - 2021



Pastor David Ross (39) of Owosso fell asleep in Jesus on Sunday, May 16, with his wife at his side.

David was born August 28, 1981, in Midland, Michigan, to Leonard James Ross and Debra Joy Britcher. After high school, David earned a BA in Biblical Studies, a Master of Theology, and a PhD in Christian Education from International Seminary.

On July 31, 2015, David married Makayla Jill Schlenker in Owosso. In the next five years, they welcomed three daughters: Neva, Selah, and Eden. David was a family man, treasuring time spent with his wife and daughters and proudly wearing the title “girl dad.” He was passionate about the Word of God, spending hours each day reading and talking about it to anyone who would listen.

David pastored the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Owosso. He shared his Bible knowledge by writing the year 3 series of the TVR quarterly. He also instructed apologetics classes at Spring Vale Christian School and was in the process of earning a DMin in apologetics from Southern Evangelical Seminary. He had recently been hired as dean of academic affairs for Artios Christian College.

David was active in the community, serving on the advisory board for Angel’s Hands Outreach and as a member of the Owosso Area Ministerial Association.

David is survived by his wife, Makayla; their daughters Neva, Selah, and Eden; his mother,

Debra Cadieux; stepmother, Barbara Ross; sister, Jennifer (Scott) Margrif; stepbrothers, Jimmy (Helen) McTheeney and Lenny (Melissa) McTheeney; and grandfather, David Britcher.

He was preceded in death by his father, Leonard; grandmother, Noreen Britcher; and paternal grandparents, Earl and Helen Ross.

For more information on David’s life, please visit the Memorials page in Churchright Online (churchright.org).

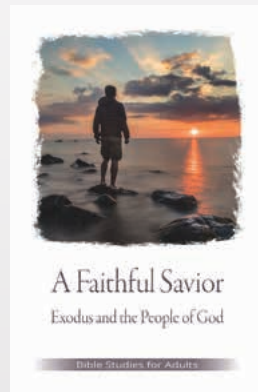


A Faithful Savior

The “Faithful” quarterly series concludes 2021 by focusing on our great God and Father. He has called us to be faithful covenant partners, and it is our heart’s desire to be true. And yet, as we reflect on the long and winding story of Scripture, we know that there would be no story — no Abraham, no Peter, no us — if not for our Creator and Savior who alone is fully faithful.

The fourth quarter lessons study God’s faithfulness to Israel in her Exodus and how her stories are examples of His faithfulness to us, in Christ, in all circumstances. Whatever the obstacle, wherever we find ourselves, the Bible has taught us to say, “But God is faithful” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

To order copies of *A Faithful Savior*, visit the online store at cog7.org.





On Mission ... in Kenya

by **Abrahams Wanda Odongo**

Kenya is located in the eastern part of Africa, covering 591,971 square kilometers. It borders Somalia, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Sudan to the north; Uganda and Tanzania to the west; and the vast Indian Ocean to the east. Kenya's population of approximately 48 million is composed of 43 tribes. Nairobi is the capital of Kenya, with a population of about 4 million.

Kenya is predominantly a Christian nation (approximately 80 percent), though the Muslim and atheist populations have been steadily increasing. Catho-

lics, Anglicans, Adventists, and other Protestant denominations make up the largest share of the Christian population.

Kenya has a rich cultural heritage and is the home to the world-famous Maasai tribe, known for their bravery and traditional way of life. Kenya is also famous for its rich wildlife, natural forests, and scenery. It is largely a peaceful nation, save for spontaneous violence triggered by pastoral communities that clash over grazing, farming land, water, and politics.

History of CoG7

It is thought that the Church of God (Seventh Day) arrived in Kenya in the late 1960s and early

1970s, though the government registration records show that the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day) was formally registered in 1981. Since then, the Church has had her own share of success and challenges. Through immense support from the General Conference in the United States and Canada, she has experienced steady growth and better organization over the decades. Because of local divisions, membership growth has suffered occasional blows. But by the grace of God, a better, clearer, and more participatory leadership is being witnessed.

Present state of the Church

Kenya has a total of 91 congregations, with approximate membership of between 3,500 and 4,000. The size of individual congregations varies, from less than 50 members to more. Administratively, the Church is currently subdivided into twelve districts. Our church has yet to reach many regions, especially the coastal areas in the south-eastern and northeastern parts of the country.

Under the leadership of the national board, the Church in Kenya is focusing on her mission and vision, which is to reach out to all people with the gospel of Jesus Christ and to share the love of God. We are focused on helping this restless world find rest in Jesus Christ. We are committed to one another in fellowship and evangelism, and we are committed to equipping and preparing all members for the work of ministry through training and discipleship. As we pursue our vision, our core value is love. We share the unconditional love of God to a world lost in self.

To achieve this, each district of the Church of God in Kenya has a robust plan for evangelism with crusades, outreach, and door-to-door evangelism. Pastor Abrahams Wanda Odongo, the president of the national conference, has been involved in radio ministry through the support of GC Missions. This ministry has seen the Church grow rapidly since 2001, from two churches to 29 currently in the South Nyanza District alone! Most districts have organized evangelism and outreach teams. Though we have yet to form a training strategy to equip all of our members,



we realize how necessary this is to achieve our vision.

Ministry projects and international support

Kenya is grateful to the General Conference for support in projects such as the Orphans and Widows Ministry, which covers areas hard hit by AIDS, war, and strife. Areas where this ministry has wonderfully blessed the lives of orphans and widows include the South Nyanza, Gucha, Bureti, Bomet, and Turkana districts. This support also includes the education, health, and wellness of those who are sick and of the vulnerable.

GC Missions has also supported two mission schools in Kenya with staff salaries for the Kesitah Academy in South Nyanza and Chesoen Academy in Bomet.

Several new classrooms have been built in Bomet, and older ones renovated. These schools provide quality education for orphans and other area children.

Our National Conference is working on a program for self-sustainability projects. This will help empower members economically and, in turn, help the National Conference achieve its mandate through the offerings, tithes, and other manners of support to the Conference. Agricultural projects are a good venture for some of our districts, while other districts are considering other alternatives. As it stands now, apart from the local churches participating in evangelism activities, some churches have been raising money to help build their worship structures. We thank God for the effort that the members have always made.



Kenya

Population:
48,417,000

Capital: Nairobi

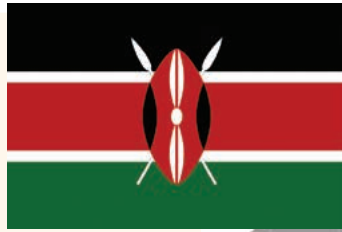
Official languages: Swahili, English

Land area: 591,971 sq
km / 228,561 sq mi

Official CoG7 congregations: 91

CoG7 membership:
3,500+

President: Abrahams
Wanda Odongo



Ongoing challenges

The greatest challenge that we face in Kenya is the menace of HIV/AIDS, which has infected and affected the largest population of the Church. The aftermath of this has caused poverty, illness, and lower productivity levels. Lack of training for pastors, evangelists, and other Church workers is also a major setback in the Church's progress. We request that our brothers and sis-



ters around the world pray with us over these challenges so that God may open the way for us.

We covet your prayers for the Church in Kenya because most of the areas with large memberships are those worst hit by HIV/AIDS. A high percentage of members in areas like the South Nyanza District have lost family members or have become infected. This high infection rate is attributed to wayward cultural practices that promote immorality and promiscuousness. Wife inheritance and rituals, poverty leading to youth prostitution, and negative cultural elements have contributed to an all-time high infection rate in western Kenya. This is especially true among the Luo community, where these customs are rampant. However, the Church has been in the forefront in the fight against these traditions and has been helping the victims.

Despite the challenges, the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Kenya is committed to our mission of reaching others with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Kenya remains a strategic nation in reaching other neighboring countries like Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, South Sudan, Burundi, and DR Congo.

Mission in Kenya

We thank God for the privilege of being in His church and of serving God's people at this point in time. We trust God that through prayers, evangelism, and outreach efforts, we will double the membership in ten years' time. Kenya offers many mission opportunities because some areas are totally unreached by the gospel, especially northern Kenya. Our strategy is to train and send missionaries to these parts.

This and other opportunities worldwide are made possible through your prayers and financial support. Please contact GC Missions (gcmisions@cog7.org) for more information on how you can assist evangelism and training efforts in Kenya and other countries. Write a check with "GC Missions" on the memo line or donate online at cog7.org/giving.

Pastor Abrahams Wanda Odongo

lives in Obuya, Kenya. In addition to his role as president of the General Conference in Kenya, he is a media (radio) evangelist.





Who is My Friend?

Luke 10 tells of an expert in Jewish law who tested Jesus in public with a pop quiz:

“Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (v. 25). In the following brief exchange, this lawyer and Jesus agreed on the law’s answer: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself” (vv. 27, 28, ESV throughout).

“Desiring to justify himself,” the lawyer then asked this follow-up question: “And who is my neighbor?” (v. 29). Jesus answered with the parable of the Good Samaritan and then flipped the lawyer’s question back on him by asking, in effect, “Who acted neighborly?” The lawyer was forced to acknowledge that loving one’s neighbor is not about restricting love to a specific few but about proactively showing love toward everyone encountered. Who is my neighbor? Everyone I meet.

Substitute the word *friend* for *neighbor*. There may not be a specific command to “Love your friend as you love yourself,” but that principle of proaction Jesus taught in His parable applies just the same. Who is my friend? Potentially, everyone I meet. Why is that important? Because most who come to Christ do so within the context of a personal relationship with one or more people who demonstrate the love of Christ and transformation by Christ. And why is that important? Because Jesus did command, “Go and make disciples” (Matthew 28:18-20). If we are to obey Jesus, we must not only be faithful to the friendships we already enjoy but also make new friends. How might we do that? I can think of no better example than that of Jesus himself.

In a sermon many years ago, Pastor John Max-

well suggested six elements of friendship, “Jesus style.” Here’s my brief expression of those six elements.

Jesus practiced what He preached. He didn’t just talk about reaching out to people; He intentionally approached and interacted with them. He spent His life among those He came to save.

Jesus was available to everyone. Jew or Gentile, male or female, old or young, rich or poor, religious or sinful — Jesus simply loved people.

Jesus had something significant to say. We often spend our “people time” engaged in small talk: the weather, sports, politics. The examples of His conversations preserved in Scripture show Him quickly moving conversations toward God and kingdom issues.

Jesus identified with people. He is deity, God with us, the One who created everything. Yet He humbled Himself and entered our world as one of us to experience life as we do. Jesus did not hold Himself above and apart from people; He joined them.

Jesus was filled with compassion for people. He felt their pain emotionally. More importantly, He acted to comfort and to help people in their areas of need.

Jesus offered people what no one else could offer: Himself.

We, too, can make friends “Jesus style,” and then introduce them to the Savior. Can we really consider ourselves faithful friends if we don’t?

Who is my friend? Everyone I meet. Who is a faithful friend? Hopefully, each one of us.

— Loren Stacy



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