

"Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth." Jeremiah 23:5

the OLIVE BRANCH

SPRING
2010

Godliness with Contentment

*From the
Overseer's Desk*

From Glory to Glory Part 11

In our continuing examination of the theme "from glory to glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18), we have considered various ways by which the Lord chooses to reveal His glory to us and through us. Most recently, in "Bringing Him Glory," we considered how we might bring glory to His name. The widow of Mark 12, who cast all her living into the collection, and the Shunammite woman of 2 Kings provided examples of how our conscious actions each day (however simple they may appear) are opportunities to bring Him glory. Such is our choice.

Living a life that brings Him glory will also bring us contentment

– the subject of this issue's sermon.

Rather than considering how our specific actions each day may bring our Lord glory, can we identify a way of life which, when we walk thus each day, will most certainly bring Him glory? A way of life that results in glorious contentment? Paul provided us with a brief description of such in 1 Timothy 6:6: "But godliness with contentment is great gain."

Consider the analogy of parents overseeing their children that was introduced in our last sermon, "Bringing Him Glory." The desires of earthly parents for their children may be described as centered around two goals: 1) that their children be well-behaved — knowing how to conduct themselves whether or not their parents are watching, and 2) that they be happy and contented — that they have a sincere

appreciation for what they have, especially what their parents have provided them.

Paul's identification of 1) *godliness* and 2) *contentment* corresponds to these same two qualities for God's children. Just as with natural children, we, as God's children must mature in the Lord until these two qualities define us.

Godliness is the quality of being godly, of living righteously, holy — in the image of our heavenly Father, as indicated by our theme scripture 2 Corinthians 3:18: "...with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory..." God's glory working in our lives each day serves to transform us into His image! By the grace of God, those that would be godly press on, "unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God." (Hebrews 6:1)

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Bulletin board...

2010 Calendar

Eastern District Convention, March 27, New Rochelle, NY

Western District Convention, April 10, Uniontown, PA

Ladies Retreat, April 30-May 2, Camp Sunrise, Markleysburg, PA

Youth Convention, May 14-15, Uniontown, PA

Bible Training Institute, May 30-June 12, General Headquarters, Charleston, TN

Youth Camp, June 18-21 (*note date change*), Mt. Chestnut Nazarene Center, Butler, PA

Regional Convention, July 9-11, Uniontown, PA

General Assembly: August 17-22, Ridgecrest Conference Center, near Asheville, NC

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New Auxiliary Coordinators

Two new auxiliary coordinators are introduced in this issue. Sis. Elaine Smail of the Monongahela, PA church is our new Sunday School coordinator. Sis. Brenda Buenavista from our New Rochelle church is our new VLB coordinator. Read their introductory testimonies on pages 11 and 12.

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Youth/Family Camp time and theme set

All are welcome to attend Youth/Family Camp June 18-21 at Mt. Chestnut Nazarene Center in Butler, PA. This camp's theme centers around the biblical advice to watch for Christ's return.

A fee of \$85 covers all lodging and food. Contact Camp Coordinator Alma Kelley at (724)-756-8841 for more information.

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Contact us:

The Olive Branch is a publication of The Church of God—Northeast Region that serves churches in Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York and Pennsylvania and new works throughout the greater area. It can be viewed online in English and Spanish at www.tcog-ne.org.

Reports and other **submissions for the SUMMER 2010 issue must be received by June 1.**

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WMB...Coordinator Diana Seese

"And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door." Gen. 19:11

The above passage reminds us that Sodom was so corrupted by sin that God's judgment became inevitable. But, earlier in this story – when two angels first approached the city – Lot invited them into his house. Soon the men of Sodom surrounded the house, demanding access to these angels. Lot pleaded for their safety, but the evil men continued to press, nearly breaking down the door.

In verse 10, the angels defended themselves and Lot's family. They, *"put forth their hand, and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut to the door."* Then they struck the men of Sodom with blindness – a physical condition that mirrored the spiritual darkness in which they were already happily living.

These men perfectly illustrate that kind of darkness about which Jesus spoke many years later: *"And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved."* John 3:19-20

In contrast, the angels proved the power of light; for light always dispels the darkness. Jesus said in John 8:12: *"I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."* Thank you Jesus!

He has called us to do the same works of heaven: *"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men,*

that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Matt. 5:14-16

Church of God:
We have a great responsibility to shine our Father's light wherever we go. As we live in these last days, we see that evil is abounding more and more. We are all surrounded by evil and by people who are living in sin and seek to cover their actions in darkness. They may not want their deeds to be exposed, but these people need the light of Jesus Christ.

Let's all make sure to let that light shine. Be bold and confident. Shine brightly, so that evil may be exposed. Live in such a way that the lost can see Christ's light and escape the grip of darkness.

Note: Please do all that you know to do to support the mission work. Jesus commissioned us to "go ye" into all the world. We can't do this without your help and prayers. We are in the last days. Let's finish the work so we can go home to be with our Lord. Praise the Lord!

Remember also that our Regional Convention is coming up soon. General Headquarters has asked us to take a special offering up during the mission program. You may also bring Coins for Missions money with you at this time.



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CPMA... Coordinator Roger Fuester

While speaking at the Eastern Regional Ministers' Convention last fall, I said that we need to work hard to spread the Gospel, because we are in the end times. In addition, I made the statement that the Battle of Gog and Magog may be just around the corner – possibly before the Rapture of the Church and the Great Tribulation. Why did I say that? Because I believe that current events fit in well with the descriptions of that battle provided in Ezekiel 38-39.

First, the Bible clearly says that this battle will happen – the question is when, and there is disagreement among Bible scholars on this. Some point to a mention of a battle of Gog and Magog at the end of the Millennial Age in Revelation 20:8, but that invading army is consumed by fire from heaven (Rev. 20:9), not by the *"feathered fowl, and every beast of the field"* mentioned in Ezek. 39: 4, 17-20. Moreover, the Ezekiel 38 and 39 account states it will take the people of Israel seven months to bury the cadavers and skeletons left behind from Gog and Magog.

Secondly, the battle described in Ezekiel 38 and 39 is not the Battle of Armageddon. They are totally different wars. Gog and Magog involves a limited number of nations in a confederacy to invade Israel, and God uses natural forces to destroy these invading armies. In the Battle of Armageddon, *"the kings of the east and of the whole world..."* (Rev. 16: 14) gather to fight Christ upon his return to earth and are *"slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth."* (Rev. 19: 19-21).

For much of the 20th century, quite a few Bible scholars felt Gog and Magog would involve Russia leading a coalition of Muslim nations against Israel in fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy. But when the Soviet Union collapsed during the Reagan administration, this seemed less likely, especially in light of their unsuccessful occupation of Afghanistan, itself a mostly Muslim nation.

Yet today – in spite of decades of atheistic policies implemented by Soviet leaders – I read a magazine article stating that there are now 8,000 mosques and 60 madrassas (Islamic religious schools) in Russia. Experts say the country is undergoing a startling change and, that if current trends continue, more than half of Russia's population

will be Muslim by mid-century. Why is this happening? Because of an important demographic -- Muslim birth rates are far higher than that of Russia's Christian Orthodox ethnic Slavs. Add in immigration issues and the spread of radical Islam in the Caucasus region and this has led some observers to the conclusion that Russia's all-conscript armed forces will be majority Muslim by 2015.



What about the other nations mentioned in Ezekiel? The first specific country named as part of the alliance (Ezekiel 38:5) is Persia, which became Iran in 1935. Iranian President Ahmadinejad's incendiary rhetoric against Israel (and the U.S.) and quest to obtain nuclear weapons should not be mistaken for empty threats; rather, they suggest a countdown to a new and terrible war in the Middle East. The second country mentioned, Cush, is often translated as Ethiopia, but is more properly assigned to the upper Nile region consisting mostly of the Sudan, as well as Ethiopia. Today, Sudan is a radical Islamic country trying to exterminate Christians and other so-called infidels. In addition, it is closely allied with Iran and Russia. So we have Iran and Sudan sitting right next to each other in the Scriptures.

Next we have Put, which Bible scholars generally agree is Libya. Its President Khadafi blames world problems on Israel and the U.S. So, he would be likely to be counted on to join the coalition.

Timing and players aside, the most important thing to realize about the battle of Gog and Magog is that it will be used by God for His own glory. By baiting this coalition of nations with their own hatred and greed, He will assemble a seemingly invincible army on the mountains of Israel to attack the tiny nation: *"I will turn*

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Regional photos...



Bro. Eugene Fordyce, Jr. of the Uniontown, PA church visited Haiti in January with a medical assistance team following a devastating earthquake there. He is pictured (top) inside Milot Hospital using a ventilator on an earthquake victim. He later trained local workers to use such equipment. He is also seen (bottom) outdoors with nuns from a nearby Catholic church. These ladies cooked and did laundry for all the visiting medical staff. The little boy in the bottom picture was one of many orphans in Haiti.



Also on this page, ministers and members of the Lawrence, MA church install new church pews that were donated by the Church of God in Lynchburg, VA. Regional Overseer James Smith, far right, and his wife Nancy pulled a trailer to deliver the pews from Virginia to Lawrence, MA.

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More photos...

Karns City, PA has seen growth recently with the addition of the Elmadollar family. On this page, Nathan Elmadollar is pictured in late November with a flagpole he installed outside the church late at night to surprise his pastor and father-in-law Tom Kelley. Bro. Elmadollar became a Christian last year and became a member of the Karns City church in December, soon after being baptized with the Holy Ghost.

In the other picture on this page, Bro. Elmadollar, his wife Dawn and mother-in-law Alma Kelley pose after being baptized by Bro. Kelley earlier last year.



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Contentment describes the state of being at peace, satisfied, happy at rest. Paul described himself thus: *“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”* (Philippians 4:11) The closer we become to our Lord (to His image), the more content we are — regardless of the circumstances in which we may find ourselves.

These two qualities: *godliness* and *contentment* must permeate our lives. To make this principle clear, we will consider a few examples of those who have exhibited these qualities.

From the Old Testament we will consider God’s servant Job. By man’s standards, Job was a great man — so much so that he was considered *“the greatest of all the men of the east.”* (Job 1:3) *“His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household.”* (Job 1.3) But what really mattered is what God thought of Job: he *“was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.”* (Job 1:1)

Here we have two key phrases to describe what God thought of Job. First, Job was *“perfect and upright”* – he lived a life that was in perfect harmony with God’s will. Job maintained his integrity before God. He walked in righteousness. His life was given to continual prayer and sacrificing unto God for his family. (Job 1:5) Job was known for his godliness.

Secondly, Job was motivated by his fear (or reverence) of God. He stood in awe of the one whom he served with all of his heart. In fear lest his family might stray from God, *“Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.”* (Job 1:5)

The purpose and desire of his life was to serve his Lord. He eschewed (avoided) the very appearance of evil. He had no longing or fascination for sin. His heart longed only for God. That is, Job was *content* to be the servant of God – to do however his Lord might lead him.

God’s glorying in Job was justified!

Job’s walk before God indeed pleased (brought glory to) his Lord. God was certain (convinced) of the character of Job – that he was fully committed in his worship of and obedience to his Lord. Job would stand true in his walk regardless of what circumstance might come his way.

The Lord was so certain of Job’s commitment that He challenged Satan: *“Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?”* (Job 1:8).

Satan was not impressed: *“Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.”* (Job 1:9-11)

The Lord accepted Satan’s challenge: *“Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand.”* (Job 1:12) Until this moment, God’s hedge about Job protected him and his household. Now in an unimaginable test that came without warning, Job’s life would be turned upside-down. Not only were his many earthly possessions all swept away in one day, but all of his children (for whom he fervently prayed everyday) perished in violent deaths. (Job 1:13-19)

How would Job respond? First and foremost, Job worshipped His Lord. He expressed his helplessness when he *“arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground”* (Job 1:20) In this prostrate position before his Lord, he worshipped. What would be his response? *“Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away;*



Regional
Overseer
James Smith

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blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21) As important as what he did is what he did not do: *"In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly."* (Job 1:22)

In the next chapter we again see Satan confronting God. The Lord not only restates His prior confidence in Job: *"a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil,"* but indeed increases His glorying in His servant Job: *"still he holdeth fast his integrity."* (Job 2:3) Job's faith and trust in his Lord had NOT been shaken!

Job holds fast his integrity and his contentment with God.

At this point in his life, Job knew not of his Lord's great plan for him: of the tribulation he would yet face, and of the glory of God that ultimately would be revealed in him. All he knew was that *"the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away."* When we can do nothing else, we can maintain our integrity with our Lord; we can maintain our worship of and prayer to our Lord and Savior.

The stakes are raised! Satan is now permitted to try Job through the affliction of his flesh: *"put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face."* (Job 2:5) So Satan *"smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown."* (Job 2:7)

Until now his wife had stood by him, but now Job's trial of the flesh was too much. Her admonishment to Job was: *"Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die."* (Job 2:9) The question was clear: would Job maintain his integrity with God, in spite of all that had come upon him? Or, would he succumb to life's pressures?

Rather than cursing God, Job's response to her was *"Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips."* (Job 2:10)

What enabled Job to maintain his integrity with his Lord? The answer was given at the beginning of his trials: *"Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the*

LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21)

Job had a *contentment* or confidence in the one in whom he trusted — the One to whom he would one day return. While he might not understand the purpose that His Lord had in permitting such to come his way; he knew that he could and would give his Lord glory: *"blessed be the name of the LORD!"* (Job 1:21)

Later in Job 19:25-27, he would declare his faith and contentment in his Lord: *"For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another..."*

Paul's godly contentment in the Lord

Paul knew this same godly contentment as well. Following our key verse: *"But godliness with contentment is great gain,"* (1 Timothy 6:6) Paul went on to essentially restate the words of Job: *"For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out."* (1 Timothy 6:7)

We do not serve the Lord for what we might seem momentarily to gain in this life. Certainly, we do appreciate what earthly benefits that our Lord permits us, but our true motivation, purpose and satisfaction resides in what awaits us when this life is over. What joy we have down here is joy in what the Lord accomplishes in us and through us.

Paul left such a witness with the Ephesians in Acts 20:22-24 as he made his way to Jerusalem following his third missionary journey: *"And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."*

Just as Paul, we live for Christ, our Lord and Savior: *"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."* (Philippians 1:21) Here again we see our theme repeated — godliness: *"to live is Christ,"* with contentment: *"that I might finish my course with joy"* is great gain: *"to die is gain."* Unbelievers cannot understand this mystery — until they also experience their own "road to Damascus" moment.

In the case of Job, he received no warning of the nature of the trial and testing that he would face, nor

promise of how it might end for the better. In the case of Paul, he was warned everywhere he went of the sufferings he would face and received no promise of escape or deliverance. From the beginning of his ministry in Damascus he had been forewarned, even as the Lord prophesied through Ananias: *“Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.”* (Acts 9:15-16)

Paul was warned that *“bonds and afflictions”* awaited him; nevertheless, he went *“not knowing the things that shall befall”* him. How could he then say: *“none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself?”* In 2 Timothy 1:12, Paul declared the source of his confidence and trust (his contentment) in the Lord: *“... I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.”*

Paul's life was filled with many trials and tests of his faith and commitment to the Lord. Why? Hadn't he sufficiently proved himself to his Lord? In fact, they were not about Paul proving anything to God. Rather, they were about the Lord proving Himself (His glory) through Paul: what He could and would do when His child was completely, totally consecrated unto Him.

God would that we all had that same godly contentment.

We have considered two instances of a child of God walking in godliness with contentment. Job gladly suffered without having received any warning of the nature of the trials and testing that he would face, nor any promise of how it might end for the better. Yet, in the end, Job was restored to full health, was blessed with twice the earthly possessions he had originally, was blessed with yet 10 other children, and lived to see his great-grandchildren. (Job 42:12-17)

On the other hand, Paul was repeatedly warned of sufferings, and ultimately gave his life in martyrdom in Rome. In his closing remarks to Timothy, Paul witnessed his joy through his suffering: *“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”* (2 Timothy 4:6-8)

When no one else stood with Paul, his Lord and Master stood with him: *“At my first answer no man*

In 2 Timothy 1:12, Paul declared the source of his confidence and trust (his contentment) in the Lord: “... I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.”

stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (2 Timothy 4:16-18)

These are but two examples of the many children of God who have walked before their Lord in godliness and contentment. We are told that: *“Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection.”* (Hebrews 11:35) Some were marvelously delivered; while, others endured unimaginable suffering for their Lord. In all, God was glorified!

When we have completely and entirely placed all aspects of our lives (both for down here, and for all eternity) into His safe keeping, we need not fear what a day may bring. Furthermore, we will gladly yield ourselves as vessels through which He may work to reveal His mighty power and glory! We, too, will be found godly in all aspects of our lives. We, too, will have that, *“peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts (godliness) and minds (contentment) through Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 4:7)

I am reminded of the words from the song *“When We See Christ”* by Esther Kerr Rusthoi:

It will be worth it all
When we see Jesus,
Life's trials will seem so small
When we see Christ;
One glimpse of His dear face
All sorrow will erase,
So bravely run the race
Till we see Christ.

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ABM...Coordinator Nancy Horchar

“And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.” Mark 1:35

Prayer was a priority in Jesus’s life. Jesus modeled a life of prayer for us. He prayed often. He prayed early in the morning, late at night and through the night. He prayed before critical events in His life. He prayed as He ministered to others. He prayed before performing miracles. He prayed for others.

So, too, prayer is an essential priority in the life of everyone who is mightily used of God – everyone who is walking in the Spirit and living a holy life.

If our time alone with God is no longer a priority for us, we can open ourselves to discouragement, doubt, disillusionment and, eventually, it can lead us to disaster.

When we no longer have that fellowship with Him, we begin to feel the spiritual, emotional and physical weight of every earthly circumstance. Prayer, in contrast, lifts our burdens so that we don’t have to bear their weight. Whether they are given by the Lord in order to teach us, or self-imposed as a result of the decisions we make, God tells us in His word in Psalm 55:22: *“Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.”*

Bearing the weight of burdens we were not intended to carry not only takes a spiritual toll on us, it leaves each one of us physically and emotionally beaten, as well. Our adversary Satan knows that tired and weary Christians are prime targets for his horrible attacks.

First, he strikes with discouragement. When we lose hope, we are primed and ready for his next weapon – doubt. Remember, when we are in doubt, we can easily be pushed into

disillusionment. Listening to the devil’s proclamations, “Where is God?” or “That Christian life you’re living doesn’t work,” can bring disaster to one’s life.

Let us all remember, prayer is not only a comfort in times of need: It is essential for our survival. Prayer guided Jesus through His life. Let it guide you.

In Luke 18:1, Jesus, *“spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”*

Your prayers can and will make a difference in your life. Then, in turn, they will make a difference in someone else’s life.

On another note: Please don’t forget that each member should pay his or her annual emergency \$5.

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VLB...Coordinator Brenda Buenavista

Greetings to The Church of God in the Northeast region. For those of you whom I have not met, my name is Brenda Buenavista and I attend The Church of God in New Rochelle, NY. Prior to moving to the East Coast, my membership was with The Church of God in California.

I would like to express my gratitude for the warm welcome that I have received in this region and also say how honored I feel to be given the privilege to work as regional VLB coordinator. So that you can know me better, let me share my testimony with you. I first came to the Lord at the age of 10. God brought a family into my life which took a special interest in me, making sure I came to church with them. For me, it was amazing to hear about God and the beautiful gift He gave to humanity through His Son Jesus Christ for the first time. It was during a children's service when I first opened my heart to the Lord. That day, my mother happened to be in the congregation and I recall her tearing up from the sight of her daughter in so many tears. I gave my life to the Lord and I just knew God had done something in my life.

But the Lord was not done there. On another occasion, I recall feeling very uncomfortable because I noticed I was the only one wearing a necklace. I knew it was wrong but I did not understand why. My parents did not think it was wrong and I believed my parents were always right! Either way, I opted to be obedient to what I had heard at church and I broke the chain off my neck, praying to God that my mother would not be upset. I just wanted to follow the Lord and please Him in every way possible.

Praise God that He sent people to reach out to me at that young age. I did not know then that later events in my life would prove to be when I would need Him the most. I believe that if it had not been for the Lord being with me then, the outcome of my life may have been completely different. With the marital split of my parents shortly after my salvation and so many other things that followed, I now understand that God is never a minute too late! What if this family had not cared enough for my young soul to be willing to commute one hour each way to the worst part of town and guide me to the truth? Although this family stayed behind with the previous organization, I am ever so thankful to the Lord for putting them in my path.

And, a few months later God touched my mother and others in my family, as well. As Paul told the keeper of the prison, *"...believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."* Act 16:31 Praise God, for these are His promises even today!

VLB's, there are so many souls out there waiting for someone to come and reach out to them. Our communities have even established organizations that aim at teaching good morals to many "at-risk" youth to try and impact their lives as adults. One of them that caught my attention is the "Big Brother Big Sister" organization, which I have recently decided to be a part of. Since I am fairly new to my town and don't know many youth I thought this would be a great opportunity to reach out to someone. This program simply consists of developing a friendship with a young one and mentoring them. I am already a big sister. So, how hard can it be? Also, why not take the opportunity to speak to them about God's love?

This is where God has led me in terms of sharing His love, but you can always ask God to point you in the right direction. The Lord may lead you to your neighbor, your schoolmate or even a family member. It does not necessarily have to be a child or a young person. Will we cast out a lifeline for a soul who may be drowning in a sea of despair? Remember, any soul without God is definitely at risk of eternal damnation. I pray that God may touch your heart to be a difference in someone's life. In order for us to become that difference we must be in tune with God. Open your heart to the Lord to do as He pleases in your life if you have not done so. Keep busy in prayer, reading the Bible and fasting. I have seen how powerful these precious resources can be. If we only put our trust in God and obey, He will lead us to the person who is desperately seeking to hear words of life. VLB, YOU have the potential to make a difference for Christ and His Church.

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Sunday School...

Coordinator Elaine Smail

“If you could see where my Jesus has brought me from to where I am today, then you’d know the reason why I love Him so...It’s my desire to live for Him.” These words are from the song “It’s My Desire,” which is dear to my heart because it truly describes my life experiences and why I cherish my relationship with Jesus. As your new Regional Sunday School Coordinator, I want to share some of my life with you in this first writing. I thought it would be a good way for you to see God’s never-ending mercy, amazing power and gracious blessings manifested in the life of a most unlikely and undeserving person such as myself.

I was not raised in The Church of God. My Roman Catholic upbringing taught me a great respect for God, but I had never heard the full salvation message until I met a girl who brought me with her to church. I didn’t quite understand it at first, nor did I really think it was that important, but I continued to attend her church. My Italian parents and I had an agreement that, as long as I attended the Catholic church on Sunday morning, I would be permitted to be involved in this “other religion.” As God would have it, Holy Ghost conviction gripped my heart and I came to know Jesus as my Savior on New Year’s Eve 1973. I knew from that moment that I would not remain Catholic.

I continued to attend church until my college years. I then began living an up-and-down life. Even though I was backslidden, I still thought I was a good person. But, one semester prior to graduation, while home on Christmas break, I received devastating news. What I thought was a pulled muscle in my leg turned out to be degenerative arthritis in my hip. It was so bad I was told the pain would never subside and I would soon be in a wheelchair, with little hope of a normal life or bearing children. It is common to run to God in times of trouble; and that I did. Despite my spiritual condition, God rescued me. After a third medical opinion, a complete right hip replacement was successfully done. I was able to graduate from college and started my first career job.

Once college was over, however, the roller coaster ride started again and it continued for about 15 years. During this time I met another God-sent friend, who ironically shared the same name, LuAnne, as the girl who first introduced me to salvation. The second LuAnne was the epitome of Christian faithfulness and perseverance. It was through her that I was introduced to The Church of God and came back to the Lord. I

additionally learned about and experienced sanctification and the baptism of the Holy Ghost. This time, I really thought I was on the right track. But, I would soon fall prey to the enemy again. My roller coaster ride was now making me so sick I thought I would suffocate and eventually die. But, once again, God came to my rescue.



Some very loving Christians took me under their wings and through God’s grace, I came back to Him. I was saved, sanctified and baptized with the Holy Ghost on March 5, 1995. I knew this was my last chance. I felt a sense of urgency to make a drastic change and walked out of my living situation. I left the town in which I lived in and headed for a reunion with The Church of God. I remembered the vision of The Church that God had given me at an earlier time in my life. I wanted to be part of this Church, forever! And so, at age 35, I became a member.

God soon blessed me with a Christian husband, Dale (who happened to be the second LuAnne’s brother), and, a year later, with our daughter Alicia, who is now 13. God has also given me many opportunities to serve Him, from teaching Sunday school to serving as a band leader to serving as chief cook for regional youth camp. Three years ago, God gave me an opportunity to teach at the Christian school my daughter attends. The list of blessings goes on and on.

Perhaps, now, you can understand why these words are so meaningful to me: “If you could see where my Jesus has brought me from to where I am today, then you’d know the reason why I love Him so....It’s my desire to live for Him.”

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BTI...Coordinator Wendell Flick

Take note: Bible Training Institute registration is May 30, with classes beginning May 31 and graduation on June 12 in Cleveland, TN.

The fields of souls are “*white already to harvest*” and BTI has been placed in the Church as a vital tool to educate and train our leadership. It is also geared to win the lost to Christ and His Church.

The song titled, “More About Jesus,” comes to my mind. The second verse reads: “More about Jesus let me learn, more of His holy will discern. Spirit of God, my teacher be, showing the things of Christ to me.” What better way could there be to learn more about

Jesus than by attending BTI?

On a personal note, my family and I thank you all for the prayers, calls, cards and visits during my recent open heart surgery and recovery. God bless you.

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CPMA

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thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws and I will bring you forth, and all thine army.” (Ezek. 38:4) But, instead of the victory anticipated by the coalition’s forces, God will defeat Russia and its allies in the greatest military disaster in history. God’s purpose in this astonishing intercession, without precedent in history, is to glorify and sanctify His holy name in the sight of Israel and the Gentile nations.

I believe that a case can be made for the Battle of Gog and Magog occurring at a time between now and the beginning of the Great Tribulation. Under that timing, what’s left of the Arab world would be in such a weak position that they would readily agree to the seven-year peace agreement proposed by the Antichrist (Dan. 9: 27) at the beginning of the Tribulation. Moreover, it would give the people of Israel the full seven years needed to burn the weapons of the coalition army (Ezek. 39: 9).

However, the Bible teaches there is no prophetic event that has to happen before Jesus snatches His Church from the earth and that we should be ready for Jesus to come for us at any moment. Jesus said that on several occasion, and I fully believe it. However, it

should be noted that while no major prophetic event has to happen before the Rapture, it doesn’t mean no such event will happen first.

We have already seen the rebirth of Israel as prophesied in Ezekiel 36 and 37. So, the events in Ezekiel 38 and 39 could happen before the Rapture just as well. God could very well cause this catastrophic battle to occur before the Rapture in order to shake people out of their spiritual indifference and/or unbelief, providing them one more chance to receive Christ as their Savior before the terrible events of the Tribulation occur.

What should we do in light of this? First, walk in the Light. Second, pray and fast on behalf of unsaved loved ones. Third, witness to as many people as possible. Fourth, as a member of The Church of God, do all you can to support its commission. This includes paying your tithes and the giving of your time, talent and offerings. This, of course, includes paying your annual CPMA dues.

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Final thoughts...

Assistant Editor Nora Edinger

Several years ago, media entrepreneur Ted Turner came up with a controversial idea. He took old movies that were filmed in black and white and “colorized” them. The idea was to make them more appealing to an audience used to media filmed in color. The result, however, was just kind of weird looking and disgusted vintage movie buffs. The problem was that key areas of any scene were indeed colorful. Faces were peachy. Clothes were bright, perhaps cartoonishly so. But, if you looked even slightly beyond the major elements, everything else could still be seen in shades of gray. It was simply too expensive and too time consuming to “colorize” the entire image.

I thought of that the other night when I saw some pictures taken by NASA’s Hubble Space Telescope. If you have not seen them, it is definitely worth looking up on the Internet. From the beginning of mankind, we have all known that the heavens are beautiful. David mused about this in Psalm 8:3-4: *“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him?...”* But, until the Hubble, who knew about all the color?

Go. Look at the pictures yourself. Unlike Mr. Turner, who was limited by earthly time and money, God spared no effort to make extraordinary beauty. As modern oceanography has already taught us of the depths, modern astronomy is now showing us that God has been at work – spectacular work – in the heights. Even though no human would see His work until the past handful of years.



So, too, He is at work in our lives. Take a look at the testimonies included in this issue. Read Gospel passages recording Jesus’s miracles out loud until you can “hear” them with fresh ears. God is at work in the depths. God is at work in the heights. God is at work in some unlikely places and in ways we may not be able to fully appreciate until we are in His presence.

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