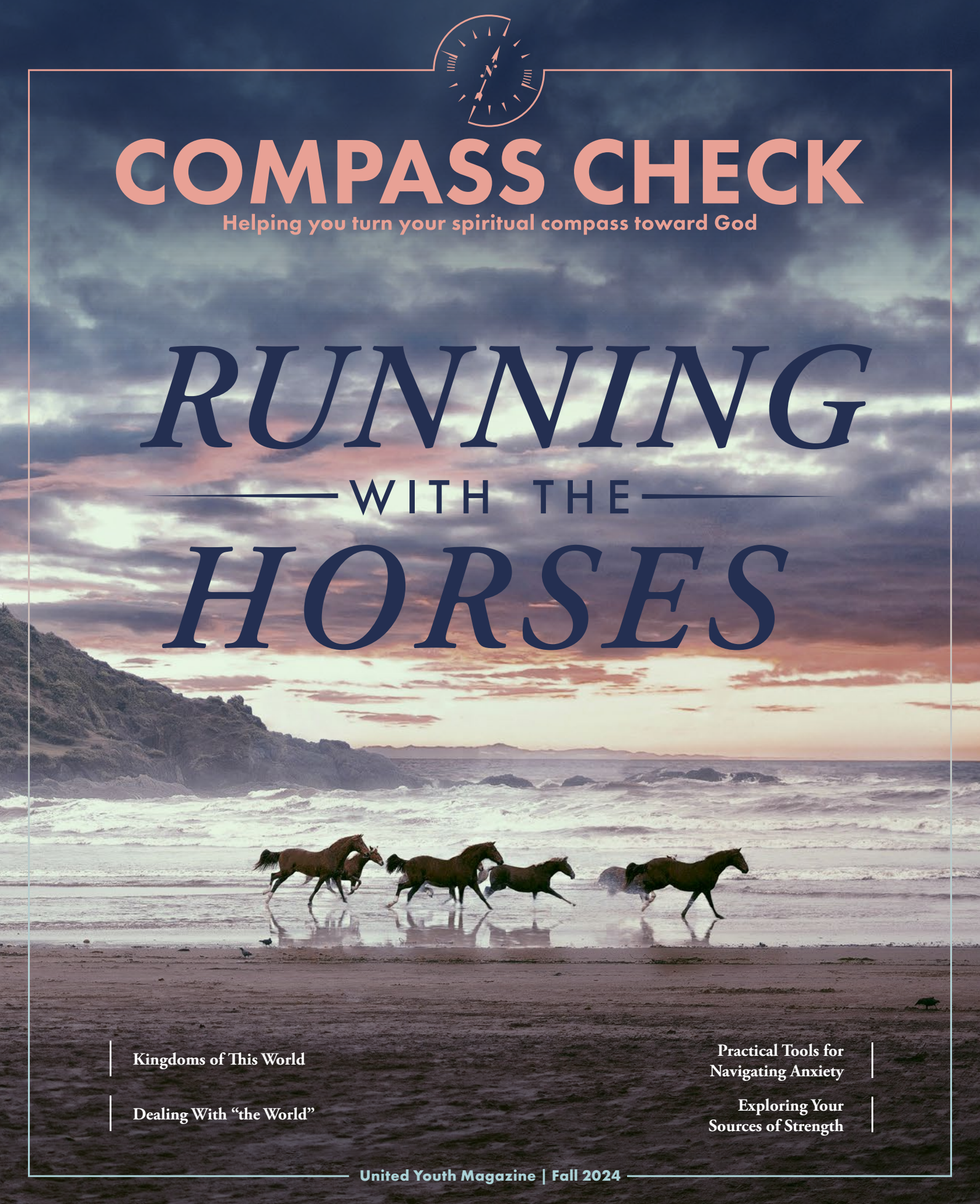


COMPASS CHECK

Helping you turn your spiritual compass toward God

RUNNING WITH THE HORSES

Kingdoms of This World

Dealing With "the World"

Practical Tools for Navigating Anxiety

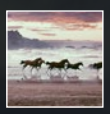
Exploring Your Sources of Strength

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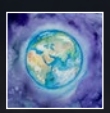
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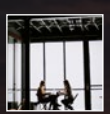
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COMPASS CHECK

Compass Check is a biblically based magazine for young people of the United Church of God, *an International Association* (UCG*IA*). Our name, *Compass Check,* refers to pointing your spiritual compass toward God. Our goal is to inspire readers to respond to the gospel message.

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COMPASS CORNER

Dear Compass Checkers,

As I write you this note, I am woefully behind in oh, so many things. My house needs painting, my bathroom remodel has come to a screeching halt and I'm about a week late in writing this letter. It was a crazy summer for my family between camp, several weddings and who knows what else. There's only one word to describe it—busy.

Although I love the summertime, fall is still my favorite season. There are cooler temperatures, football (Who-Dey!) and of course, the fall Holy days. Each day has special meaning, but I think the Feast of Tabernacles is no doubt a high-water mark for most of us during our year. Not only does it represent the coming Kingdom of God, but it also represents a time of rest. Rest from the influence of Satan and rest from the confusion that abounds in our world—something we take a look at in this issue.

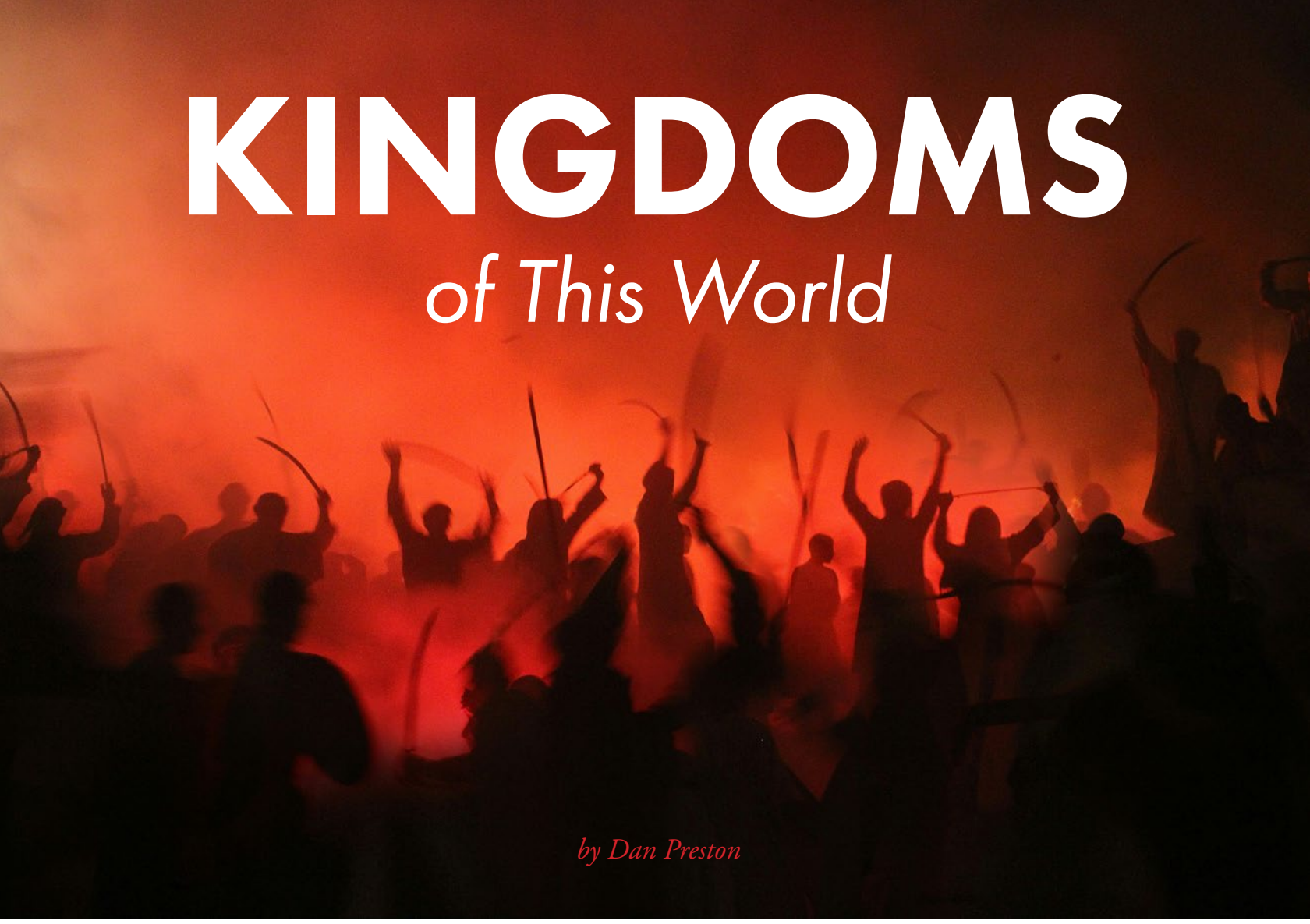
And speaking of rest, one of the biggest challenges it creates in our lives is anxiety. This can leave us a little weak—physically, emotionally and spiritually. In this issue, we'll take a look at a few ways to deal with some of those challenges.

Of course, just as we don't sit around and do nothing during the Feast, the Kingdom of God is a time when our Lord Jesus Christ will expect us to work. In fact, much of what we do today is training for our future. Our cover article for this issue, "Running with the Horses," takes a closer look at exactly what is expected of us.

By the time you receive this issue, you will likely only be days away from leaving for the Feast. I pray that you all have a very rewarding physical, emotional and spiritual journey there and back!



Dan Preston
Editor of Compass Check *magazine*



KINGDOMS
of This World

by Dan Preston

Everyone has preferences. It might be a style of music, a restaurant or even different types of people and personalities. With the election coming up in just a few weeks, it's very obvious that a *lot* of people in this country have a presidential candidate they favor more than the other. That's okay—as they say, everyone is entitled to their opinion.

But before you allow yourself to get too caught up in the upcoming election (or politics in general), consider what is written in Revelation 11:15: "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" At some point (in the not-too-distant future, I suspect), all the governments of this world will be overthrown. They will be replaced by the Kingdom of God and ruled over by Jesus Christ.

Think about what that means for a moment: there will no longer be Democrats or Republicans, nor even a democracy over which they vie to rule. There will not be communism, dictatorships, oligarchies or republics. The closest definition that fits the coming Kingdom of God is a monarchy. According to merriam-webster.com a monarchy is "undivided rule or absolute sovereignty by a single person." While that does align with what the Bible says about Christ ruling as King, there has never been a monarchy even close to what is to come. Why is that? Quite simply, it's because man offers quite a few things that God cannot and will not bring to government.

You read that right. There are some things that human beings bring to the table that God simply cannot or *will* not allow. And that's a good thing.

CONFUSION

One thing *man* contributes to government that God will not, is confusion. Of course, it's not like we live in anarchy. Most governments provide a nice system of roads, rules everyone must obey while using them, and police officers to take action when things go awry. This is all done to avoid chaos and confusion, and the Bible even points out we are to do our part such as paying taxes to support such things (Romans 13:1-7).

One example of where it can get confusing, though, is on how exactly we pay those taxes. Most of you probably have not started doing your taxes yet, but *trust* me—when you do, you'll



True justice—along with a complete lack of corruption—will arrive with the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

learn just how confusing man's governments can be! While I couldn't even begin to explain tax laws in this article, here are a few examples of things which are hard to explain: Why is there a different tax rate depending on where your money is kept—in the U.S. vs. off-shore? Why can you receive a tax credit for *some* of your children, but not others, even though they still depend on you to support them? And then there's the concept that even if you don't earn income, you can still get a tax refund. These are just a few examples of the types of confusion man brings to government.

By contrast, God's plan is pretty simple. "And concerning the tithe of the herd or the flock, of whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the LORD," (Leviticus 27:32). The specific example given here is of animals, but the principle is simple: One-tenth (a tithe) of what we earn goes to God. Done. That's it. No confusion there!

CORRUPTION

Another thing that man offers his fellow man via government is corruption. Now, not *everything* that *every* government does *all the time* is bad. There are some pretty good programs that exist that governments have created to serve and benefit its citizens. I enjoy nice, paved roads to drive on, public libraries, etc. I don't even mind paying taxes to help fund these things. Without organized government, the abolition of slavery in the United States probably wouldn't have been successful.

There are thousands of good things the governments of the world offer, and we are of course to honor those who govern us (Titus 3:1-2). However, the existence of corruption within our government is undeniable. Not just accusations, mind you, but actual charges from legal authorities. Check out the United States Department of Justice website (justice.gov) and search through the press releases. The number of government officials who have been convicted of crimes for things like bribery, extortion and racketeering is staggering.

Of course, those are just some of the bigger highlights. Innumerable injustices have taken place over the years, and not just by politicians, but by private citizens too. These include false testimony based on personal biases, lies in advertising about a product's performance to boost sales, and storerooms full of evidence that were inadmissible in court based on some minor technicality. As good as it might appear, our legal system fails to serve its people with complete justice.

By contrast, God's government offers pure and just rule. "Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this," (Isaiah 9:7). True justice—along with a complete lack of corruption—will be the standard, following the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

HYPOCRISY

God's government will not offer the hypocrisy we see in the governments of the world today. As was noted above, people sworn to protect and live by the laws of our nation are found breaking them on a daily basis. And of course, it's not just in America. Josef Stalin, who led the Soviet Union from 1924 to 1953, is known to have intentionally caused famine in parts of the empire which he swore to protect.[1] Pol Pot, communist leader of Cambodia, did similar things to his citizens, all while claiming to have their best interests in mind.[2]

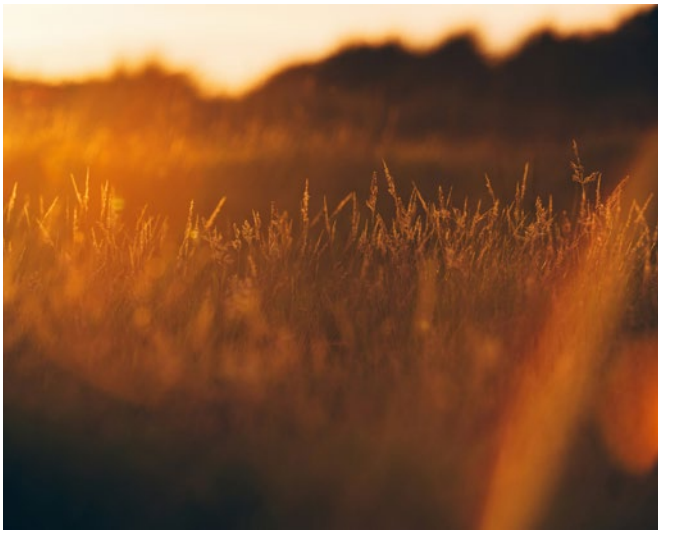
It's sad to say, but hypocrisy has even been a part of the history of the people of God. In Nehemiah's time, there was a revival of obedience to God's law, but it didn't last. "In those days I saw people in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them about the day on which they were selling provisions," (Nehemiah 13:15). Later, in verse 26, he reminds them that even king Solomon struggled to obey God's law. As king, there's no doubt Solomon knew better,

considering he would have been required to write a copy of the law for his own edification (Deuteronomy 17:18).

So, what's the point? To show that everyone is a hypocrite to one degree or another? Yes, that's part of the reason, but the main reason is to highlight the following detail: No government of man can or ever will be perfect. (For more on the subject of hypocrisy, see the article from the Winter 2023 edition of *Compass Check*, "Hypocrisy in the Church" (ucg.org/members/compass-check/hypocrisy-in-the-church-0) .

Now compare the hypocrisy inherent to *man's* kingdoms to the integrity of the Kingdom that is to come: "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it" (Isaiah 2:2). The mountains here are symbols of government. Here, we see the Lord's house (God's government) will reign supreme over all other forms of government, just as we read earlier in Revelation.

The replacement of man's governments is impressive enough, but here's the really amazing part: "Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (verse 3). People will actually want to learn from and obey this government! That's not something you see in the governments of man today, in large part due to the hypocrisy they invariably contain.



We desire the straightforward simplicity, justice and righteous rule that will come with the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, Jesus Christ.

WHAT DOES MAN OFFER?

Throughout man's history, there have been a few bright spots in terms of government. But eventually, all forms of human government fall short for the same reason: the human heart. No, not the organ, but the inward moral weaknesses of humans. Jeremiah 17:9 reminds us, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

In the end, it's not governments that fall short, it's people. Sometimes, it's through confusion, corruption or hypocrisy. Needless to say, none of these are things people want in any government or their officials. Instead, we desire the straightforward simplicity, justice and righteous rule that will ensue with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Jesus Christ.

While it can be tempting to look for a solution to humanity's problems in human governance, it is futile. Some individual leaders and even systems of governance are better than others, but none offers what the coming Kingdom of God has to offer. Jesus demonstrated this when Satan tried to tempt Him with the governments of this world. "Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, 'All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve"'" (Matthew 4:8-10).

Jesus Christ understood that all the kingdoms and governance of this world ultimately had nothing of real value to offer. We would be wise to recognize this as well. No matter what the results of any election might be, remember that no one can offer you the peace, joy and fulfillment that the coming Kingdom of God will bring! **CC**



Dan Preston yearns for the coming kingdom of God, but until then, prays for wisdom for all our leaders.

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RUNNING WITH THE HORSES

by Grant Fogelson

Have you ever wanted to achieve something truly great and significant? Imagine being someone like David who had the courage to face Goliath. Or Daniel, who had complete faith in God, even in the lions' den. You could also imagine becoming a person who embodies love, self-control and peace. In all of these traits that we aspire to develop, we may overlook a critical question: If I were given the opportunity to do something truly significant and impactful, would I actually be able to do it?

Imagine if there were a person in your life whose whole world would change if you encouraged them. Would you be able to do it? Imagine if your integrity were tested and you needed to stand up for what was right. Would you be able to do it? How would you know?

The prophet Jeremiah was given a great deal of responsibility in his calling. He was delivering God's message to Judah in a time when he would only receive hate in return. Often, Jeremiah faced one trial after another due to the responsibility God gave him—each one more difficult than the last. At one point during his trials, Jeremiah became exhausted with the persecution he faced, and he asked God, "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are those happy who deal so treacherously?" (Jeremiah 12:1).

God chose to respond in a way that did not directly answer Jeremiah's question, but instead pointed to a truth that would lead Jeremiah to persevere and go on to accomplish even *greater* works for God. God asked Jeremiah, "If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses?" (Jeremiah 12:5). God was making a point to Jeremiah that there were greater responsibilities in store for him. He would need to be capable of handling smaller responsibilities if he would ever be ready for the larger ones.

Just as it is unrealistic to think that we could keep up with a running horse if we are unable to keep up with a running human, it's also unrealistic to think that we will be able to behave properly in a situation of great importance if we haven't first demonstrated our ability to behave appropriately in matters of little importance.

Imagine thinking that you are going to be physically fit without eating well and exercising, or attempting to play a masterpiece on an instrument without first learning to play simple songs. Without performing the smaller steps along the way, the idea of being successful in more significant tasks is simply a fantasy. Even though this may sound daunting at first, we should let this reality drive us to action and growth, as we will be called to "run with the horses" sooner or later in our own lives. The biblical heroes we read about also had to be able to run with the footmen before they could run with the horses.



David was questioned about his courage and ability to face Goliath and responded, "'Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God.' Moreover David said, 'The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine'" (1 Samuel 17:36-37). David didn't suddenly have faith in God out of nowhere in his moment of greatest need. Instead, he had experiences with lesser challenges leading up to this moment in which he developed the necessary qualities—like faith—to deal with bigger challenges later on.

Similarly, Daniel did not suddenly build a relationship with God as soon as the plot was hatched against him to get him thrown into the lions' den. The book of Daniel records, "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days," (Daniel 6:10). Daniel had built a constant relationship with God since he was young and maintained it until the end of his life. Daniel and David were not overnight successes, and neither are we.

Without performing the smaller steps along the way, the idea of being successful in more significant tasks is simply a fantasy.

So, what can you do to run with the footmen *now* so you will be ready when the need arises to run with the horses? How do you approach such a large task? Simply put, begin doing small and consistent actions each day that relate to the goal you are trying to achieve. Start small and set a *daily* goal for something tangible you can do that is related to the person you want to become. Here are some examples of qualities you may want to work on developing, and daily goals to go with them:

- Be an encourager: Say one thing to another person that builds them up.
- Be biblically knowledgeable: Read and think about one chapter of the Bible on a regular basis, perhaps once a week or once a day.
- Love your neighbor: Do one small act of kindness for someone.
- Be at peace: Dedicate five minutes of

If we cannot properly manage our physical lives, how can God trust us to bear responsibility over a life that is so much greater?

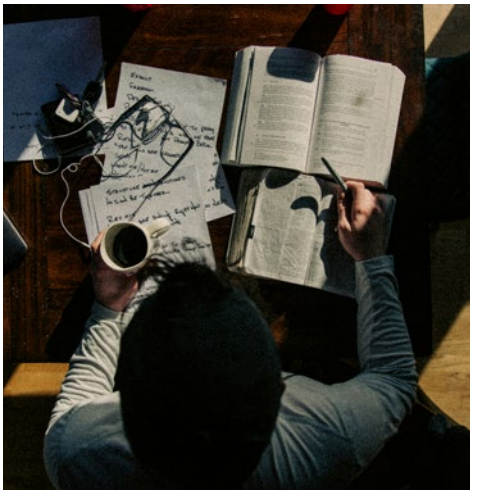
your day to think on things that are true and praiseworthy.

- Have self-control: Pray for help and make an effort to resist a temptation you face for one day.

These goals and actions may seem insignificant at the moment, but they will grow into habits that define the kind of person you are. To be able to handle the significant moments that you'll encounter in life, you'll first need to become a person who is able to manage important matters—this is only developed through consistent practice.

So, right this moment, stop what you are doing. Get out something to write with and make one goal. Start small and have a goal each day. As time passes and you get better at it, you will notice room to add greater, more significant things to your list of goals. Slowly but surely, you will be growing into a godlier person as you strive to be like our perfect example, Jesus Christ. In fact, Jesus applied this same teaching in His parables and related it to the ultimate scale of eternal life.

Jesus said, "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?" (Luke 16:10-11). We are given the responsibility over our physical lives now, which compared to eternal life is relatively insignificant. If we cannot properly manage our physical lives, how can God trust us to bear responsibility over a life that is so much greater?



Our personal responsibility will increase as God sees fit, and we need to make sure we grow in godly character over time. Remember as you go through your journey that God is your strength and that you are not called to succeed all on your own. Pray to God for strength and use the blessings that are given to you to help you along the way. It is impossible to live a godly life alone, but very possible to do it with God's help, even though you will still face challenges along the way. Start small. Be consistent. And just like Jeremiah, if you learn how to run with the footmen now, you will soon be able to run with the horses. **CC**



RIGHT THIS MOMENT, STOP WHAT YOU ARE DOING. GET OUT SOMETHING TO WRITE WITH AND MAKE ONE GOAL.



Grant Fogelson currently attends the Dallas, Texas congregation along with his wife, Katarina. He enjoys music, board games and the outdoors.

DEALING WITH *"the World"*

by Dan Preston

You've probably heard it a million times. You're listening to a sermon and the speaker says something along the lines of, "In the world, people think this, but the Bible teaches we should think . . ." What do they mean when they say, "the world?" Aren't we all in the same world, on the same planet, breathing the same air? Aren't you and I living in the world too?

SAME PLANET, DIFFERENT WORLDS

The point the speaker is likely trying to make is not about the physical planet we all live on. It's that two people (or groups of people) can live on the same planet but in different worlds. In other words, their focus in life is on two completely different things (see the illustration below for a humorous example . . .)

While the guy and the gal live on the same planet, their minds are in two different worlds. He's thinking about her and she doesn't even know he exists (BTW—I know it feels that way sometimes guys, but I'm sure she knows you exist. But that's a different article . . .)

The point is, while we all live on the same planet, some people live in different worlds.



Matt Hernandez



When ministers talk about "the world" versus you and me, they are often trying to point out that there is a difference between our mindset and the mindset of most others.

When ministers talk about the world versus you and me, they are often trying to point out that there is a difference between our mindset and the mindset of most others. But before we get into those details, there's something we should understand about this comparison. It shouldn't be thought of as an adversarial sort of relationship, or that we are in some way perfect and without fault.

Sometimes there is a tendency to categorize the world as "bad" and the Church as "good." Generally speaking, those in the world don't follow God's will or laws, and we in the Church do—or at least try to. But we have to be careful about making too broad a generalization. Not everyone in the world is an evil, horrible person bent on destruction. In fact, most are quite the opposite. You probably have neighbors, teachers and even family who aren't in the Church who are good people, who want to do what is good and right. But at this moment in time, they simply don't understand God's way as you do. We must always remember that it is Satan the devil who is the real enemy: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

Likewise, we need to make sure we don't think of ourselves as perfect and without faults. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Not everyone in the Church (including you and me) is always the best example. We're all human; we all make mistakes and sin. Of course, we repent and seek God's help to overcome our problems, but the point is, just like we can't blatantly label everyone in the world as "bad," we must recognize that no one in Church is always "good."

OUR WORLD

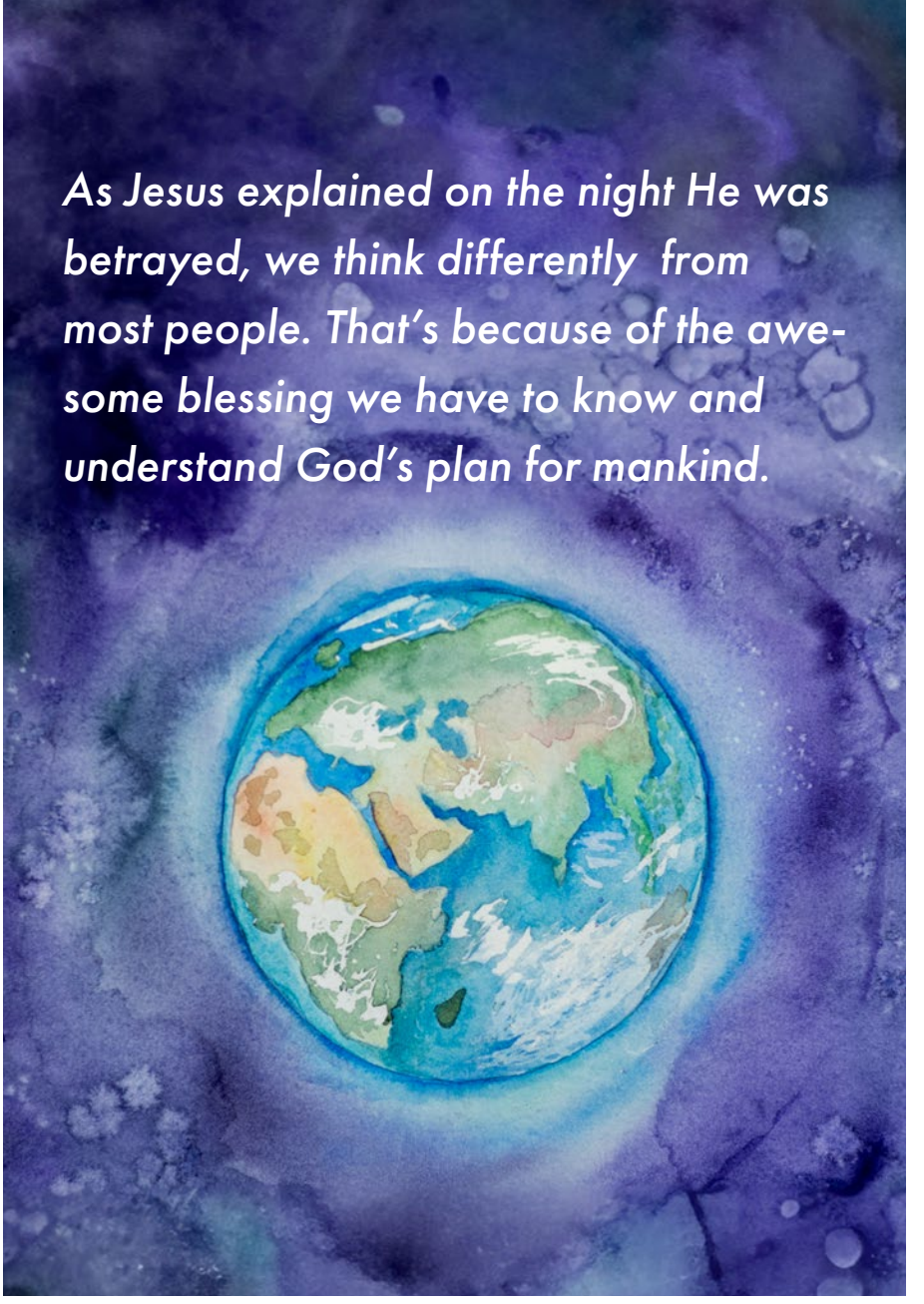
Even though not everyone in the world is evil and no one in the Church is perfect, there's no doubt that there *should* be a difference between us and the world. Jesus Christ talks about this quite a bit on the night before He was crucified. In John 15:12-14, He says, "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you."

I think one of the first things that begins to separate us from the world at large is how we view this command. Most people view it in a negative way, like a person giving a dog a command to go fetch. There's a tendency to think that it means we're lower than the other person, like a servant. But Jesus Christ explains that is not the case: "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you" (verse 15).

Of course, we are under Christ and God's authority, but we're more than just a simple minion who does the bidding of his master. Christ says that we are His friends, and that all things He has shared with us come from God the Father. You probably look at your parents much differently than you might a teacher or supervisor at work. Hopefully, you have good teachers and supervisors who treat you well, but they're just not the same as your parents. You know your parents love you and always have your best interests in mind. If they ask you to

do something, like cut the grass, clean the living room, etc., you know that it is in your best interest. They're not just trying to get you to do their work for them—they're instilling lessons on taking care of a home and being responsible.

Christ goes on in verses 18 and 19, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." Hopefully, you haven't experienced the kind of hate that Jesus Christ felt from the world, but chances are, you've felt a little discomfort. Like when people ask you why you can't play football on Friday nights, or why you are eating those weird matzos for lunch during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It might not be downright "hate," but it illustrates a simple point: the world does not think like you and I think.



WHERE DO YOU LIVE?

As Jesus explained on the night He was betrayed, we think differently from most people. That's because of the awesome blessing we have to know and understand God's plan for mankind. That single fact changes how we look at and think about everything. That's what makes us different than the world.

Of course, one day, all mankind will have an opportunity to know the wonderful truths you and I know and live by today. But until then, there is a difference between us and everyone else. Paul summarized it this way in Philippians 3:20: "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." We look and see the events of this world and understand that they are temporary. As wonderful as our country is, it's nothing compared to the coming Kingdom of God.

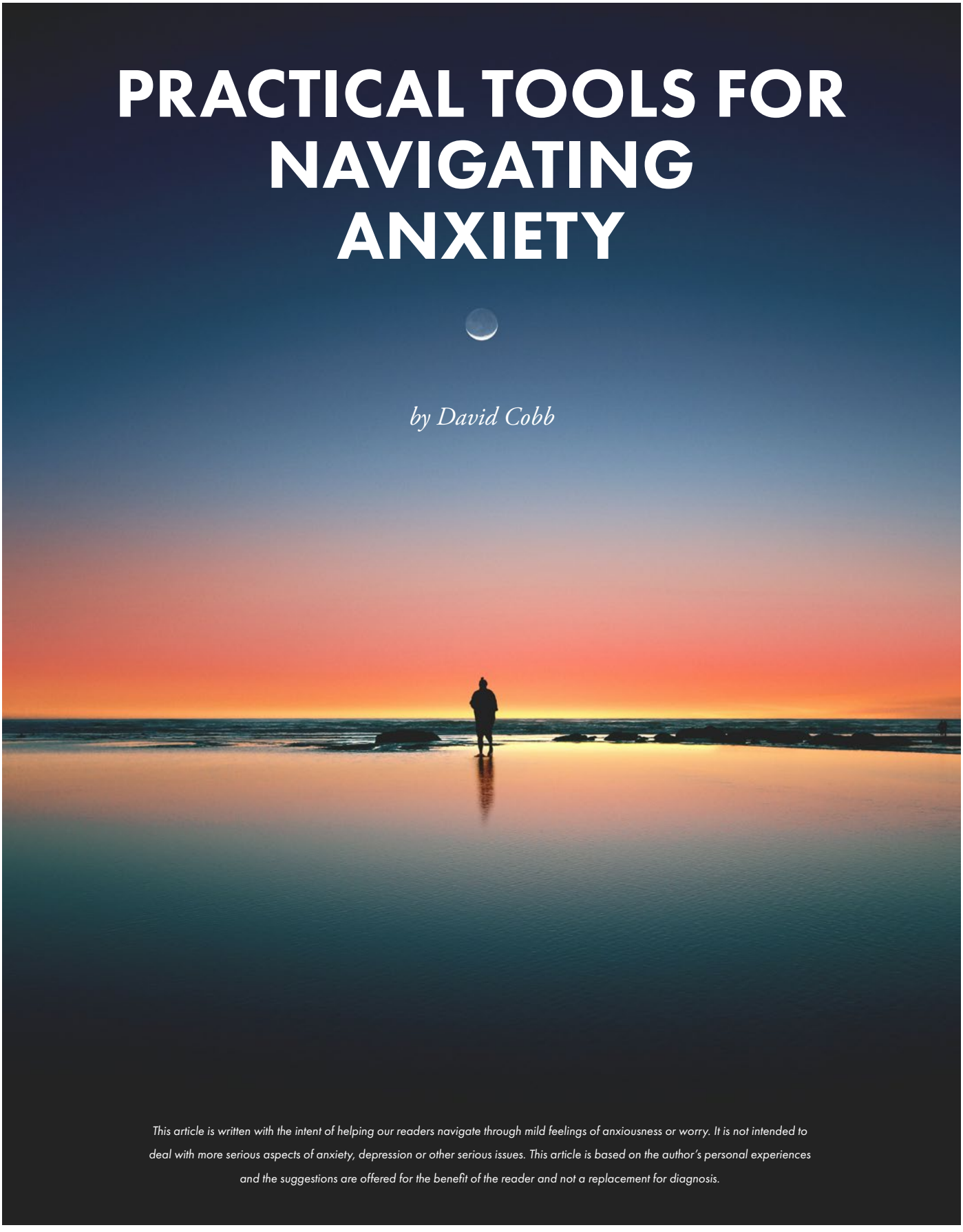
Until then, it can help to understand the difference between the world and you and me. While we shouldn't be judgmental of others, or feel that we are perfectly righteous in some way, it is important that we understand why we are different from others. You and I have been called friends of Jesus Christ, and so we know the future plans for all mankind. Let's be grateful for this blessing, and look forward to the day when we can share this joy with the entire world! **CC**



Dan Preston still struggles with 'the world' at times, but is learning to show more compassion toward everyone he meets.

PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR NAVIGATING ANXIETY

by David Cobb



This article is written with the intent of helping our readers navigate through mild feelings of anxiousness or worry. It is not intended to deal with more serious aspects of anxiety, depression or other serious issues. This article is based on the author's personal experiences and the suggestions are offered for the benefit of the reader and not a replacement for diagnosis.

Jesus Christ taught that we are not to worry (Matthew 6:31), or to have an anxious mind (Luke 12:29). But Jesus was not saying that we should simply "not feel" worried or anxious. Rather, His powerful message is that reliance on God provides us with the ability to work through these difficult but very common feelings. It is important to remember not to obsess or ruminate about a problem situation, which increases anxious feelings.

Worry and anxiety can be caused by a variety of factors including:

- Our circumstances, especially when we are not safe or lacking basic needs.
- Uncertainty and lack of stability in our communities or society as a whole.
- Thinking pattern tendencies that personality and emotional makeup gravitate toward.
- Learned thinking patterns and behaviors absorbed from our environment.
- Loneliness and lack of connection in healthy relationships.
- Some people experience anxiety as a permanent symptom of a medical condition.

Many people face one or more of these factors during their lives, and if you have experienced acute anxiety, you are not alone!

Through my own experience with anxiety (my personality and emotional makeup gravitate that way), I have learned that there are multiple readily available tools that provide meaningful support to help navigate these feelings with God's help.

PROACTIVE EDUCATION

"A wise man will hear and increase learning . . . " (Proverbs 1:5).

When experiencing anxiety, the default response is sometimes to avoid our feelings and think about them as little as possible. It's difficult in the short-term, but much more helpful in the long-term to proactively pursue learning about them. There are many credible resources that bring understanding to the experience and alleviate fear.

When we have feelings that are both powerfully difficult and intensely personal, not being able to explain the feelings or why we have them magnifies their impact. Understanding the what and why does not eliminate all difficulty, but it does greatly diminish the impact.

What exactly *is* anxiety, anyway? Researchers Catherine Pittman and Elizabeth Karle define it by contrasting it with the very similar emotion of fear:

> *Both arise from similar brain processes and cause similar physiological and behavioral reactions; both originate in portions of the brain designed to help [us] deal with danger. Fear and anxiety differ, however, in that* fear *is typically associated with a clear, present and identifiable threat, whereas* anxiety *occurs in the absence of immediate peril. In other words, we feel fear when we actually are in trouble . . . We feel anxiety when we have a sense of dread or discomfort but aren't, at that moment, in danger.*[1]

Understanding this distinction that anxiety generally arises from *perceived* or *anticipated* dangers that haven't occurred is critical. It opens pathways for deescalating perceptions and anticipation to reduce or avoid the anxiety that they can generate. Understanding anxiety's role is also critical—both what it is, and just as importantly, what it isn't. As relationship and mental health counselor and author John Delony puts it:

> *Anxiety is just an alarm system. Nothing more and nothing less. Anxiety is our body's internal notification that our brain is detecting danger . . . It] is not a permanent medical condition. [It] is not an identity. [It is not] a reason for giving up on connection and joy.*[2]

Developing a clear and accurate perspective on anxiety's purpose again opens pathways for healthy responses to what we experience. An alarm that alerts us to potential danger such as a fire or tornado is inherently a bit frightening, but is ultimately meant to keep us safe. Alarms are meant to get our attention and spur us to necessary action.

Anxiety can feel like an uncontrollable force in the mind and body that can't be turned off or tamed. From that perspective, it feels like an unknown quantity that operates on its own power, which quite naturally makes us afraid of it. Proactive education greatly reduces that fear and allows us to redirect our focus and energy to identifying and addressing the cause of the alarm. As Delony explains, it's not very helpful to "fix or disable the alarm system instead of putting out the fires and clearing out the smoke."[2]

PROACTIVE EMOTIONAL PROCESSING

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxieties . . ." (Psalm 139:23).

Difficult emotions are unavoidable as we experience life. The physical existence that we inhabit is temporary, imperfect and incomplete—and we ourselves are too! Yet, we are often surprised and dismayed when we encounter uncomfortable emotions, and do our best to avoid them.

Challenging emotions such as discouragement, loneliness and grieving are indeed unpleasant. However, we feel them for a purpose! They are meant to allow us to recognize

and respond to hard things in life in healthy ways that bring us through the experience, and help us to grow emotionally and spiritually. For additional guidance on processing difficult emotions that often generate fear, see "Facing Your Fears" in the Summer 2017 edition of *Compass Check*.

Writing simple statements about our emotions and talking to God about them in prayer are simple but very powerful tools that increase our understanding and ability to process them. Writing things down brings two immediate benefits:

1. The process of writing helps bring clarity to our thoughts and feelings.
2. Writing is a healthy form of expression that provides an outlet for externalizing thoughts and feelings that can generate anxiety.

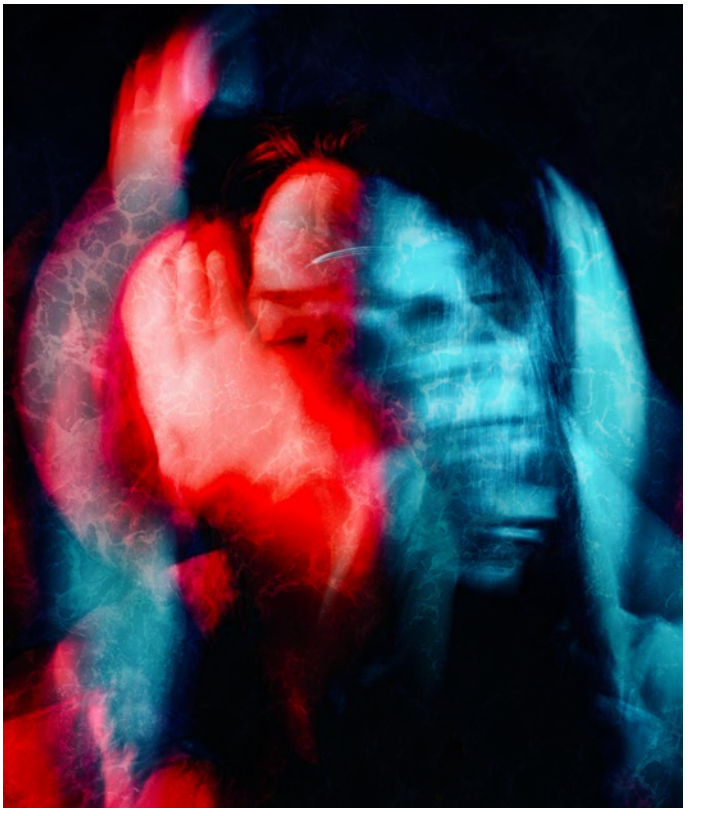
There are many different styles and methods for writing regularly—don't worry about doing it perfectly; just start and develop a method that works for you based on your preferences. The practice that I have developed is to carry a small, simple notebook and pen where I can easily write a few simple statements about thoughts, emotions, experiences and scriptures, or things I read and hear that resonate with me.

There are many readily available lists of words that describe both positive and challenging emotions available from various resources. Find one (ask your parents or another trusted resource for help if needed), and begin using it to write very simple statements about both your positive and challenging emotions such as:

- "I am feeling . . ."—write the emotion and something about how you are experiencing it, whether you know why you feel that way or not.
- "I am processing . . ."—write the feeling and the emotional or physical experience that you aren't quite sure what to do with or how to handle.
- "I am grateful for . . ."—write something that you are thankful for or appreciate. Regularly focusing on the many good things in our lives does not prevent us from having trouble, but it does help with keeping those difficulties in proper perspective.

To clarify, the goal of this practice is not to have more "positive" thoughts or less "negative" ones, but to perceive and process our thoughts and feelings *more accurately*. This means acknowledging hard things and not minimizing or exaggerating them, learning to see them for both what they are and aren't, and developing healthy responses.

The best way to do that is to talk to God about what you write, because He already knows and understands it better than we do. He loves you and wants to help you work through it! As King David wrote, "O LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off." (Psalm 139:1-2) God can provide understanding of both the present and any future steps needed that will lead to true peace! (Philippians 4:6-7).



Anxiety can feel like an uncontrollable force in the mind and body that can't be turned off or tamed.

PROACTIVE CONNECTION

"A man of understanding will attain wise counsel" (Proverbs 1:5).

When we experience anxiety, it is easy to isolate ourselves in various ways to avoid the things that we perceive to be making us anxious. Avoidance is an unhealthy response for two reasons. First, the things and situations that seem to cause anxiety are often only a signal that we are feeling unsafe at a deeper level, and avoidance delays identifying the actual cause of the feeling. Second, avoidance and isolation *feed* anxiety, giving those feelings stronger and deeper roots.

As Pittman and Karle explain: "[The] dynamic of experiencing anxiety and then escaping it by avoiding the situation just serves to maintain anxiety, and this is exactly what makes anxiety reactions so difficult to modify. In this way, anxiety can be self-perpetuating."[3] This is a daunting reality, but one that can be overcome. Changing our response to anxiety is most achievable when education and processing occur *within healthy relational connections*.

The power of talking to others about the anxiety that we



God can provide understanding of both the present and any future steps needed that will lead to true peace!

experience cannot be overstated! Delony describes the powerful benefit of sharing genuinely this way:

> *Processing your thoughts and feelings out loud with a trusted friend, family member, counselor or group can be transformative and healing. Connecting with a loved one—in person, face-to-face if possible—is one of the best ways to quickly calm your anxiety and regain a sense of safety . . . Courage and bravery and vulnerability help quiet our alarms.*[4]

These principles are found throughout the Bible as well, in scriptures encouraging us to help one another in difficulty (Proverbs 17:17; Galatians 6:2) and rely on the combined strength that relationships provide (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). In contrast to what we naturally feel and assume, sharing our difficulties does not weaken us—it strengthens us to face and work through them!

For additional guidance on seeking support from the ministry or professional counseling resources, see "Facing Your Fears, Part 2" in the Winter 2017 edition of *Compass Check*.

SUMMARY & AUTHOR'S NOTE

The ability to turn negative thoughts, which contribute to anxiety, into positive thoughts, words and phrases using God's Word can be a powerful means of reducing anxiety. God gives us information on how to handle any situation we may encounter in life. Internalizing these concepts and beliefs and strategies can greatly reduce feelings of anxiety.

This article is meant to share practical tools that provide value, no matter what level of anxiety you may encounter. If you experience general anxiety with low-impact symptoms that have little or no effect on your normal activities, pursuing these practices can help you maintain healthy responses that mitigate and prevent additional impact.

If you experience acute anxiety with higher-impact symptoms that affect your ability to engage in normal activities, take heart and remember, you are not alone! Pursuing these practices, combined with additional support and tools in each category, can have an enormous positive impact in equipping you to reduce and navigate anxiety in healthy ways. If you feel you are suffering from any of these serious conditions, talk to your parents or minister about contacting the Church's free helpline, Light of Hope.

I know this from my own experiences, and I am confident that the same is possible for you as well. Notice that each of the practices begins with the same word: *proactive*. I haven't used that word lightly, because it's been anything but easy for me. To be honest and transparent, a lot of my learning has occurred when forced through difficulty into *reactive* growth.

But I am learning and practicing the benefits of leaning into discomfort and actively pursuing further growth. I encourage you to lean in as well, especially to writing and sharing. As Dawson Trotman, a 1900s Christian evangelist said, "Thoughts disentangle themselves when they pass through the lips and fingertips." Through God's work in us, the unhealthy aspects of our human fears, including anxiety, can be transformed into a healthy fear (respect, reverence, worship) of Him that produces wonderful spiritual fruit (Psalm 34:1-9). **CC**



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References

1 Rewire Your Anxious Brain by Catherine M. Pittman and Elizabeth M. Karle, New Harbinger Publications, 2015, p. 2.

2 Redefining Anxiety by John Deloney, Ramsey Press, 2020, pp. 6-7.

3 Pittman and Karle, p. 129.

4 Delony, pp. 38-39.

EXPLORING YOUR *Sources of Strength*

In January of 2023, my school introduced my fellow students and me to Sources of Strength, a program committed to helping people who are struggling mentally and to spreading positive messages throughout communities. The program introduced several strategies, each relating to an aspect of life that helps people through hard times. While participating in this program, I made a few good friends, and I began to ponder about how each aspect of the program relates to our Christian lives.

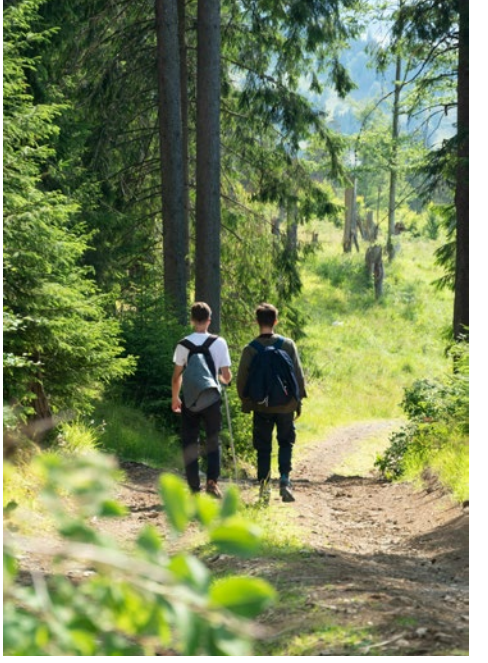


PEOPLE IN OUR LIVES

Family support is one of our primary sources of encouragement. There are times when one family member sacrifices for the well-being of another, just as Ruth did when she left her homeland to travel to Bethlehem with her mother-in-law Naomi (Ruth 1:16-19). Some of us may have a lot of family members nearby, and some may have very few. Regardless, we are all a part of God's marvelous family. Ephesians 2:19 tells us that we "are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." We not only have a physical family, but through the Church, we also have a spiritual family that we can go to for comfort.

How many of you have a positive friend in your life? A positive friend is someone who cheers you up when you feel down and knows when to give you advice. Jonathan and David were like brothers, and Jonathan had the compassion to protect David when Saul was bitterly angry toward him (1 Samuel 18:1-4, 19:1-7). A true friend is more than someone who is nice to you, but someone who is willing to be there for you during your time of need. In today's world, it becomes more important than ever to make and be around friends who have a positive influence on us. Use whatever social opportunities you have in order to find a good friend, such as a library, a local club or at the Feast!

I'm sure many of you have at least one person whom you would consider a mentor, someone who is wiser and is there to guide you through the challenges in life. Eli proved to be a good mentor for Samuel by advising him to answer and obey God's calling (1 Samuel 3:9). There are times in our lives when we need to seek advice from someone who is older than us, and we shouldn't rely on our own knowledge, as implied by Proverbs 15:22. While it's okay to reach out to peers, sometimes we need the perspective of someone who knows how to make wise choices. Depending on your congregation, you may find yourself surrounded by a lot of young people, a variety of ages, or a small group of old people. Consider reaching out to those at church who are more experienced in life than you are, whoever that might be for you.



SELF-CARE

When you're going through a difficult time in your life, taking care of your physical health is especially important. Exercise and a healthy diet benefit our minds as much as they benefit our bodies. For instance, exercise has been shown to release feel-good chemicals in the brain. We may not be able to change the circumstances we are in, but we should do what we can to maintain a positive outlook on life. Through Christ's sacrifice, we can go to God in prayer whenever we are sick or injured (1 Peter 2:24). We can have faith in God's healing power because He is merciful and heals all of our diseases (Psalms 103:3).



There are certain times when we need to take care of our mental health and not just focus on our physical health. If something is bothering you or you don't feel like yourself, talk to someone you feel comfortable opening up to or seek help from a counselor. As with our physical health, we can turn to God for guidance regarding our mental health. Through prayer, we can tell Him whatever emotions we're feeling, for His comfort encourages us when we feel overwhelmed (Psalms 94:19). It's totally okay to feel angry or sad at times, and my health class at school taught me that it's normal to experience a wide variety of emotions. What matters is finding helpful ways to cope with them, such as listening to music or journaling.

We can take care of our health while enjoying ourselves through healthy activities. Meditation, for instance, relieves stress, and it benefits our spiritual health. King David wrote, "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psalms 119:97). When he went through various trials throughout his life, he always went to God in prayer and spent time meditating on Scripture, and we can do the same. We can turn to God for help and guidance, and we need to cope with our emotions in healthy ways. Besides meditation, we can do a number of other activities, such as biking or exploring nature.

THE GREATER PURPOSE

Even as we go through different struggles, we can still show generosity to other people. Paul wrote, "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2:4). We must always have a willingness to serve those who are around us, as shown by Dorcas when she made clothes for the widows (Acts 9:36, 39). A widow, giving everything she had, dropped two pennies into the offering box, and it was of more value than what the rich gave (Mark 12:41-44). Some acts of kindness may seem small to us, but they mean the world to the people who receive them. God truly blesses our works when we generously give to others, as promised in Deuteronomy 15:10. You can use your abilities and talents to help people, and seeing others happy will make you happy too!

Another thing that can help us in our trials is focusing on spirituality and going beyond the physical aspect of life. We can stay close to God as Esther did when she fasted and prayed for the deliverance of her people (Esther 4:16). Besides praying and fasting, we can also study our Bibles and focus on His plan, such as the hope and future He has planned for us (Jeremiah 29:11). Philippians 4:8 tells us that we must always be thinking about whatever is worthy of praise. Consider keeping a notebook or a journal and writing down your many blessings from God.

Overall, I enjoyed my time in Sources of Strength. I always looked forward to our weekly meetings when we planned campaigns and worked on projects as a group. I hope you can apply some of these ideas to your own lives when you're going through a difficult time. As we look forward to God's Kingdom, let us continue to "encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thessalonians 5:11, New International Version). **CC**



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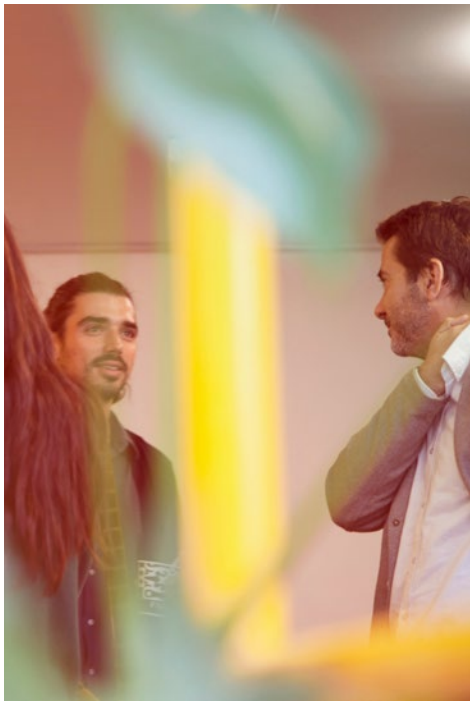
SHARE THE

Have you had a moment where you see your work from a few years ago and it makes you cringe? You see your skills with fresh eyes that can only come from a few years of practice and growth.

A while back that happened to me and it actually helped unlock new meaning from a passage of Scripture, which I'd like to share.

One of the ways the Church tries to reach people with the gospel is by advertising its literature. As part of my job, I have designed some of those ads, specifically ones which get printed and are included in the loose-leaf collection of ads you find in the middle of newspapers around the country. When I first got involved in this project, I created a design that I thought would work well. Over the course of a few years we used that template to advertise various church booklets. After analyzing the data those first years, they decided to run the best-performing ads again but with a larger audience. Going back into the very first design files to update them is when I had that cringe moment, seeing my work with new eyes.

My dad's career has been in print marketing, so I was explaining to him how I updated the designs, making them more attractive, with better photography and color palettes. "That's usually the kiss of death," he joked. "The best-performing ads usually have the worst color schemes and the cheesiest scissor clip-art on the thick dotted line where they are supposed to cut off the coupon." We both laughed. We both died a little inside . . .



But while it might offend my artistic sensibilities to think of ugly ads doing a better job than something beautiful, the question that matters is: Which works better? At the end of the day, which ads got the most people to respond?

And that mindset jumped off the page to me when I was reading one of Paul's letters to the Corinthian church.

ARE YOU COMPELLED TO PREACH?

In 1 Corinthians 9, you can sense some hurt from Paul as he defends himself on multiple points. Some apostles (like Peter) were being funded by the churches directly for their work, while Paul and Barnabas worked side gigs to support themselves as they went. This caused a bit of a stir in the early Church: "the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me, for *I would rather die than allow anyone to deprive me of this boast*" (1 Corinthians 9:14-15, New International Version throughout, emphasis added throughout).

And then he continues: "For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (verse 16).

This attitude saturates Paul's writing: His utter and complete commitment to spreading the good news that God has defeated death to redeem humanity through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And for Paul, there is no alternative. He is compelled to preach that message, no matter his own feelings. This attitude reminds me of the prophet Jeremiah's plight: "If I say, 'I will not mention his word or speak anymore in his name,' his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot" (Jeremiah 20:9).

For the prophet and the apostle alike, they could not hold in the message that God had given to them. Whether they were in the mood or not, the need to preach overruled any personal feelings they might have had.

I half-jokingly think of it like my two little boys and going to the bathroom. They get busy playing, and ignore the feeling they have to go for as long as possible. But at some point, it doesn't matter what else they'd rather be doing; it's happening.

E GOSPEL



So allow me to ask the question to you, dear reader: Are you *compelled* to preach as Paul was?

Asked another way: Has the understanding of Jesus' death and resurrection so completely transformed your life that you feel as if you have no other choice but to share it with others?

If that makes you uncomfortable to imagine, let's continue reading Paul's letter to discover his thoughts on what that might look like.

MAKE IT ALL ABOUT PEOPLE

Paul continues: "Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law . . . so as to win those under the law . . . To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. *I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some"* (1 Corinthians 9:19-22).

What jumps off the page to me is how he chose to put his own ego aside, making it all about people and their needs. And what do people need the most? The gospel. So Paul adjusted his approach when speaking to every person, to give the message the best possible chance for them to hear in a way they'd be most likely to respond to.

So I ask, when you are compelled to preach the gospel, are you able to set aside your own ego and deliver the gem each person is most likely to respond to in that moment?

This is a mindset shift. It's a change from an inward-focused way of thinking (my taste, my opinions, my values) to an outward way of thinking (their needs, their best interests).

FOR WHO? SO THAT __?

I was listening to a podcast by someone who has a very successful business as a writer. He explained the typical mistake most people make when trying to make a living as a writer is to write about the stuff they are interested in, then go hustle to try to find an audience for it.

Instead, he advises to start with what people actually want to know. What are people interested in, what are they looking for answers to, what are their pain points that you can help solve, what ways can you help them? Figure out those things, and *write that,* and you will find an audience much more quickly with much less hustle.

His advice for writers, which I think can guide us in all our communication with others, written or not, is to ask two questions before beginning any new writing exercise: "For who? So that _?" Know whom you're writing to as much as you can—their needs, wants, background, pain points. And have a specific, concrete outcome you want for your readers to take away from your writing.

In our personal interactions, we do this automatically in some cases. We talk to adults at church differently than we do our friends at school or than our siblings. Extending the principle to how we present the gospel to others when the opportunity arises, we should train ourselves to be attuned to communicating in a way that gives the gospel its best chance to land in someone's mind. Not changing the gospel, rather the way in which we share it and the specific way we might present it to someone.

As I've been on this path to learning to be more successful in these areas, it's required me to undergo this mindset shift. That shift has been learning to set aside my ego, and opening myself to understanding the needs of other people, so I can meet those needs with the life-giving message of the gospel.

So I leave you with two questions from Paul's passage in 1 Corinthians 9: Are you compelled to preach the gospel? And when you do so, are you able to set aside your ego, your desire to be right and to have the last word? All to make it *about people,* who need to hear the gospel, so you can be the vessel through which God speaks to them. **CC**



Mitchell Moss is the design production manager for Compass Check. *He and his wife Dana love traveling, particularly in Italy, where the tailoring is soft, the people are warm, and the gelato is cold and never-ending. They live in Cincinnati with their two sons/future legends.*

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HAPPY FALL

Holy Days!

From all of us on the *Compass Check* staff, we pray you and your families have a wonderful and inspiring Fall Holy Day season.

"Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are **My** feasts.'"
– Leviticus 23:2

