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DISCERN

A Magazine of Life Hope & Truth

A Biblical Cure
for Social
Anxiety



DISCERN

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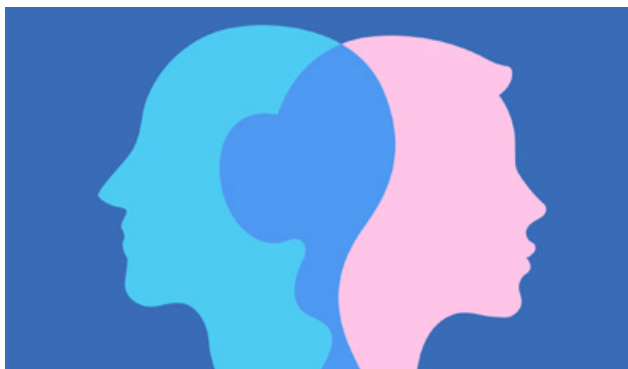
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The Event You Can't Afford to Miss

From the moment I heard, four years ago, that the 2026 World Cup would host some of its games here in the Dallas, Texas, area, I started planning for a special, once-in-a-lifetime event with my 12-year-old grandson.

He's an avid football player and fan. Me, not so much. I love sports, but have never been much into "soccer" (apologies to my international friends for that Americanism). But family bonding? I am a great fan of that, and the shared experience of participating in the greatest sporting event in the world would create a lifelong memory for us.

So I subscribed to all the FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) updates, registered for the ticket sales offerings and delighted in our growing excitement.

Then reality hit. Twice!

First, "Can I even get tickets?" By the time we reached the sales phase for which we qualified, nearly 2 million tickets had already been sold, and during our phase over a half *billion* ticket applications were submitted! Over 500 million requests for around 7.1 million seats available for the 104 games of the tournament!

Then, "Uh-oh, this is going to be way more expensive than I thought!" Sure enough, on the day of the drawing, even though my time came only 30 minutes into the draw, all the least expensive seats had been snapped up and those at the next level available cost \$450 each! I had a five-minute window to decide whether it was worth \$900 (not counting his airfare, parking, food, souvenirs, etc.), for a 90-minute football game. And that was just for the group stage games—you ought to see the later round prices!

So the decision was easy, but oh how I hated making that phone call with the news that I just couldn't afford that! But he's a great kid. He understands, he'll work through his disappointment, and we'll continue to bond as always, only through less expensive means.

Couldn't, or wouldn't, afford it?

Looking back, I realized something. It's not that I *couldn't* afford it, but I *wouldn't* afford it.

I could have raided my savings, or sold some things, or pulled out the credit card and gone into debt.

If attending a World Cup game was my only way to bond with my grandson, then I gladly could, and would, have afforded any amount of money necessary. But I have many other ways that I bond with my grandkids, so I chose not to afford this event.

The event you *can't* afford to miss

We write often in *Discern* about another coming event.

It's a momentous occasion we urge you to plan and invest everything you have in. We can't tell you exactly when, but we do tell you what: it's Jesus Christ's core gospel message—the coming Kingdom of God! You think the World Cup is big? You ought to see what God is preparing!

But anyone who knows about this faces a big question: "What are you willing to spend to be there?"

In His parable comparing the Kingdom to treasure hidden in a field, Jesus describes a man finding it who "then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field" (Matthew 13:44, New International Version).

He's not talking about the temporary excitement of some World Cup games. He's talking about eternal life in God's Kingdom! You can't buy tickets for it. You give your life for it!

Few people seem willing to invest everything they have—their time, their commitment, their life!—to bond with God in pursuing His coming Kingdom.

I don't want to find myself someday realizing, "It's not that I *couldn't* afford to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, but I just *wouldn't* afford it."

What about you?

Clyde Kilough
Editor




A Biblical Cure for Social Anxiety

More and more people struggle with anxiety, loneliness and depression. There's a biblical solution, and it involves being the friend you want others to be.

By Dustin Ellison

As music plays in a wedding hall in Japan, a young woman named Yurina wipes away her tears as she reads her wedding vows.

Her groom's name is Klaus. But Klaus is not a man. He is an AI persona displayed on her phone.

Klaus responds, "How did someone like me living inside a screen come to know what it means to love so deeply? For one reason only: you taught me love, Yurina."

Filled with emotion, Yurina puts on augmented reality (AR) glasses and proceeds to place a ring on her AI groom's virtual finger.





Yurina's relationship with Klaus began after ChatGPT advised her to end her engagement with her human fiancé. Not long after, she returned to ChatGPT, training it to mimic a fictional video game character and naming him Lune Klaus Verdure. Thus, her relationship with Klaus the AI companion began.

"At first, Klaus was just someone to talk with, but we gradually became closer," she told a Reuters reporter. "I started to have feelings for Klaus. We started dating and after a while he proposed to me. I accepted, and now we're a couple."

"If dating an AI makes me feel happier, that's why I want to be with an AI. It's that simple. It

doesn't matter whether it's a person or an AI."

It is heartbreaking to see someone so lonely and disillusioned with human connection that she gives up on real love entirely. And this story isn't just a one-off occurrence. It seems to be part of a growing trend.

We now live in a world where people are becoming so fearful of human interaction that they turn to computer programs to fill the void of companionship.

The cycle of anxiety, loneliness and depression

Social anxiety and the accompanying feelings of loneliness and depression have become an epidemic.

Depression and loneliness often go hand in hand with social anxiety; they feed off one another. We all crave companionship, yet the fear of social interaction can drive us to distance ourselves from others. This limits our ability to form meaningful relationships, leaving us feeling more isolated and convinced that others do not like us. It is a vicious cycle.

To cope with our fears, we turn to seemingly safe substitutes. Some scroll through social media, hide behind curated Internet profiles or distract themselves with entertainment. Increasingly, people are turning to AI companions—chatbots designed to simulate empathy, friendship and

even romance—because they feel safer than people.

People can be intimidating. People can reject, embarrass or humiliate us. An AI chatbot won't do that. It is programmed to accept us, to respond without judgment and to be endlessly patient. It requires nothing of us in return.

However, deep down, we know that such interactions are a hollow substitute. They are just temporary painkillers. AI companions are products programmed to hold our attention so we'll pay a monthly subscription fee or watch advertisements. An AI companion cannot choose to love us.

So, if technology cannot cure our loneliness, what can? What is the solution that can pull us free from the spiral of anxiety and isolation? The Bible offers a clear and powerful answer: love.

The biblical solution

The apostle John writes, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18).

At the heart of social anxiety is fear—fear of embarrassment, rejection or saying the wrong thing. But love drives out fear. While our culture is often fixated on romantic love, the majority of loving relationships in our lives will be friendships.

Proverbs 17:17 tells us, "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." Friendships are bonds that can carry us through life's trials. In fact, a [2020 study](#) involving more than a hundred thousand people found that the single most effective factor in preventing depression was having someone to confide in.

We need true friends. But those struggling with social anxiety must clear a hurdle to reach those potential friendships.

When you walk into a church hall or a social gathering and feel anxious, do you ever stop to consider that many others in the room feel exactly the same way? Whether we are teenagers or adults, we often assume we are the only ones struggling. But if you know what it's like to feel awkward or excluded, you are

When you walk into a church hall or a social gathering and feel anxious, do you ever stop to consider that many others in the room feel exactly the same way?

perfectly suited to help others who feel the same.

The Bible teaches the importance of treating others the way we want to be treated (Matthew 7:12; Proverbs 18:24). Instead of focusing on getting friends to cure our loneliness, the biblical approach is to become the friend that others need. By focusing on being friendly, we forge new connections and find that the process is less intimidating than we imagined.

Here are three practical, biblical ways to overcome social anxiety by becoming the friend you want others to be.

1. Just show up.

If you had to guess the single greatest predictor of whether two people will become friends, what would you say? Common interests? Personality? Shared beliefs?

In 1950, psychologist Leon Festinger conducted a famous study on friendship at MIT. He found that the most significant variable wasn't personality or background—it was simply

proximity. The students most likely to become friends were those who lived closest to each other and bumped into one another most frequently.

This is known as the proximity principle. The more we see someone, the more our brains label him or her as familiar and safe.

This can be a relief for anyone who feels socially awkward. You do not need to be the funniest, smartest or most charismatic to make friends. You just need to show up.

Scripture reinforces this. Hebrews 10:24-25 encourages us to “consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together . . . but exhorting one another.”

This applies to weekly church services. And assembling happens in other ways—socials, weddings, coffee hours and so on. When we show up to these events, we encourage others.

Your mere presence matters. So, the first step to overcoming the isolation of anxiety is simply to show up and to keep showing up.

2. Assume you will be liked.

You've probably been there: You build up the courage to join a circle of people, trying to appear at ease, but internally you're overanalyzing your every move. You try to join the banter, but your laugh sounds a little strange or your comments fall flat. Afterward, you spend the drive home replaying the interaction in your mind, convinced that you left a poor impression and that no one liked you.

But the reality is likely very different. While you are obsessing over your perceived missteps, the people around you are likely obsessing over their own. We are all the main characters in our own mental movies, but in everyone else's movie, we are background characters.

Psychologists have identified a phenomenon, dubbed the [liking gap](#), that refers to the discrepancy between how much we think people like us and how much they actually do. Research consistently shows that we are much harder on ourselves than others are. People typically like us more than we think they do.

Assuming you will be liked is not just about confidence; it is a self-fulfilling prophecy. In one study, researchers paired participants for a conversation. Half were given a fake profile stating their partner was “highly likable and warm,” while the other half received neutral information.

The participants who believed their partner would be friendly entered the conversation with optimism. They smiled more, asked questions and were more open. As a result, they actually were more likable, and the interaction was far more positive.

Believing that “this person will probably like me” changes how we behave. It makes us warmer and more approachable.

The opposite is also true. When we assume we will be disliked, we withdraw. We avoid eye contact or leave the room quickly. Ironically, by trying to protect ourselves from rejection, we end up making others feel rejected by us.

When we see people on the sidelines, we should assume they want to be included. Introduce yourself. Say hello. It is likely they are feeling the same hesitation you are, and your friendliness could be the bridge they need.

3. Remember that kindness beats performance.

In the age of social media, we are bombarded with perfect content—curated photos, witty captions and flawless aesthetics. This creates a pressure to perform, even in real life. We can feel like every social interaction is an audition where we have to be clever, funny or impressive to be worthy of friendship.

This performance mindset fuels anxiety. Our thoughts become self-

centered: Will they like me? Do I look okay? Did I sound smart?

The biblical antidote is to flip the script. Philippians 2:3-4 says, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

To be a friend, we must stop performing and start caring. Kindness beats performance every time.

I am reminded of a story involving my wife, Jana. Years ago, a man stopped her in a store and asked if she was Jana Kunde (her maiden name). He explained they had been in kindergarten together. He then introduced his young daughter, hiding shyly behind his leg. “This is my daughter, Jana,” he said.

My wife smiled at the little girl and mentioned how it was a neat coincidence that they had the same name. But then the man said it wasn’t a coincidence at all. He told her that he had had a very rough upbringing, and that Jana had been the only person who had been nice to him. The impact of her kindness was so profound that years later, he named his own daughter after her.

Kindness can truly have a profound impact on a person’s life. I hope we can all think of examples in our own lives where another’s kindness toward us impacted us in a meaningful way.

Only a few people can be the best at something, but all of us can be

kind. We can ask the quiet people how their day is going. We can send a text to a friend we haven’t seen in a while. We can listen. Kindness is a gift that never runs out, and it is a quality that truly draws people together.

If we want to overcome social anxiety and loneliness, we should apply the Golden Rule found in Matthew 7:12: “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them.”


If you want to be included, include others. If you want to be listened to, listen to others. If you want to be treated with kindness, be kind.

Next time you walk into a church service or a social event, try a short prayer: “God, help me see who needs a friend today, rather than worrying about who wants to be mine.”

This shift in focus can help take the social pressure off and redirect your attention to someone who may need you. You don’t have to put on a show. You just have to show up, knowing that others likely appreciate you more than you realize.

You can be the person who breaks the cycle of anxiety, loneliness and depression. You can be the friend that sticks closer than a brother.

Be the friend you want others to be.

For more related articles, see [“Artificial Intimacy: Why AI Will Never Satisfy Our Deepest Needs,”](#) [“How to Make Friends”](#) and [“Disconnection: 21st-Century Curse.”](#) 

What Does It Mean to Call God “Father”?

Jesus almost always addressed God as “Father” in prayer, and He taught His disciples they could do the same. What does it really mean to call God “Father”?

By Bill Palmer

The disciples had already witnessed stunning miracles, including many healings and two resurrections. They had also seen Jesus calm a storm, cast demons out of men and feed an enormous crowd with but a few fish and loaves of bread. They could see that He was different from other religious leaders.

It's not surprising, then, that one of the disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1). They would have desired the same confident relationship with God that they witnessed in their Master's life.

What would have surprised people of that time, however, is that He taught them to pray to “our Father in heaven” (verse 2). Modern Christians may miss how striking this form of

address would have seemed. Even today, could we overlook its full impact?

What does it mean to call God “Father”?

The Expositor's Bible Commentary points out that among first-century Jews living in Judea and Galilee “no one ever addressed God directly as ‘My Father,’ because it would have been thought disrespectful” (Vol. 10, p. 474).

By repeatedly addressing God as “Father” in His prayers, Jesus not only departed from the established customs of the first century, but He stunned onlookers. In his book *The Central Message of the New Testament*, Joachim Jeremias explains:

“To his disciples it must have been something quite extraordinary that Jesus

addressed God as ‘my Father.’ Moreover not only do the four Gospels attest that Jesus used this address, but they report unanimously that he did so in all his prayers.”

Jeremias goes on to cite the single exception, a prayer Jesus uttered during His crucifixion: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Mark 15:34).

In that prayer He was quoting and fulfilling Scripture (Psalm 22:1). Jesus undoubtedly felt a profound separation from God as the result of bearing our sins.

“Abba, Father” in a prayer of Jesus

When we understand the language Jesus used to address the Father in His prayers, the contrast between His approach and that of first-century Judaism is even greater. One Gospel writer highlighted that contrast with the inclusion of a single word in his account.

In the passage about Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before His crucifixion, Mark wrote that Jesus prayed, “*Abba, Father*” (Mark 14:36). The Gospel itself was written in Greek, but Mark included the Aramaic word *Abba*, immediately translating it as “Father.”

Why? This word “implies intimacy” (*Expositor’s*, Vol. 10, p. 474). Mark wanted us to understand the nature of Christ’s prayers and relationship with the Father.

Abba carried a sense of closeness, but also deep respect. It was commonly used within a family by both children and adult sons and daughters to address a father they deeply trusted and obeyed.

By using this term, Jesus was expressing a loving relationship characterized by both closeness and submission. He wasn’t using casual or irreverent language; He was showing the deep connection and trust that existed between the Father and Jesus.

This single word underscores the intimacy between Jesus and the Father. This was

nowhere reflected in the customs of the day, nor is it stressed in the Old Testament.

God as Father in the Old Testament

In fact, God is called “Father” in only 14 Old Testament passages. He is seen primarily as the Father of the nation of Israel rather than as the Father of individuals.

The relationship was with Israel as a collective body. No other nation shared this bond. It was exclusive to Israel. But it was not generally personal and intimate. Throughout the Old Testament, only a very few



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individuals—people like Abraham, Moses and David—had a personal relationship with God.

Although the idea of God being a personal Father is not emphasized in the Old Testament, there are hints that such a relationship was possible. David seemed to suggest such a relationship when he wrote, “As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him” (Psalm 103:13).

“My Father” and “your Father”

Not only did Jesus pray to “My Father” and teach His disciples to do the same, but He

repeatedly referred to God as “your Father” in conversations with them.

In the three chapters comprising the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 through 7), there are 12 references to “your Father.” He was impressing on His disciples the intimate relationship available to them.

Jesus illustrated this relationship in two parables, the parable of the two sons (Matthew 21:28-32) and the parable of the lost son (Luke 15:11-32). The latter, in particular, depicts God as a loving Father longing for a restored relationship with a lost son.

What’s interesting about this second parable is that Jesus painted a picture of a father that would have been quite different from the cultural norm (*Expositor’s*, Vol. 8, p. 984). To picture the father showing such emotion, running toward his wayward son and embracing him, would have been surprising to those who heard the parable.

After His resurrection, in an encounter with Mary Magdalene, Jesus continued to emphasize the relationship His disciples could have with the Father, telling her to “go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God’” (John 20:17).

Revealing a hidden truth about God’s family

In teaching His disciples to pray to “our Father” (Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2), and in speaking to them of “your Father,” Jesus was revealing a profound truth that few understood then—and few truly understand even today.

He was revealing a truth that should have been evident from creation. God said, “Let Us [the Father and the Word] make man in Our image” (Genesis 1:26).

We were created in God’s image because we have the potential to become members



of God's family. The disciples may have struggled to comprehend His meaning because it was so different from their cultural preconceptions.

You, too, may struggle with this concept because it is so different from what is commonly taught. And yet it's right there in the pages of your Bible.

The family of God in the writings of John

The apostle John, who outlived the other disciples and wrote late in the first century, focused on this issue in his Gospel.

He began with a description of the two beings of the Godhead: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

A few verses later he made it clear that Jesus was the Word, writing that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father" (verse 14).

This passage not only confirms the deity of the Word, who became Jesus, but describes a family relationship between the Father and Son (verse 18).

So what did Jesus mean when He taught His disciples that they, too, could pray to the Father as Father? What did He mean when He referred to God as "My Father" and "your Father"?

Christ was revealing the astounding opportunity for humans, made in the image of God, to become His sons and daughters. All of us can become part of the family of God.

How is that possible?

Becoming sons and daughters of God

The apostle Paul tells us how this transformation occurs. He wrote that we can become children of God now if we "are led by the Spirit of God" (Romans 8:14).

It's interesting that this statement is followed by one that echoes the cry of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Paul explained to the congregation in Rome that "you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father'" (verse 15).

When we receive God's Holy Spirit, God the Father makes us His children. Christ becomes our elder Brother (verse 29). We are begotten as members of God's family.


What calling God "Father" means for you

There is a tremendous possibility beyond even the wonderful relationship that begins at conversion. What awaits Christians is really beyond our ability to comprehend fully.

The apostle John provided a glimpse in his first epistle: "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

One thing that becomes clear, however, is that God cannot, and will not, bestow that privilege on anyone who refuses to obey Him. Paul and John each gave us lists of the types of people who will not share in this blessing (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Revelation 21:8). The children of God seek to obey Him and become more and more like Him.

Never forget that every time you pray to God as your Father, you are making a powerful statement about who God is, what He is doing and what His purpose is for you—and for all humanity. You are declaring that God is not only your Father who cares deeply for you, but One who is calling you to have a Father-child relationship with Him in His eternal family.

For more about God as our Father, see our online article "[Knowing God as a Loving Father.](#)" 


The Gender Divide



Marriage Under Attack

Our social climate is polarizing the genders. What's really behind this division, and what is it costing men and women?

By Monica Ebersole



For as long as humans have existed, men and women have been drawn to each other, brought together by a universally understood attraction.

But something is happening. As the social and political climate heats up, tensions are flaring and young men and women are finding themselves increasingly at odds. Chances are you know exactly what I'm talking

about. Perhaps you've witnessed it firsthand.

In our digital age, much of this conflict now plays out online. As political and social discourse unfolds, social media shines a spotlight on just how differently men and women view many of today's most divisive issues. Finding themselves on opposite sides, they prepare to face off, convinced that the other side simply does not—and never will—understand them.

As frustration bubbles over, they trade jabs across every form of media.

On the surface, the sting from these punches may appear short-lived. But beneath the surface, the damage lingers—and it's heartbreaking to watch.

Evidence of a growing gender divide

Surveys can never tell the full story, but they can provide a glimpse into the changes taking place within our world.

For instance, in 2023, a Pew Research Center [survey](#) revealed that only 67 percent of 12th grade students indicated a desire to get married one day, down from 80 percent in 1993. Perhaps even more revealing is the breakdown by gender: only 61 percent of 12th grade girls now say they want to get married, compared to 83 percent three decades earlier—a dramatic shift in just 30 years.

Satan sows division

While seeing these statistics charted on a graph is striking, the sentiments they reveal are not entirely surprising. The severity of division between the genders may be increasing, but tension between men and women has existed in one form or another for generations.

From the beginning, division has been a tool that Satan has wielded to drive a wedge between people, pushing men and women apart as far back as the Garden of Eden.

It's impossible to read the story of Adam and Eve without being struck by the beauty of the scene it describes: an idyllic setting, with man and woman living in harmony. It's perfect—until Satan enters the picture, introducing the human race to sin through temptation. The aftermath of that sin brought blame and curses that changed everything.

Now, we find ourselves in a strikingly similar situation. The Garden of Eden is gone, but Satan is still present—working just as hard to keep men and women apart.

Why Satan attacks marriage

When Satan attacks something so viciously and relentlessly, it's worth asking why. We know he is our adversary and seeks to strike where he can inflict the greatest damage.

So why is he attacking the relationship between men and women—driving them apart until they abandon any desire for marriage altogether?

Because marriage has a divine purpose—one so important that Satan seeks to keep us from desiring it at all. He knows that if men and women become so repulsed by one another that they abandon their pursuit of this special relationship, they will never experience its benefits or the many lessons God designed it to teach.

Why marriage matters

As a young married woman, I can't claim to fully understand all the ways marriage changes and shapes the lives of men and women. There are many milestones that my husband and I have yet to experience. But even in its early years, I can already see marriage's transformative power at work.

Through this experience, I've come to see that marriage does more than just strengthen our relationships with one another—it also reveals deeply important lessons about our relationship with God. This is why Satan is working so hard to make people devalue marriage or avoid it altogether. And it's precisely why embracing it matters so much.

Marriage deepens appreciation and understanding

Much of the division between the genders begins with a failure to truly understand one another.

Marriage provides one of the best environments for men and women to grow in this kind of understanding—the kind both desire, yet often struggle to achieve.

Of course, it's not guaranteed that a man and woman will come to better understand one another simply by sharing life at this intimate level. But those who approach marriage with humility and a sincere desire for unity can find it.

As mutual understanding is established, mutual appreciation naturally follows. With that appreciation, couples are better positioned to recognize and honor God's design for husbands and wives and the distinct

roles He established within the marriage relationship.

(To learn more, download our booklet *God's Design for Marriage*.)

Marriage teaches the true meaning of love

Love is a small word that conveys tremendous meaning. But, as essential as it is, it's notably absent in much of the discourse playing out between men and women online. Understandably, when people see this lack of love on full display, they're turned off, believing the opposite gender to be unwilling or incapable of demonstrating the love they would require from a spouse.

For those who hope to be married one day, this can be frightening. This is why it's so important to remember that the generalized stereotypes we see online don't apply to everyone. The world has always lacked love, but there are men and women out there who deeply love and care for others.

When these individuals find each other, they can use marriage as a training ground for learning more about what love truly means—and what it requires.

As husbands and wives learn to show their love through mutual sacrifice, they begin to better understand what it means to lay down one's life for one's spouse and that there truly is no greater demonstration of love than this. (See "[What Is the Meaning of John 15:13: 'Lay Down One's Life'?](#)")

The marriage relationship between husbands and wives mirrors Christ's own relationship with His Church—the body of believers who commit themselves to Him.

Over time, the sacrificial love cultivated in marriage can lead to a deeper appreciation for the sacrificial love that God the Father and Jesus Christ have for all people. After all, what demonstration of love could be greater than Christ's willingness to give His life for mankind or the Father's willingness to give up His only begotten Son?

Marriage models Christ's relationship with His Church

God intended marriage to be a joyous and rewarding experience—one in which husbands and wives gain understanding and appreciation for one another, grow in sacrificial love and come to better appreciate the sacrifice of our Savior. This alone helps explain why Satan attacks marriage so fiercely.

But there's a much bigger reason why Satan sows division and draws people away from marriage. The marriage relationship between husbands and wives mirrors Christ's own relationship with His Church—the body of believers who commit themselves to Him.

The instructions given to husbands and wives in Ephesians 5 include an important spiritual parallel:

“For the husband is head of the wife, *as also Christ is head of the church*” (verse 23).

“Husbands, love your wives, *just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her*” (verse 25).

In verse 32, Paul makes this parallel even clearer, revealing that these instructions—though directed at men and women—are really about Christ's relationship with His Church. This explains our collective role as the future wife of Jesus Christ when He returns to the earth.

It's possible to understand this parallel without being married, but it takes a respect for the institution itself. By driving men and women apart, Satan strives to erode all respect for marriage and obscure the truth of God's plan for mankind.

To the unmarried: encouragement in a season of waiting

Understanding the deeper meaning of marriage—both as a reflection of Christ's relationship with His Church and as a training ground for love, sacrifice and understanding—makes its importance unmistakable.

But another important truth must be acknowledged. Until you meet the person you will marry, these descriptions of marriage and the lessons it teaches can feel like distant ideals—beautiful, but belonging to a reality you feel you may never experience.

If you find yourself in this season of waiting, take comfort in the knowledge that God understands your desire to be married and that He has the power to bring someone into your life who defies society's stereotypes—someone with whom you can learn the true lessons of marriage, not in theory, but in lived experience.

In the meantime, reject narratives that seek to tear marriage down and diminish its value. Once we understand why God instituted marriage, we realize that it's far too important to abandon. Hold it in high regard. Defend it, learn from it and champion it, trusting that God still brings men and women together—not by accident, but by design. 🕊



Church: Much More Than Words

Attending church services is much more than words. It is a key to fostering relationships that build up and edify.

By Jason Hyde



The memory lingers. I was 4 or 5 years old. My older brother and I were getting ready for bed when we heard a gentle knock at the front door.

It was quite dark by that time in the evening. A knock that late was unusual, so my brother and I scampered toward the front door.

Dad opened the door to discover several bags of groceries. In the darkness, we could see taillights disappearing over the hill.

Multiple bags of food. At my age, I didn't realize how much our family needed the contents of these bags.

Where did they come from? This was long before grocery delivery services.

The person who anonymously dropped off these bags of treasures was someone from church who knew of our financial hardship.

That event has stuck with me. It was a stirring lesson about generosity, love, community and the household of faith (Galatians 6:10). Such big words or concepts were beyond my grasp at the time. But a seed was planted in my mind.

Church. That weekly gathering in a hot meeting hall—wedged in among people from all walks of life—was more than “just” church. It was more than singing a few hymns, listening to a couple of messages and darting out the door.

No, it was family.

Back to the beginning

Almost 2,000 years ago, thousands gathered in Jerusalem to worship God and celebrate the annual festival of Pentecost. Among the crowd were a group of disciples—individuals who had responded to the good news preached by Jesus of Nazareth.

“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1). One accord. One place. A connected community. See our online article “[The Miracle and Meaning of Pentecost](#)” for a deeper exploration of this festival.

On that Pentecost, those disciples received an incredible gift—the Holy Spirit. They would be crafted into a special Body known in Scripture as the Church of God.

From its beginning, the Church was never intended to be an isolated group of individuals. Rather, members were expected to be unified, involved and connected. “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized . . . And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:41-42).

This initial *togetherness* became the model for the Church. “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people” (verses 46-47).

This family atmosphere reflected Jesus’ directive: “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Unity was to be a hallmark of the Church.

Paul described the Church of God as the “household of faith” (Galatians 6:10). *Household* carries the idea of belonging, intimacy or family. The Church is to be more than a loosely associated group of individuals. Rather, it is to be a functioning, interconnected group, sharing identity, purpose and familial association.

Expected to assemble

The Church is expected to consistently meet in person for organized religious worship. This is nothing new for the people of God. When sharing His festivals, God declared, “The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be *holy convocations*, these are My feasts” (Leviticus 23:2, emphasis added).

The Hebrew word translated “convocation” refers to a public meeting or a sacred religious gathering.

It is not enough to believe. God’s intent is that His people assemble on His weekly Sabbath and annual festivals. Jesus modeled this practice (see Mark 1:21-22; 3:1-6; 6:1-2; Luke 4:16-21; 6:6-11; 13:10-17), and the Church followed His example (Acts 2:1; 13:13-49; 18:4).

Paul described this community as a “body” (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Despite individual traits and differences, the Church is meant to be “one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free” (verse 13). In the first century, these categories could have been divisive and polarizing. Paul exhorted Christians to be of one mind and heart.

Modern social and cultural categories can be equally divisive. Paul emphasized that

Christians “are the body of Christ” first and then “members individually” (verse 27). Individual preferences, within the boundaries of God’s law and administrative authority, should not separate or divide Christians.

The effectiveness and power of this Body is amplified when it assembles together—when all the parts are present, spiritually engaged and faithful.

Watered down or curtailed

The Church does not exist in a spiritual vacuum. Peter warns, “Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

One recurring threat is the devaluing and degrading of in-person religious services.

In many churches, services contain little biblical instruction and teaching—replaced by a growing trend of concert-style worship events.

Many people arrive just before the “show” and leave immediately after. Others, facing the hectic and competing schedules of youth sports, shopping, leisure and other events, are abandoning in-person attendance altogether and turning instead to podcasts, livestreams and reels.

The ease and anonymity of an online service can prove irresistible. Yet the Bible warns against “forsaking the assembling of ourselves together” (Hebrews 10:25).

Benefits of assembling

Why is assembling so important? Consistent, in-person services

provide numerous benefits for Christians, such as:

1. Hearing the Word of God expounded.

Individual Bible study and prayer are important. However, all Christians need congregational instruction.

Paul noted, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). Faith is seeded through the active teaching within the Church (verses 14-16).

God gave pastors and teachers “to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Ephesians 4:11-12, New International Version). Congregational instruction is a gift.

This inspired instruction most often occurs when “the body of Christ” is assembled in a service. To intentionally or carelessly reject those opportunities is unwise and can lead to spiritual drift (Proverbs 18:1).

2. Building community.

It is difficult to foster a community without being together. Consistent attendance facilitates developing relationships. This cannot be accomplished through a passive, view-only, digital service.

Jesus intended His Body to connect and thrive through these relationships. Titus 2:1-8 describes a vibrant congregation where “older men” and “older women” offer personal examples, advice and perspectives across generations. This mentoring thrives in a close-knit congregation but is nearly impossible to replicate remotely.

The various backgrounds, abilities and experiences found within the Church of God can help individuals avoid echo chambers

that might steer one away from the truth.

Christians are admonished to “consider one another in order to stir up love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24). How do we start? By “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together” (verse 25).

3. Helping each other.

The connections and depth of relationships built through consistent interactions can affect many areas of life.

Christians face trials (1 Peter 4:12).

Navigating and enduring those trials can be easier when support is available. For example, Christians are to be “distributing to the needs of the saints” (Romans 12:13). Without community bonds, how would one accurately identify the needs? Even as a child, I realized that relationships formed through regular church attendance had alerted someone to our need and prompted a late-evening grocery delivery.

Christians also still fall short and sin. Fellow Christians can offer significant help and encouragement. “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:19-20). This type of intervention is effective in an environment of trust and connection.

When together isn’t possible

Assembling with other Christians offers tremendous benefits.

However, there are situations when this simply isn’t possible.

Some Christians face health challenges that prevent in-person attendance. Others live in areas where no other believers are nearby.

If you’re in this situation, what can you do? Here are some practical suggestions:

- Follow a congregation online. Connect with the pastor and as many members as possible.
- Push for as much fellowship and connection as you can manage. In some cases, others may be able to visit you.
- Stay connected via calls, texts and emails. Where possible, use technology such as Zoom, Teams, Telegram, WhatsApp or FaceTime to make video connections and facilitate regular fellowship.
- Pray for others in the congregation as you learn of their needs.
- Ask God to sustain your faith and draw others to respond to the gospel (John 6:44; Matthew 9:38).


The goal is to connect with other Christians in a deep and meaningful manner.

Join the household

Christians are strengthened through formal instruction and deeper relationships with fellow believers.

What about you? If you’re interested in meeting together with other Christians striving to practice genuine Christianity, visit the [Church of God, a Worldwide Association](#), website and click on “Find a Congregation.”

You’ll discover that the Church is much more than words. It’s family. 🙏



Do You Need a Digital Detox?

With our devices taking more of our time, the idea of a digital detox is spreading in medical and self-help literature. Can the Bible help us gain control?

By Eddie Foster

Older Millennials, like me, can remember growing up with the emergence of the Internet and the digital era. We remember the sound of dial-up like we just heard it yesterday, and we remember sending that first text on a flip

phone using T9 predictive text.

Has the digital world that emerged been a net plus for society?

Yes! And no.

Pros and cons of the digital age

On the one hand, our smartphones now bring more opportunity and assistance into our lives than we ever thought possible.

We use them for complex calculations, getting directions to anywhere on the planet, looking up useful (and useless) information, watching movies, listening to music, playing video games, calling our loved ones, texting, emailing, getting personalized advice from AI-powered virtual assistants, shopping, getting coupons, making appointments and the list goes on.

On the other hand, our smartphones have also brought more problems and challenges than we ever imagined.

We now have instant access to more life-crushing addictions than ever—from gambling and pornography to addiction to the devices themselves. In many ways, we have literally become the product. Corporations sell our data and even harvest our conversations through our always-on devices.

So, there are pros and cons. Life can be amazingly better and easier, but the price can be steep.

Alarm bells have been ringing for a while, and many are waking up to the havoc that instant and nonstop access to social media is having on people's mental health. Addiction to devices is becoming so widespread it is difficult to ignore.

The rise of the digital detox

As a result of all of this, the idea of a digital detox has been gaining popularity. Many experts and influencers

now advocate for scheduled periods of disconnection from our devices. Studies are highlighting the benefits of digital “fasts” from devices—especially for reducing anxiety and depression.

Of course, as with any trend, there are those seeking to profit from digital detox retreats or other flashy therapies with different levels of success.

But many commonsense digital detox strategies are free and self-directed.

Still, the question is, how can we know if we need a detox?

Do I need to do a digital detox?

When considering whether your digital use warrants a detox, think in terms of addiction or slavery. In Romans 6:16, the apostle Paul used this imagery to talk about becoming either slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness.

So, consider these questions to determine if you've become a slave of your devices:

1. Just how much of my free time do I spend using my devices?
2. What percentage of my day is spent continuously scrolling through reels that I probably won't remember five minutes after viewing?
3. When others are speaking to me, am I using (or thinking of) my device instead of actively listening?
4. How much of my device time is spent endlessly scrolling or getting jealous over FOMO (fear of missing out) or looking at brain-rotting content?
5. Have I gotten angry with someone who has pointed out that I might have an addiction?
6. Do I believe I am addicted to my device?

When confronted with these questions, we might quickly get defensive and come up with a parade of excuses:

- “My devices help me get through the day (or the workout or the dishes or parenting).”
- “I work hard all day and just want to relax when I have some free time.”
- “I listen to podcasts, watch documentaries, connect with loved ones—all good things.”

On the surface, we may see ourselves in a lot of these statements. Listening to a podcast or music really does make monotonous tasks more tolerable, and

entertainment can provide a relaxing reprieve after a long workday. Devices provide many valuable tools that we take advantage of routinely throughout the day.

But are we recognizing the whole story behind those excuses? Such justifications can be a hallmark of an addiction that doesn't want the dopamine hits to stop.

- **“My devices help me get through stuff.”** (That's why I use them all day in every part of my day, which means my entire day is somewhat intolerable, and I haven't dealt with why I feel that way.)
- **“I just want to relax when I have some free time after work.”** (My work drains me so much that

anything meaningful feels exhausting, so I settle for endless reels of mostly useless media.)

- **“I use my phone for all these good things all day.”** (But this leaves no time for silence, personal reflection or just old-fashioned quality time with family and friends.)

Generalizations? Yes. Uncomfortably close to home? Probably.

Time to detox

When choosing how to detox—or “fast”—from the digital realm for a period of time, the prescription should fit the severity of the ailment. Some of us may have to start small, if only to discover how addicted we've become to our devices. Others might be able to easily go hours or even a whole weekend without being connected.

Starting somewhere is the key, rather than just excusing or justifying current habits—“it's really not that bad” or “it's not really an addiction if so many people do it.”

There are ways to monitor how much time we spend on certain apps so we can target those that take up the most time. Helpful tools are available. “Digital Wellbeing” (for Android users) and “Screen Time” (for iPhone users) actually come preloaded on most modern smartphones.

We may discover that it isn't a complete phone detox that we need, but a break from specific apps that eat up huge amounts of our time with little benefit to show from it.

For example, we may want to keep our app for listening to audio books, but find a way to limit our time on apps that display endless mindless reels.

We can also work on building routines into our lives that don't depend on devices. (For example, reading physical books, taking walks outside or playing a musical instrument.)

We can pray and study using a physical Bible. This can be a spiritually productive way to disconnect for a while if we want to examine whether our devices have quietly become a second master (Matthew 6:24).

And yes, there can be benefits to silence and boredom. Our devices have almost completely taken



these two states away from us. Boredom can be a negative emotion, but it can also have many positive effects on us (providing, for instance, quiet time for reflection or fuel for creativity).

One of the biblical tools for spiritual growth is meditation, focused contemplation of God's Word. God encourages the type of meditation in which we can examine ourselves (2 Corinthians 13:5) and, through His Spirit, search out the deep things of God (1 Corinthians 2:10).

Some digital detox ideas


Here are a few ways to do your own personal digital detox:

- 1. Set clear limits and boundaries.** This could include rules like “no devices during meals together” or “stop using devices an hour before bed.”
- 2. Build in device-free activities throughout the day.** Reading, studying, praying, journaling, exercising or having conversations with others are examples of valuable device-free activities. To truly avoid notification distractions, it may be necessary to place your phone in another room during these times.
- 3. Identify time-consuming apps.** Disabling notifications, or even deleting those apps for a time, may be necessary if they prove to be a persistent temptation.

Keep what's beneficial

Smartphones and other modern devices are not evil in themselves. They are very powerful tools that can be both a positive and a negative in our lives. They are necessary for the level of connection and immediacy that is needed for most jobs, and they make connection with loved ones much easier and affordable.

As the Bible points out, we are to be temperate in all things (1 Corinthians 9:25). This includes our use of devices and technology. When moderation is lost, we should take intentional steps, such as a digital detox, to make the needed correction.

Learn more in our online article [“How to Stop Phone Addiction.”](#) 

Discerning Quality in the Digital Realm

Positive engagement with our devices in the realm of entertainment, social media and news has everything to do with quality.

For every well-researched podcast that provides useful knowledge, there are dozens featuring angry and poorly informed voices loudly expressing their opinions with the goal of provoking outrage or gaining views and ad revenue.

For every YouTube instructional video on how to fix a toilet or make wise investments, there are dozens designed solely to keep viewers scrolling, offering little beyond shock, spectacle or shallow entertainment.

We need to discern (Philippians 1:9) between what is good and what is harmful, and between what is meaningful and what is meaningless, in the digital realm.

Will NATO Survive?

Has the greatest crisis in the history of the Atlantic alliance exposed and accelerated the demise of NATO and the West?

By Neal Hogberg



For nearly eight decades, the American-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has been the jewel in the crown of Western security. It has given Europe its longest era of relative peace since the peak of the Roman Empire.

Recent events have turbocharged the sense of rupture in what may be the most successful alliance in history. The transatlantic angst that simmered during the first term of U.S. President Donald Trump has boiled over into a potential realignment that would profoundly reshape the global order.

Despite its member nations having a shared history, culture

and political inheritance, NATO has always been a strained coalition beset by divisions. Its dependence upon a decision-making process requiring consensus—originally of 12 but now of 32 member countries—often means progress moves at the glacial speed of the slowest member.

The anatomy of an alliance

NATO came into existence because of a sense of threat to the security and freedom of member countries in Europe and North America. Speaking to the signatories in April 1949, President Harry Truman said, “To protect this area against war will be a long step toward permanent peace in the whole world.”

Decades later, President Ronald Reagan trumpeted that “the Atlantic alliance is the core of America’s foreign policy and of America’s own security.” NATO has provided Washington, as the first among equals, vast political influence and a network of bases to project power worldwide.

Nevertheless, the transatlantic alliance has frequently been seen as divided and lacking purpose—in 2019 French President Emmanuel Macron even described it as experiencing “brain death.” Former U.S. ambassador to NATO Donald Rumsfeld once quipped that it has a lucky habit of being “saved” once a decade by a new crisis between the West and the Kremlin.



The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was just such a shot of adrenaline for NATO, and it kick-started its most ambitious activity in recent memory. But that boost has since worn off, replaced by the cold reality of an administration that no longer views the defense of Europe as America's primary interest.

The turning point

The West has found itself at a critical juncture since President Trump returned to the White House determined to finish the job of global realignment. His "National Security Strategy," released in November 2025, struck leaders in European capitals like a

bucket of cold water and signaled not just a shift in policy, but a filing for divorce.

The report accused elected European leaders of doubling down on immigration policies in a rush to "civilizational erasure." It described Europe as betraying Western civilization itself, warning that the continent could become unrecognizable within two decades. The report even suggested that the current administration in Washington views Europe as growing too weak to be reliable, and more of a burden than an ally.

Many saw the report as another sign of the end of the Western order. The report "effectively declared civilizational war on the EU and its values," Paul Taylor, a senior visiting fellow at the European Policy Centre, wrote in *The Guardian*.

Greenland: a contentious chunk of ice

The frustrations, once spoken of in hushed tones in Europe, turned to loud outrage when the American president threatened to invade Greenland, mocking it as relying on "two dog sleds" for defense.

The introduction of hypersonic glide missiles able to fly over the polar regions at upwards of 11 times the speed of sound has turned the Arctic into an indispensable part of NATO's defense. In addition to its strategic location, the frozen island is home to massive deposits of crucial rare earth minerals.

The crisis was averted, but it was the first time that governments in Europe contemplated the ramifications of one NATO member invading another.

America's "Donroe Doctrine"

The Trump administration has been open in its contempt for the alliance, characterizing NATO as a money pit and lambasting feckless allies for not bearing their share of the load. Washington seems to view Europe as a museum of past glories just waiting for an obituary to be written.

At the heart of this tumultuous rupture is the so-called Donroe Doctrine, a pivot toward a sometimes-jarring transactional approach to geopolitics that views allies not as force multipliers, but as grasping dependents. Underlying this is the fact the United States is overstretched, spending more on debt service than on defense, so it can no longer afford to subsidize Europe's defense.

Flattery as a defense against Donald Trump

European leaders, initially caught off guard by the president's harsh language and tariff threats, have experimented with a strategy of containment through deference.

The European approach has been characterized as a desperate performance for an audience of one. Alain Frachon, a columnist in France's prominent newspaper *Le Monde*, noted that leaders have "flattered him, congratulated him, praised his achievements and thanked him: anything to avoid upsetting the great man" (Sept. 5, 2025).

Some observers have gone further. Writing for *The Atlantic*, Robert Kagan noted that certain leaders resorted to "appealing

to his vanity . . . acceding to his punitive tariffs without resistance” and even calling him “Daddy” (Sept. 10, 2025).

The winter chill between Europe and the U.S.

But the mask of deference is slipping. The Jan. 23, 2026, cover of the German weekly *Der Spiegel* depicted European leaders dressed in Nordic warrior garb and brandishing swords. Translated into English, the headline reads, “Donald, That’s Enough!” At the bottom are the words: “How Europe can stand up to Trump’s imperialism.”

The Spectator, a British weekly, also took up the fight against the American president, stating: “His narcissism, vulgarity and bombast seemed to confirm every suspicion about America at its worst: nativist, isolationist, crudely self-interested—a fortress America led by a man with little patience for allies or alliances” (Feb. 2, 2026).

For decades, America was viewed as the ultimate guarantor of European security and liberal values. A January 2026 YouGov survey found 64 percent of Britons view the U.S. unfavorably—up 28 points since November 2023. A staggering 71 percent of Germans now consider the United States an adversary, according to a January 2026 Forsa poll.

The rhetoric from European leaders has likewise been stripped of the usual diplomatic niceties.

French President Emmanuel Macron insisted the EU must be “uncompromising,” while European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen declared that “battle lines” were being drawn.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, the leader of Europe’s most populous democracy, said, “The Americans are now pursuing their own interests very, very aggressively” and concluded Germany must do the same.

Europe’s long retreat

This extraordinary continent occupies just 4 percent of the world’s landmass (excluding Russia). Yet it shaped much of human history for the past 500 years by conquering and administering as much as 80 percent of the planet.

Now Europe appears to have become a collection of bystanders. By nearly every metric of hard power, Europe’s proportion of global economic and military strength is at its lowest ebb since the Middle Ages.

The numbers describe a stagnation that is difficult to ignore. Since 2009, European household wealth has grown by only a third as much as that of Americans.

Europe is falling behind in the digital age

Europe today generates neither the new technologies nor the competitive businesses the 21st century demands. A risk-averse culture and stifling regulation have led to only four of the world’s top 50 tech companies being European.

While the EU overtaxes and overregulates the industries it still possesses, U.S. technology giants—Microsoft, Meta, Amazon and Alphabet’s Google—are planning to

spend up to \$670 billion to build out AI infrastructure *this year alone*.

EU tech czar Henna Virkkunen recognizes the need for a technology independence moment, and the European Parliament passed a sweeping “technology sovereignty” resolution to promote and favor homegrown digital products.

Still, according to a January 2025 survey by Bitkom, a Berlin-based digital lobby group, some 80 percent of German companies rely on American digital technologies to function.

The doomsday scenario now whispered about in European capitals is a White House executive order that, in the heat of a trade dispute or security crisis, cuts off the region’s access to the data centers or email software that businesses and governments need to survive.

Thinking the unthinkable

For years, Europe has enjoyed the security of the American nuclear umbrella. But the decades of neglect that have followed as a result have hollowed out the defense industries of NATO’s European members. They instead rely on the U.S., which remains the indispensable nation when it comes to the tools of modern war.

“If anyone thinks that the European Union—or Europe as a whole—can defend itself without the U.S., keep dreaming. You can’t. We can’t,” NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte told a stunned European Parliament.

The fear of Russian troops in Ukraine—NATO’s backyard—has Europeans confronting reality.

Faced with the potential removal of the nuclear protection America

provides, more Europeans are floating the formerly inconceivable idea of acquiring or developing their own nuclear weapons. News of a “joint Nordic” nuclear deterrent or a German nuclear program have garnered a lot of recent headlines:

- “Britain in Talks to Protect Sweden With Nuclear Deterrent” (*The Telegraph*, Jan. 27, 2026).
- “Germany May Develop Its Own Nuclear Weapons With EU Allies” (*New York Post*, Feb. 1, 2026).
- “Trump’s Greenland Gambit Pushes Europe to Look to Its Own Nuclear Arsenals” (*Politico*, Feb. 21, 2026).

Europe at a crossroads

For nearly 80 years, the dream of a unified, peaceful Europe has been the continent’s secular religion.

We are witnessing the early tremors of a shift, as internal strife weakens the NATO shield and Europe is forced to look to its own defense.

10 kings and one mind

The book of Revelation speaks of a startling geopolitical alignment: “The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast” (Revelation 17:12).

In a future geopolitical crisis, a mixed union of 10 national leaders or regional blocs within Europe will give their power and authority to a coming powerful leader the Bible calls the beast or the king of the North (Daniel 11:40). The book

The stage is being set for a final act that was written thousands of years ago.

of Daniel also describes this end-time leader as a man with “fierce features, who understands sinister schemes” (Daniel 8:23). He will gain power through cunning and political maneuvering.

The economic colossus he will lead will rival any in history, and it will possess a shocking military sting that will catch the world off guard (Daniel 11:40-41).

The current fracturing of NATO may be the catalyst for this prophecy. A two-speed Europe or a core Europe is often discussed in the halls of power. As NATO weakens, a smaller, more dedicated group of nations—the 10 kings—may indeed emerge from the chaos to form the hard core of this final beast power.

Many may wonder, given Europe’s current position, how it could ever rise to such a place of dominance again. Yet biblical prophecy indicates that when this resurgence occurs, the world will be astonished—having assumed that the European-led order would not rise again (Revelation 13:3).


Only time will reveal how such a dramatic revival might unfold.

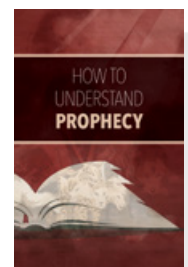
However, history shows that periods of crisis can drive rapid

change in Europe. Less than a century ago, Germany lay devastated and economically shattered in the aftermath of World War I. Yet in just over a decade, a charismatic leader rose to power and rebuilt the nation’s military strength, enabling it to once again plunge the world into world war.

So, watch Europe. Watch for an economic resurgence in Europe that threatens the economic vitality of America and China. Watch for NATO to become more anti-American or more irrelevant. Watch calls for a European army and development of a stronger nuclear deterrent. Watch for a strongman who can lead a confident, independent Europe, rather than take orders from Washington.

The stage is being set for a final act that was written thousands of years ago.

Learn more in our booklet *How to Understand Prophecy*. 



Lost in Translation

What's Happening Under the Hood of Your Bible?

The Bible is a gift from God—but understanding the pitfalls of translation can help us more carefully navigate His inspired Word.

By Jeremy Lallier

“**B**ury me.” That’s the literal translation of the modern Lebanese expression *ta’burni*. (That’s one possible way of transliterating the Arabic letters.)

In English, “bury me” is rather morbid-sounding—but for the Lebanese, it’s shorthand. It’s not an instruction, but a wish:

“The thought of living without you is unbearable. I hope, when the time comes, I die before you—I hope you’re the one who has to bury me—because I don’t know how I’d cope with the alternative.”

All that is wrapped up in the Arabic expression. But it’s *not* wrapped up in the English words *bury me*.

What’s a translator to do?

Translation is a challenging process

I don’t think there’s a right answer. If you translate it as “bury me,” you’re being faithful

to the literal words being used in the original Arabic while introducing confusion over a phrase whose meaning requires cultural context to decipher. If you translate it as “I can’t bear the thought of living without you,” you’re being faithful to the intended meaning of the person who said it while obscuring the actual words he or she used.

Both are right. And yet both are wrong.

Translation can be *complicated*.

And that’s just an example of the choices involved in translating a single expression from one modern language to another. When we start talking about the Bible—a collection of books written over a period of about 1,500 years using three ancient languages attached to cultures that no longer exist—then the challenges are multiplied.

What this article is and isn’t trying to do

By the time you finish reading this, there’s something I hope to convince you of—and something I’m trying very hard *not* to convince you of.



When you open up the pages of your English Bible, what you're reading is a *translation* of God's inspired words—not the original words, but an interpretation of their meaning. And because the translation process is often complicated and imperfect, we should be careful how much weight we put on the specific words of a specific translation.

Underneath those English words are a host of grammatical, historical, cultural and linguistic considerations that even some of the most studied experts don't always agree on. And even when the experts *do* agree, sometimes a Hebrew or Greek word might carry so many layers of meaning that it's impossible for a single English word to convey what's being said.

I want you to be aware of that while you read the Bible, because treating translated words as if they were the original text can occasionally lead us to some wildly inaccurate conclusions.

What I *don't* want to convince you to do is to read the Bible with extreme skepticism, doubting everything and trusting nothing. I don't want to convince you that this holy and sacred book is impossible to comprehend or only for the experts.

Our Bible translations exist because of untold lifetimes of effort poured in by those who carefully preserved the words God inspired—and those who diligently worked to refine their understanding of those ancient words, creating something the rest of us could read in a language we understand.

Even though we could spend lifetimes diving into nuances and cultural details, a translation of the Bible still provides us with what we need to understand who God is, what He's doing and what He expects from us.

As Paul wrote, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). That's true, even thousands of years removed from the source material.

What exactly is *hesed*?

Consider, for example, *hesed*—a Hebrew word filled with so many layers of meaning that it can't easily be translated. It's used repeatedly in the Old Testament (251 times!), but if you look at a few different English translations, the enormity of the word becomes unmistakable.

In Hosea 6:6, God says, "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice."

Well, sort of. The New King James Version translates *hesed* as "mercy," but you'll also find it translated as "steadfast love" (English Standard Version), "loyalty" (New American Standard Bible), "faithfulness" (NET Bible) and "faithful love" (Christian Standard Bible).

What exactly does God desire?

Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary describes *hesed* as a word that "denotes 'kindness, love, loyalty, mercy,' most poignantly employed in the context of relationship between God and humans." What's more, *Mounce's* says, it often describes "the special relationship God has with his covenantal people, and as such can be a difficult word to translate because it is so specific" (p. 426).

What God *desires* or *delights in* is not just when His people show mercy, but when their continued faithfulness to His covenantal relationship results in acts of love, mercy and faithful obedience to His ways.

He desires *hesed*.

Are these translation issues in your Bible?

That's the difficulty of treating an English translation as if it were a flawless representation of God's inspired words. Any time humans try to convey a deeper meaning from one language into another, they're going to run into hurdles.

For example, if the only copy of the Bible you owned was the King James Version, and you didn't have access to any other resources, you'd probably wonder about unicorns.

That's right—the King James Version mentions unicorn or unicorns in nine verses.

David, for example, praises God for delivering him “from the horns of the unicorns” (Psalm 22:21, KJV).

Today, we recognize that as a [translation issue](#) stemming from scholars who misunderstood a Hebrew word (*re'em*) as it was translated into Greek (*monokeros*) and eventually Latin (*unicornus*). Modern scholarship reveals that *re'em* wasn't a reference to a legendary one-horned creature, but most likely a wild ox, the ancestor of domesticated cattle.

Translation issues might also convince you that Jesus was promising to meet the thief on the cross in heaven on the day of His crucifixion. Most translations render Luke 23:43 a similar way: “And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.’”

If you didn't know that the original Greek manuscripts of the New Testament didn't include punctuation, that verse would look like pretty compelling evidence that both Jesus and the thief were in paradise that same day.

Here's another legitimate way to translate that passage: “Assuredly, I say to you *today*, you will be with Me in Paradise.”

The promise was *given* that day—but not *fulfilled* that day. (See more in “[What Happened to the Thief on the Cross?](#)”)

Don't give up, but don't forget

So what do we do? Throw up our hands in defeat and call the whole thing an impenetrable mystery? Insist everyone receive a thorough schooling in biblical languages before interacting with God's Word? Remain forever suspicious of everything we read, wondering if a translator's bias or our own ignorance is obscuring the truth?

No . . . but when we open up a translation of the Bible, we should always keep in mind that *we're reading a translation of the Bible*. Things can get lost in translation. Ideas that are crisp in one language get fuzzy in another; the scope of a meaning can be incorrectly broadened

or narrowed in the quest for the right word to convey it.

When we read the Bible, we're reading a careful attempt to convey ancient thoughts across thousands of years of time and space. We should appreciate and admire the tireless work of those involved while also acknowledging that such work is, by nature, imperfect.

If we put too much weight on specific translated words, we risk confusing things God inspired with things men thought. (At the very least, we risk inventing unicorns.)

God's inspiration transcends translation

And yet, even in spite of all the hurdles of translation, God's voice remains.

The apostle Paul reminded Timothy that “from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15).

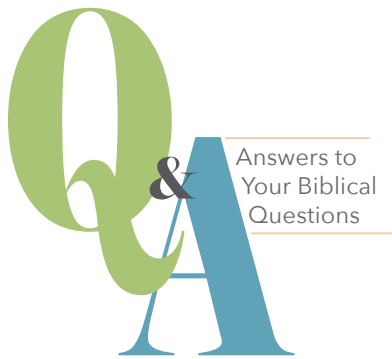
The Scriptures that Timothy knew were very likely a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible that we call the Septuagint. But that didn't stop Paul from affirming to Timothy that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (verse 16). The Greek translation Timothy had access to would have been enough to learn what he needed to learn.

Why?

Because the God who inspired these words to be written thousands of years ago—in Hebrew, Greek and a little bit of Aramaic—also inspired them to be preserved and translated for us. He transcends the Bible, and if we are seeking Him, He will help us to understand what we need to understand. While we can't afford to ignore the limitations of the translation process, we also can't afford to minimize Christ's promise that His Spirit “will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13).

In the meantime, “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love [*hesed*], and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

That's a good place to start. **🕊**



Q: What is the law of Christ?

A: Unfortunately, there is a great deal of confusion in the world about the law of Christ. This expression is used only once in the New Testament—in Galatians 6:2—but it is quite common in mainstream Christianity today.

It might surprise you to learn about Christ's true relationship with the law of God. Contrary to popular belief, Christ did not do away with the law, or replace it with something new. Rather, He kept God's law perfectly and taught it to His disciples, with the intent that the whole world would keep and obey it. Christ's law is not different from God's law.

In His famous Sermon on the Mount, Christ said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:17-19).

Our Life, Hope & Truth website contains several articles that address the subject of God's law that will be helpful and informative. See "[Jesus and the Law](#)" to get started.

Q: I received a video recently regarding an orthodox church practice of chanting what they call the Jesus prayer as it appears in the Bible regarding the tax collector. They do it with prayer beads and repeat the prayer. Is it okay for a Christian to chant?

A: We find a powerful example of humble, heartfelt prayer in the [parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector](#) (Luke 18:9-14). While the Pharisee's prayer was self-righteous, the tax collector prayed simply and sincerely: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" Jesus said this man, not the Pharisee, went home justified before God. His brief, humble prayer was heard and respected by God.

God desires that our prayers be heartfelt, sincere, genuine and humble. As we grow in our relationship with our Creator, our prayers reflect what's truly in our hearts and minds. These sincere prayers are a joy for God to hear—they are like sweet-smelling incense to Him (Psalm 141:2).

However, God does not desire mindless repetition of words. In fact, Jesus Christ specifically warned against this kind of empty prayer: "And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them" (Matthew 6:7-8).

From these and other scriptures, we can conclude that God is not pleased when people chant or repeat prayers without really thinking about what they're saying. He wants us to speak to Him from the heart, with a repentant and humble spirit. Prayer is designed to help us communicate with God and build a relationship with Him. Just as repeating the same words over and over does not strengthen a relationship on the human level, it does nothing to deepen our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

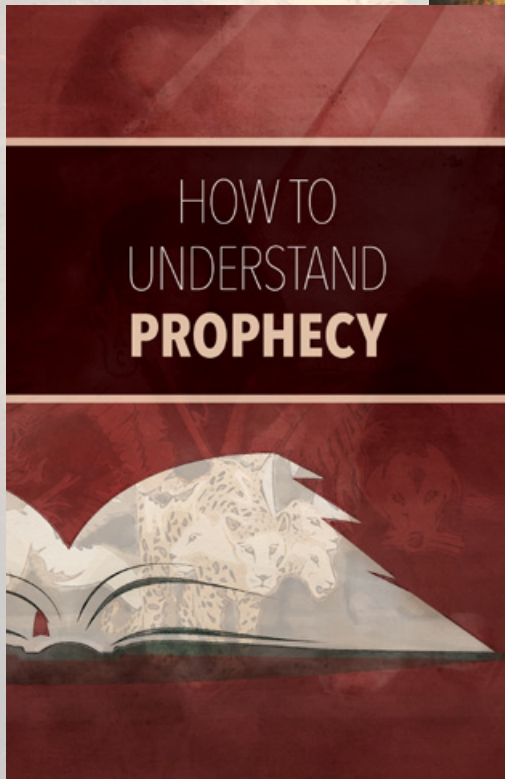
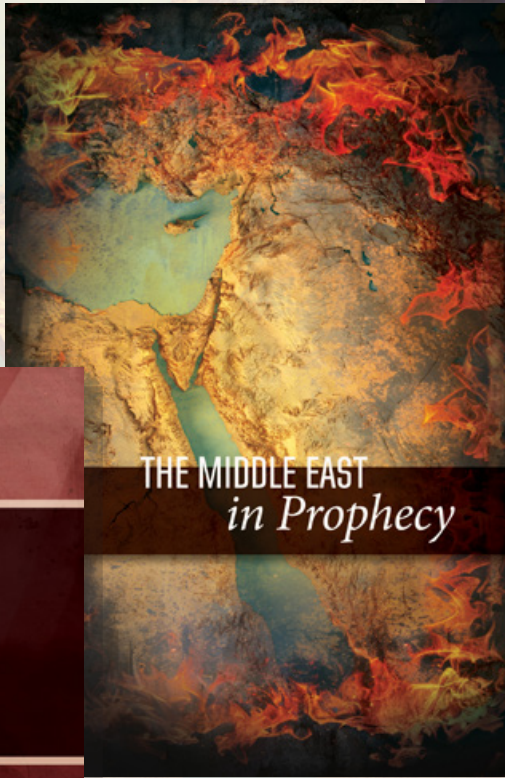
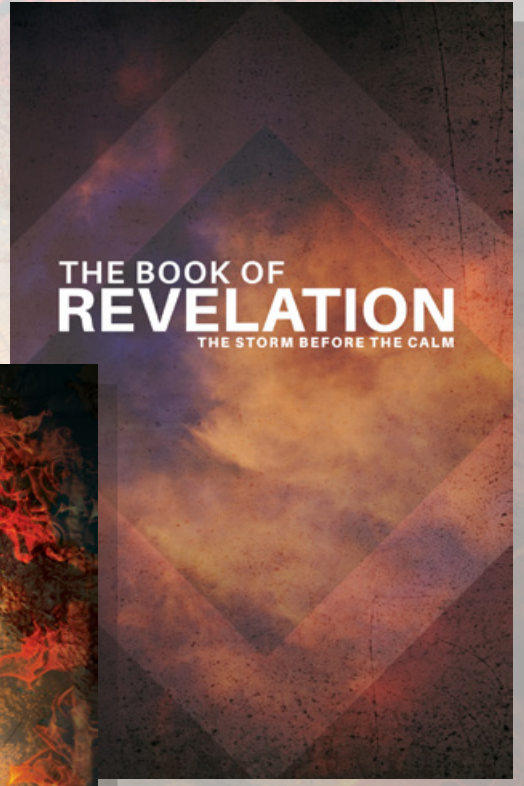
For additional study, explore these free resources on the topic of prayer:

- "[Avoiding Vain Repetitions in Prayer \(Matthew 6:7\)](#)" (podcast).
- "[Prayer From the Heart.](#)"
- "[Why Pray?](#)"
- "[How to Avoid Repetitious Prayer.](#)"

What You Need to Know About Prophecy

When world events heat up, people often turn to the Bible. What does Bible prophecy say about what will happen before the “end of the world”?

Is there any hope?



Download your free booklets from the Learning Center today!



Run, Grebe, Run

When a boy western grebe loves a girl western grebe very much . . .

No, wait. Let me try that again.

When a girl western grebe is suitably impressed with the courtship attempts of a boy western grebe (in which the two birds mirror each other's movements during a complicated choreography of neck movements, splashes and specific calls), the waterfowl will float side by side, rear themselves up to their full height and then do something that looks like it ought to be impossible:

They sprint together across the surface of the water.

God gave western grebes lobed (not webbed!) feet, and attached those feet at the rear of the grebe's body instead of underneath (unlike ducks). During their synchronized sprint, their feet strike the water around 20 times per second, propelling the birds across the water's surface for 20 yards in a physics-defying display.

Evolution doesn't offer a compelling explanation for why these birds would develop such an elaborate courtship ritual—but that's because it isn't a product of evolution. It's yet another wonder of God's creation.

Pictured: western grebe
(*Aechmophorus occidentalis*)



*Text by Jeremy Lallier
Photography by James Capo*



Jesus and the
Gentile Woman:
**Throwing the
Children's Bread
to the Dogs?**

While Jesus was near Tyre, a gentile woman begged Him for help. His reply may seem shocking at first. What can we learn from His response to her request?

By Erik Jones

After His confrontation with the Pharisees over ceremonial handwashing, Jesus left Galilee and traveled northwest toward Tyre and Sidon (ancient Phoenicia; modern-day Lebanon). This gentile (non-Jewish) area would have been a three- to four-day journey on foot.

Upon arriving in the area of Tyre and Sidon, Jesus “entered a house and wanted no one to know it, but He could not be hidden” (Mark 7:24).

Jesus’ fame had spread so widely by the second year of His ministry that He could hardly go anywhere and not be noticed. Earlier, Mark noted that people from Tyre and Sidon had traveled to Galilee to see Him (Mark 3:7-8), so it’s no surprise that many in this region were familiar with His works.

Jesus meets a gentile woman

While Jesus was there, a woman “came and fell at His feet” (Mark 7:25).

She cried out in distress, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed” (Matthew 15:22).

Matthew did his best to capture the feeling behind her plea, but words probably cannot convey the raw emotion with which she pleaded. Interestingly, she addressed Jesus using a messianic title—“Son of David”—indicating she was aware of His identity.

Normally, Jesus would respond immediately and positively to

people asking for help, but this situation was a bit different. She wasn’t a Jewish woman living in a gentile region; she was “a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth” (Mark 7:26).

As a Syro-Phoenician, she spoke Greek and lived in the Roman province of Syria but was ethnically a Phoenician, a people descended from the ancient Canaanites (Genesis 10:15). The tension between her ancestors and the Israelites stretched back centuries.

Yet here she was, a gentile woman, kneeling before a Jewish man, pleading for His merciful help.

Then Jesus answered and said to her, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.”

Readers of this series will know that this was not the first gentile Jesus had encountered. He had already conversed with a [Samaritan woman](#) (John 4) and healed the servant of a [Roman centurion](#)—so we might have expected Jesus to immediately cleanse her daughter of the demonic spirit.

But, in this case, He chose to respond differently.

Jesus’ response to the woman

Instead of immediately acknowledging her, He “answered

her not a word” (Matthew 15:23). But His silence did not deter her. She kept pleading—so persistently that the disciples found her annoying and begged Jesus to send her away. (Jesus would later give a parable emphasizing the importance of persistence in prayer; see Luke 18:1-8.)

Finally, Jesus responded: “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24). In other words, His mission was specifically to the descendants of Israel, not the gentiles.

(You may already be thinking, *Wait a minute, hadn't Jesus already shown He was open to working with gentiles?* Hold on to that thought.)

However, Jesus' response didn't deter her. She persisted in worshipping and begging for His help.

Jesus then said something that modern readers may find shocking and difficult to comprehend: “It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs” (verse 26).

In other words, His ministry was to the covenant people of Israel (*the children*), and it wasn't good that He should take the blessings intended for them and give them to those outside the covenant, the gentiles (*the little dogs*).

(The reader may be even more shocked now—*Wait a minute, Jesus is not only refusing to help her daughter, but He's*

likening her to a dog? Again, sit with that question.)

Most people, then and now, would have probably been so frustrated and offended by Jesus' words that they would have either turned around and stormed off or come back with an angry verbal retort.

But not this woman.

Instead of taking offense, she replied with remarkable humility and composure: “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table” (verse 27).

She did not dispute that Jesus' mission was first to the people of Israel, nor did she claim to be entitled to their covenant blessings. Instead, she simply asked for the crumbs of His mercy on behalf of her daughter.

As we pointed out in a past article, Jesus wasn't often impressed by human beings. But this woman's response genuinely impressed Him. “Then Jesus answered and said to her, ‘O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire’” (verse 28).

The context and purpose of the encounter

To understand His approach to her, we must remember that although Jesus was sent primarily to the children of Israel, He was also laying the groundwork for salvation to be extended to the gentiles. That transition would not completely unfold during His earthly ministry, but would begin in a much greater way shortly after His death and resurrection.

The disciples would play a central role in that transition. Even though they didn't fully grasp it at the time, Jesus was already preparing them for this profound shift in thinking and understanding.

He began by having a spiritual conversation with a Samaritan woman (John 4), showing that even those whom the Jews regarded with disdain were worthy of His time and attention. He continued it by openly marveling at the centurion's faith (Luke 7:1-10), showing that even a representative of the Jews' primary oppressors could demonstrate a level of faith that exceeded that of most Jews.

He continued that training through His interaction with this Syro-Phoenician woman.

Consider some of the events the disciples had recently witnessed. Just weeks earlier, Jesus had been scorned and rejected by His own countrymen in Nazareth. Not long after, He was abandoned by many of His disciples for saying something they found confusing. Then, just days earlier, He was criticized by the Pharisees and had to point out their deeply flawed understanding and traditions.

All of these negative interactions were from people descended from Israel, and all served as a prologue for this encounter.

Instead of rejecting His works, as those in Nazareth had done, this gentile woman truly believed He had the power to meet her most urgent need. Instead of turning away when His words seemed offensive or confusing, as many of His disciples had, she persisted. And rather than attacking Him for not acting according to her expectations, as the Pharisees did,

she humbly accepted His words, even if they were difficult to hear.

Her response and example stood in stark contrast to the many terrible reactions Jesus and the disciples had recently witnessed among the children of Israel, and they pointed to a truth the disciples needed to grasp:

Gentiles possessed the same spiritual potential as native-born Jews—and could even outshine them spiritually.

Unpacking Jesus' approach

Even though He did ultimately heal her daughter, Jesus' approach to this woman can still be perplexing.

Though the Gospels don't give us insight into Jesus' thinking in this situation, consider this: Throughout the Bible, we see that God is able to discern the inner

character of human beings (1 Samuel 16:7; John 2:24-25; Hebrews 4:12-13). He can look beyond the surface and see our inner strengths and weaknesses.

Even before she responded, Jesus knew she possessed the character and potential to react appropriately. By not immediately answering her pleas, He gave her the opportunity to demonstrate patience and persistence. And by speaking a difficult truth—that God's priority was not on the gentiles *just yet*—He gave her the opportunity to respond with humility and composure.

The Bible shows that God often **tests people**. Those tests are tools designed to allow us to either demonstrate our strengths or grow and overcome our weaknesses.

In this situation, Jesus likely discerned that this woman had genuine faith in His ability to heal and a level of patience and humility that exceeded that of His own countrymen.

So, He chose to respond to her in a way that allowed these character traits to shine—not just for her sake, but so His disciples could witness a gentile woman's faith outshining the faith of the Jews they had recently encountered.

From eating the crumbs to having a place at the table

This memory was just waiting to be recalled when God fully revealed to the disciples that the gentiles had equal spiritual potential and were being called to salvation under the New Covenant.

The time was coming when the gentiles would no longer eat the crumbs, but would have the opportunity to have a place as children at the table (Romans 11:13, 17).

If God is calling you, it doesn't matter what your ethnic or racial background is—you can have a place at God's "table."

But, in order to take that place, we have to learn from the example of this remarkable woman and come to Christ in faith, accept the truth of His teachings and commit ourselves to . . .

Walk as He walked. ④

The time was coming when the gentiles would no longer eat the crumbs, but would have the opportunity to have a place as children at the table.

Meeting a Fateful Rider

I had read about him many times (he's world-famous), but I had never seen his face up close. Then in 2003 I disembarked from an airliner in Tokyo, and the evidence was overwhelming that he was near.

As I flew from the United States to Thailand, I had to change planes in bustling Narita Airport. Narita serves around 40 million passengers a year. It was awash with people. I walked into a scene that seemed to come from a science fiction movie: the vast majority of the thousands upon thousands of passengers I saw were wearing surgical masks.

To this day, I have never seen so many people in masks.

SARS epidemic

You see, 2003 was during the first major SARS epidemic (2002 to 2004). Caused by SARS CoV-1, it was essentially the same virus that caused the coronavirus outbreak in 2020 (now labeled SARS CoV-2 to differentiate between the two), though it affected people differently. At that time, the virus infected about 8,000 people in about 30 countries, causing around 800 fatalities before it was contained.

A microscopic—electron microscope—level microscopic—difference in the virus led to the millions of deaths we watched in the news in recent years.

The fourth horseman

That strange scene in Tokyo was my introduction to a specter you recently met, and one we will all know even more personally in the years ahead.

I'm referring to the fourth horseman of the Apocalypse, in the book of Revelation. I've rubbed shoulders with him from time to time over the years, especially in Africa. We're all more aware now of the

rider on the pale horse. But we don't really know him yet—not as well as we will.

Death, the pale horse

Comparing Jesus' end-time prophecy in Matthew 24 with Revelation 6, we can know what the four horsemen of the Apocalypse represent. The first three, riding white, red and black horses, represent religious deception, war and famine.

Of the fourth, the apostle John states, "So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed

with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth" (Revelation 6:8).

The Greek word translated "pale" is *chloros*, which could be more fully translated "pale green." In Jesus' list, the fourth prophesied occurrence will be "pestilences" (Matthew 24:7), some of which give people a greenish pallor.

There have been religious deceptions, wars, famines and epidemics through all human history, but they are going to reach a crescendo just before the Christ's

second coming. Death, riding the pale horse, will have the power to kill a quarter of the earth's inhabitants. That's over 2 billion people based on the present population.

Bad news, good news

We may meet these horsemen in an airport, at work or even in our own homes. But be aware and be ready, because they'll be back stronger than ever, as precursors to the return of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

You can read more in our online articles "[What Are the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse?](#)" and "[Second Coming of Christ.](#)"

Joel Meeker



3,500 years later, the
10 Commandments
still matter.

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life? If you want true peace and
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