

# READINGS

for the Week of Prayer

Friday, December 4, to  
Sabbath, December 12, 2020

## SPIRITUAL *Growth*



# Introduction

Another year is about to conclude. For more than 100 years, this Reform Movement has upheld the gospel of Jesus Christ and the sinner's need of sanctification before the people of God and the world. At the end of each year, the Week of Prayer readings are distributed internationally. Written by pastors, after much meditation and prayer with the hope of strengthening the faith of the flock of God, these collective articles address one common theme and goal.

In this Week of Prayer, we will read seven articles related to Peter's Ladder of eight rounds mentioned in 2 Peter 1:5-7. It is a spiritual ladder of sanctification which all must climb to reach heaven. Jesus is the ladder, and the eight rounds make reference to His holy virtues which He desires to see reflected in His saints and the elect. As every believer, by God's grace, works on the plan of addition, climbing step by step up Peter's ladder, God promises to compound the saints' efforts by working on the plan of multiplication. He will multiply and bless every sincere effort to adopt the holy attributes enumerated by the Apostle Peter. A new and symmetrical character resembling Jesus Christ will be the result.

"Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 1:5-8.

"We must climb this ladder, round after round, remembering that God is above it, ready to help us in our efforts. We must live upon the plan of addition, and God has promised that He will multiply His grace to us. Then with earnestness and enthusiasm he added: 'Let us begin today to climb Peter's ladder, never looking back...'" —*The Signs of the Times*, October 22, 1885.

"A new and symmetrical character may be formed by laying up one grace and good deed upon another, thus climbing Peter's ladder of eight rounds in sanctification. A character thus built will be harmonious in all its paths. Faith will sustain works, for faith works by love and purifies the soul." —*Signs of the Times*, May 6, 1880.

During the Week of Prayer, it is of utmost importance to gather at the church, in homes, or virtually to read the articles contained herein. Moments should be set aside to stop, meditate, and comment about the principles presented. Short prayers should be offered on behalf of God's cause.

The last Sabbath of the Week of Prayer is a special day. It is a day of fasting and prayer. The article scheduled for that Sabbath should be presented as a sermon during the divine service. A special offering should be collected at the end of the sermon for the General Conference. This offering is to expand the work of God worldwide. Each donor should place their funds in an offering envelope and annotate their favorite Bible verse on the back of the envelope. The deacons, church elders, or pastors present should read those verses aloud. The treasurer should add up the sum of the offerings collected and later report it to the local church. The offerings received from the Week of Prayer constitute a very significant and meaningful portion of the total expenditures of the church's international mission expansion.

May God bless the readings, the prayers, and the meditation of His word as we enter a new year. May His Spirit abundantly bless each one who participates in this holy endeavor.

—*The Brothers and Sisters of the General Conference*

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## READINGS

Week of Prayer

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# SPIRITUAL Knowledge

By E. G. White

**N**icodemus held a high position of trust in the Jewish nation. He was highly educated, and possessed talents of no ordinary character, and he was an honored member of the national council. With others, he had been stirred by the teaching of Jesus. Though rich, learned, and honored, he had been strangely attracted by the humble Nazarene. The lessons that had fallen from the Saviour's lips had greatly impressed him, and he desired to learn more of these wonderful truths.

He greatly desired an interview with Jesus, but shrank from seeking Him openly. It would be too humiliating for a ruler of the Jews to acknowledge himself in sympathy with a teacher as yet so little known. And should his visit come to the knowledge of the Sanhedrin, it would draw upon him their scorn and denunciation. He resolved upon a secret interview, excusing this on the ground that if he were to go openly, others might follow his example. Learning by special inquiry the Saviour's place of retirement in the Mount of Olives, he waited until the city was hushed in slumber, and then sought Him. —*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 167, 168.

## Nicodemus - A Product of His Education

In the days of Christ the town or city that did not provide for the religious instruction of the young was regarded as under the curse of God. Yet the teaching had become formal. Tradition had in a great degree supplanted the Scriptures. True education would lead the youth to "seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him." Acts 17:27. But the Jewish teachers gave their attention to matters of ceremony. The mind was crowded with material that was worthless to the learner, and that would not be recognized in the higher school of the courts above. The experience which is obtained through a personal acceptance of God's word had no place in the educational system. Absorbed in the round of externals, the students found no quiet hours to spend with God. They did not hear His voice speaking to the heart. In their search after knowledge, they turned away from the Source of wisdom. The great essentials of the service of God were neglected. The principles of the law were obscured. That which

was regarded as superior education was the greatest hindrance to real development. Under the training of the rabbis the powers of the youth were repressed. Their minds became cramped and narrow. —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 69.

“ The knowledge and education of Nicodemus was considered great and deep, but Christ showed him that they were of no value with God. He must be born again. He must receive new ideas...”  
—*This Day with God*, p. 231.

You may have a good knowledge of the arts, you may have an acquaintance with the sciences, you may excel in music and in penmanship, your manners may please your associates, but what have these things to do with a preparation for heaven? What have they to do to prepare you to stand before the tribunal of God? —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 267.

### A Need for Spiritual Renewal

Nicodemus had come to the Lord thinking to enter into a discussion with Him, but Jesus laid bare the foundation principles of truth. He said to Nicodemus, it is not theoretical knowledge you need so much as spiritual regeneration. You need not to have your curiosity satisfied, but to have a new heart. You must receive a new life from above before you can appreciate heavenly things. Until this change takes place, making all things new, it will result in no saving good for you to discuss with Me My authority or My mission.

Nicodemus had heard the preaching of John the Baptist concerning repentance and baptism, and pointing the people to One who should baptize with the Holy Spirit. He himself had felt that there was a lack of spirituality among the Jews. ... He had hoped for a better state of things at the Messiah's coming. Yet the heart-searching message of the Baptist had failed to work in him conviction of sin. He was a strict Pharisee, and prided himself on his good works. He was widely esteemed for his benevolence and his liberality in sustaining the tem-

ple service, and he felt secure of the favor of God. He was startled at the thought of a kingdom too pure for him to see in his present state. —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 171.

### Spiritual Knowledge Creates Change

As an educating power the Bible is without a rival. —*From Eternity Past*, p. 434. Day by day a change is wrought upon mind and hearts, and the natural inclination, the natural ways, are molded after God's ways and Spirit. They increase in spiritual knowledge, and are growing up to the full stature of men and women in Christ Jesus. They reflect to the world the character of Christ, and abiding in him, and he in them, they fulfil the mission for which they were called to be the children of God. —*The Youth's Instructor*, October 25, 1894

“The germination of the seed represents the beginning of spiritual life, and the development of the plant is a beautiful figure of Christian growth. As in nature, so in grace; there can be no life without growth. The plant must either grow or die.”

As its growth is silent and imperceptible, but continuous, so is the development of the Christian life. At every stage of development our life may be perfect; yet if God's purpose for us is fulfilled, there will be continual advancement. Sanctification is the work of a lifetime. As our opportunities multiply, our experience will enlarge, and our knowledge increase. We shall become strong to bear responsibility, and our maturity will be in proportion to our privileges. —*Education*, p. 105.

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”  
(2 Corinthians 5:17).

### A Preparation for Eternity

The heavenly character must be acquired on earth, or it can never be acquired at all. ... Those who have trained the mind to delight in spiritual exercises are the ones who can be translated and not be overwhelmed with the purity and transcendent glory of heaven. —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 267. [Spiritual knowledge] changes the natural disposition of man. Heaven would not be desirable to the carnal-minded; their natural, unsanctified hearts would feel no attraction toward that pure and holy place, and if it were pos-

sible for them to enter, they would find there nothing congenial. The propensities that control the natural heart must be subdued by the grace of Christ before fallen man is fitted to enter heaven and enjoy the society of the pure, holy angels. —*Acts of the Apostles*, p. 273.

### How Do We Obtain Spiritual Knowledge?

Our spiritual development depends upon our knowledge of the truth, upon our practice of its divine principles as embodied in the precepts of the law and in the teaching of our Lord. —*The Signs of the Times*, April 6, 1891. [The Bible] is full of knowledge, and all who come to its study with a heart to understand, will find the mind enlarged and the faculties strengthened to comprehend these precious, far-reaching truths. The Holy Spirit will impress them upon the mind and soul. —*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 449.

But there must be earnest study and close investigation. Sharp, clear perceptions of truth will never be the reward of indolence. No earthly blessing can be obtained without earnest, patient, persevering effort. If men attain success in business, they must have a will to do and a faith to look for results. And we cannot expect to gain spiritual knowledge without earnest toil. Those who desire to find the treasures of truth must dig for them as the miner digs for the treasure hidden in the earth. No halfhearted, indifferent work will avail. It is essential for old and young, not only to read God's word, but to study it with wholehearted earnestness, praying and searching for truth as for hidden

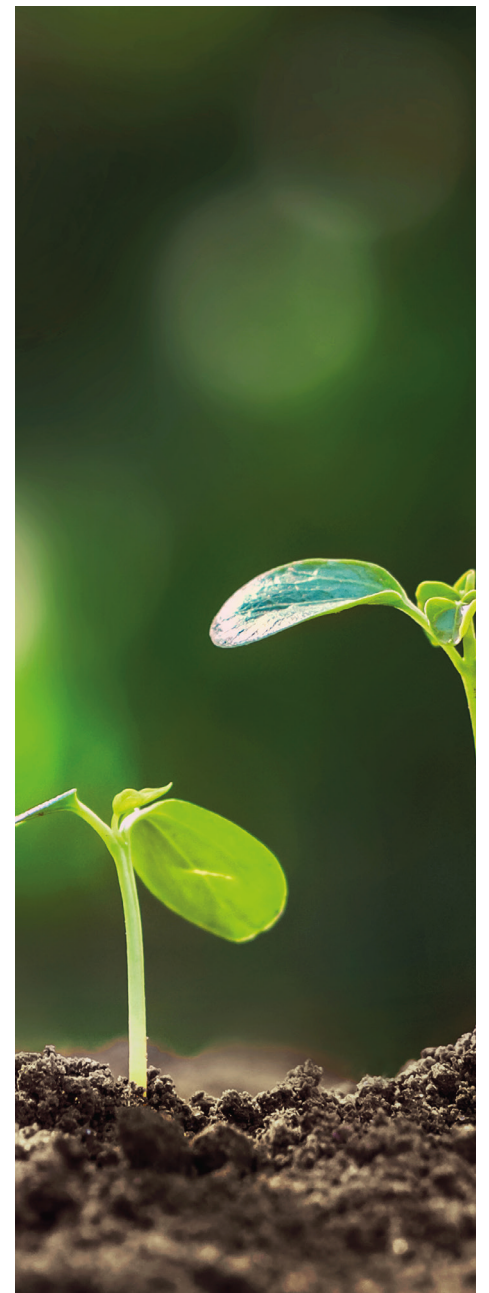
treasure. Those who do this will be rewarded, for Christ will quicken the understanding. —*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 111.

“Begin, then,  
at once. ...  
Educate your  
mind to love  
the Bible, to love  
the prayer-meeting, to  
love the hour  
of meditation,  
and above all,  
the hour when  
the soul communes  
with God.  
Become heaven-  
ly-minded if  
you would unite with  
the heavenly choir  
in the mansions  
above.” —*Testimonies for  
the Church*, vol. 2, p. 267.

### A Final Thought

True knowledge comes from God and returns to God. His children are to receive that they may give again. Those who through the grace of God have received intellectual and

spiritual benefits, are to draw others with them as they advance to a higher excellence. And this work, done to promote the good of others, will have the co-operation of unseen agencies. As we faithfully continue the work, we shall have high aspirations for righteousness, holiness, and a perfect knowledge of God. In this life we become complete in Christ, and our increased capabilities we shall take with us to the courts above. —*Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 18. Amen. ■



# GROWING in Faith

By Y. Delgado, Peru / USA

**M**y dear brothers and sisters in the faith, let's tackle together this interesting subject about the growth in faith, considering the need for a transformative experience in His likeness. It is my prayer that the name of God may be glorified and let us be built up by His word. Taking as the only cause and purpose of our growth in faith, the participation of the "atmosphere of grace [is] as real as the air that circulates around the globe. All who choose to breathe this life-giving atmosphere will live and grow up to the stature of men and women in Christ Jesus." —*Steps to Christ*, p. 68.

The next thing to consider is our experience of growth in faith "following the truth in love, let's grow in everything in the one who is the head, that is, Christ." Ephesians 4:15.

## The Cause of Our Growth

Because plant development parallels a Christian's growth in faith, let us examine the illustration of the seed recorded in Mark 4:26-29, as well as the parable of the vine and its branches in John 15.

Spiritual growth is not the result of human virtue. That's why Jesus said of the man who sowed the seed: "And [he] should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how." Mark 4:27. Both our spiritual life and plant life grow with power from the same source. "The plants and flowers grow not by their own care or anxiety or effort, but by receiving that which God has furnished to minister to their life....

“No more can you,  
by anxiety or effort  
of yourself, secure  
spiritual growth...”  
—*Steps to Christ*, p. 67.

In the illustration of John 15:5, we learn that the vital force is not contained in the branches, but in the vine. For this reason, the branches must maintain a constant connection to the vine in order to receive the life-giving nutrients which the

vine shares freely. In the same manner, a close relationship with God is vital for spiritual growth. He must remain in us and we in Him. This is not an arbitrary instruction, but a life-or-death necessity.

To corroborate what was expressed we highlight the following: "Separation from Christ involves a ruin as complete as that represented by the dead branch. 'If a man abide not in Me,' said Christ, 'he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.'" —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 676.

Belonging to the church does not ensure growth in faith, because membership is only an outward union. "There may be an apparent connection with Christ without a real union with Him by faith. A profession of religion places men in the church, but the character and conduct show whether they are in connection with Christ." —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 676. Only the vital connection is what will provide us with a growth in grace, leading our spiritual progress, and a constant abiding in the faith.

## Vital Connection that Ensures Growth

"Abide in me, and my words [will] abide in you." John 15:7. This expression of our Saviour Jesus Christ provides us with the key whereby we may maintain a vital connection with Him. When we finally understand that the cause of our growth in faith comes from abiding in Christ and He in us then we can learn how to maintain this life-giving connection.

The vital connection consists of "know more and more of Jesus through an interested searching of the Scriptures, and then following the ways of truth and righteousness therein revealed. Those who are ever growing in grace will be steadfast in the faith, and moving forward." —*Messages to Young People*, p. 121.

"The knowledge of God as revealed in Christ is the knowledge that all who are saved must have.... Received into the life, it will re-create the soul in the image of Christ. This is the knowledge that God invites His children to receive." —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 475. This is the secret of the vital connection, of knowing God through His Word. "Abide in me, and I in you." John 15:4. "The connection of the branch with the vine, He said, represents the relation you are to sustain to Me." —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 675.

"Christ came to the earth to reveal to men the character of His Father, and His life was filled with deeds of divine tenderness and compassion." —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 469. "By dwelling upon the love of God and our Saviour, by contemplating the perfection of the divine

character and claiming the righteousness of Christ as ours by faith, we are to be transformed into the same image." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 744.

Continuing our connection with God requires careful, daily searching of His Word, elevating the soul to God through sincere prayer, and appropriating the justice of Christ by faith.

## Confirmation of Our Growth in Faith

"For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." Mark 4:28. Reveals the secret of our progress in faith, and at the same time the irrefutable proof that allows us to confirm whether we are truly growing in faith.

The text reads, "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full ... ear." It is inevitable that where there is life, there is growth; and, where there is growth, fruits are manifested.

To experience growth in faith, we need to follow the inspired instruction to "Ask the Lord to reveal to you yourself; place your life under His searching eye, and when He

lays hold upon your case you will see that you have made grievous mistakes, and what you supposed was of little importance was offensive in the sight of Heaven." —*That I May Know Him*, p. 237. "Go to Him with your soul all stained as it is. Like the psalmist, throw its chambers open to the all-seeing eye, exclaiming, 'Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.' Psalms 139:23, 24." —*Steps to Christ*, p. 34.

"The life of the vine will be manifest in fragrant fruit on the branches. 'He that abideth in Me,' said Jesus, 'and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing.' When we live by faith on the Son of God, the fruits of the Spirit will be seen in our lives; not one will be missing." —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 676.

The result of growth is fruit. "The work of sanctification goes on in the soul, constantly progressing and enlarging." —*Ye Shall Receive Power*, p. 34.

"There is in the religious world a theory of sanctification which is false in itself and dangerous in its influence. In many cases those who profess sanctification do not possess the genuine article. Their sanctification consists in talk and will worship. Those who are really seeking to perfect Christian character will never indulge the thought that they are sinless. Their lives may be irreproachable, they may be living representatives of the truth which they have accepted; but the more they discipline their minds to dwell upon the character of Christ, and the nearer they approach to His divine image, the more clearly will they discern its spotless perfection, and the more deeply will they feel their own defects." —*The Sanctified Life*, p. 7.

The irrefutable proof of our growth in faith is the transformation and improvement of our characters.

"The power of the love of Christ [will work] ... a transformation of character. This is the sure result of union with Jesus. When Christ abides in the heart, the whole nature is transformed. Christ's Spirit, His love, softens the heart, subdues the soul, and raises the thoughts and desires toward God and heaven." —*Steps to Christ*, p. 73.

"In every generation and in every land the true foundation for character building has been the same—the principles contained in the word of God. The only safe and sure rule is to do what God says. 'The statutes of the Lord are right,' and 'he that doeth these things shall never be moved.' Psalms 19:8; 15:5." —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 475.

The only foundation that provides for a proper construction of our characters and continuous growth in faith is obedience to the Word of God.

## Conclusion

In this world, occupations and responsibilities may differ, but the focus is the same. Everyone wants to see growth. A mother prays for her children to grow up well and become established in good professions. The entrepreneur or investor's concern is for their product or service to exhibit a positive growth curve.

"The soul dead in trespasses and sins receives life through connection with Christ. By faith in Him as a personal Saviour the union is formed. The sinner unites his weakness to Christ's strength, his emptiness to Christ's fullness, his frailty to Christ's enduring might. Then he has the mind of Christ. The humanity of Christ has touched our humanity, and our humanity has touched divinity. Thus through the agency of the Holy Spirit man becomes a partaker of the divine nature." —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 675.

Brother and sister, beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, I take my leave. Considering the time in which we

“ Likewise, each believer is to make his aim to be of that number who shall be presented faultless before the throne of God.”

live, I invite you to make a decision to grow in faith through the knowledge of God and His character. The inspired admonition tells us this: "Unless you are advancing in the knowledge and love of God, you cannot maintain even the light that you now have. If the light does not shine more and more, it will grow dim and flicker away in darkness." —*Daughters of God*, p. 136.

Amen. ■



# Genuine Repentance

E. Mtikama, Malawi

Beloved brothers and sisters, in this Week of Prayer reading, I am delighted to share with you the topic of repentance. Our Lord Jesus Christ told a story of two brothers assigned to go and work in their father's vineyard. The first brother refused, but later changed his mind and did what he had been asked to do. The second brother accepted immediately, but then did not go. Why did the first brother, who had initially refused, change his mind? He came to the realization that he was wrong for not obeying his father and repented.

What is repentance? Three Hebrew words for repentance are used in the Bible. They are: *nacham* (naw-kham), meaning "a feeling of regret, to relent, or to repent"; *shuwb* (shoob), meaning "to return or turn back"; and *teshuvah*, meaning "to return to God." The word "repent" in Greek is *metanoia* (met-an'-oy-ah), which means "a change of mind, regret, or remorse." In the parable of the two brothers, we can see that one brother changed his mind. An internal influence of the Holy Spirit guided him to repentance.

The Spirit of Prophecy defines repentance as something that "includes sorrow for sin and a turning away from it." —*Steps to Christ*, p. 23. This is the repentance that applies to man.

True repentance takes place in the mind of a person. The mind controls the whole body, and, if true repentance takes place, the body will obey the will of God, not the lust of the flesh. "When the mind is not under the direct influence of the Spirit of God, Satan can mold it as he chooses." —*Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 22. "Having brought conviction of sin, and presented before the mind the standard of righteousness, the Holy Spirit withdraws the affections from the things of this earth and fills the soul with a desire for holiness." —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 52.

## In the beginning

During Solomon's reign, from 970 to 931 BCE, the building of the temple was completed. During the service of dedication, King Solomon knelt before the people and prayed, saying, "We have sinned,

and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness." (1 Kings 8:47). Following his prayer, thousands of animals were sacrificed. Although the blood of animals was needed to obtain pardon for sin, God takes no pleasure "in burnt offerings and sacrifices." (Hebrews 10:6). They were only a representation of the true sacrifice to come. "The patriarchs, the prophets, the martyrs from righteous Abel, looked forward to a coming Saviour, and they showed their faith in him by sacrifices and offerings." —*The Signs of the Times*, February 20, 1893.

In the Old Testament, the phrases "turn away from evil" and "turn to God" are frequently used in place of the word "repent." "Turn ye again now everyone from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the Lord hath given unto you and to your fathers for ever and ever." (Jeremiah 25:5). "Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!" (Isaiah 45:22 ESV).

Atonement through the blood of animals was required for sins. However, for the specific sins of blas-

phemy, homosexuality, witchcraft, Sabbath breaking, human sacrifices to Molech, adultery, and apostasy in worshiping other gods, people were stoned to death (Leviticus 20; Exodus 21:28; 31:15; Leviticus 24:16; Deuteronomy 13:10; 22:21-22). The condemned sinners could plead for forgiveness, but their plea needed to be accompanied by the blood of sacrificial animals.

### A gift from God

Receiving a gift does not depend on one's wishes or actions. We may be eager to receive something, but what is given depends on the giver not the recipient. On the other hand, all gifts are precious in the eyes of the giver. Many people don't value what they receive and are always wishing for something more. God gave the precious gift of His own Son to our lost world, to lead us to repentance, but many do not appreciate that gift. "Repentance, as well as forgiveness, is the gift of God through Christ. It is through the influence of the Holy Spirit that we are convicted of sin and feel our need of pardon. None but the contrite are forgiven; but it is the grace of God that makes the heart penitent." —*Counsels for the Church*, p. 49. Those who understand the gift of repentance will always forgive.

During the time of Christ, the Jews, even while under Roman rule, continued the capital punishments of the Old Testament for those condemned as sinners by the Jews. Stephen was stoned. (Acts 7:59). Paul was stoned. (Acts 14:19). A woman caught in adultery would have been stoned were it not for Jesus' intervention. (John 8:3-11). Jesus Christ also was threatened with stoning. (John 8:59). This

shows that the Jews did not fully understand the gift of repentance. It is the same today. When we notice that a brother or a sister has sinned, we often hurry to report the sin to the church instead of lovingly counseling the sinner to repent.

### Who should repent?

Sinners are invited to repent. "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5:32). Usually, when we talk about repentance, we think of others and not ourselves. This is not only the thinking of the world, but also within the church. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (1 John 1:8). This verse uses the singular form of the word "sin," referring to "transgression of the law" of God. (1 John 3:4). Because of the disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, we have inherited their sinful nature and also the consequences of sinful practices. So then, if we say we have not sinned, we make God a liar. We humans sin on a daily basis through our errors and mistakes, which are accounted as sin in the eyes of God. Solomon says, "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." (Ecclesiastes 7:20). God admonishes us, however, not to continue in sin. How then, can we stop sinning? It is through true repentance and asking guidance from God, through the help of the Holy Spirit, who shows us our errors and mistakes.

Satan is not happy when people truly repent. Zechariah's description of Joshua the high priest is a striking representation of each sinner for whom Christ is mediating. Satan stands at the right hand of the advocate, resisting the work of Christ. Because the sinner had

chosen Satan as ruler, Satan claims that sinner as his property. "In the prophecy of Zechariah is brought to view Satan's accusing work, and the work of Christ in resisting the adversary of His people." —*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 166.

### The love and goodness of God

The love of God is so great that even while we were sinners, He sent His son to die for us. It is only through the goodness and love of God that people come to repentance. "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Romans 2:4). "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." (Jeremiah 31:3). "If you can so impress your children that they will exercise that repentance which is acceptable to God, that godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of, the work will be thorough, the reform certain." —*Child Guidance*, p. 459.

The repentance that results from the fear of punishment or payment for sin is not regarded as true repentance. Because Judas Iscariot feared the result of his sin, he "repented" and returned thirty pieces of silver to the priests. "Judas then threw himself at the Saviour's feet. He confessed that Jesus was the Son of God and begged Him to deliver Himself from His enemies. The Saviour knew that Judas did not really repent for what he had done. The false disciple feared that punishment would come upon him for this terrible deed; but he felt no real sorrow because he had betrayed

the spotless Son of God." —*The Story of Jesus*, p. 121. "The convicted sinner has something to do besides repent; he must act his part in order to be accepted by God. He must believe that God accepts his repentance, according to His promise." —*Evangelism*, p. 287. Besides not having sorrow for his wrong act, Judas did not believe that God would accept his repentance, and he hung himself. His love for worldly approval hindered him from coming to true repentance. "The world holds your affections, and its customs are more agreeable to you than obedience to the heavenly Teacher." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 432.

### Fruits of repentance

Every tree is known by its fruit. "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance." (Matthew 3:8 NKJV). In the world, there are both genuine and counterfeit products. The appearance of these products may be the same, but they differ in function and durability. If you are not careful, you can be easily tricked into choosing the counterfeit. Satan can lead people to display repentance that appears genuine, but because it is done through the carnal heart, the sinner receives no spiritual benefit. One fruit of repentance is putting into practice the truths that have been learned, which will cause us to grow spiritually. "At times you may have a desire to repent. But unless you decidedly reform and put into practice the truths you have learned, unless you have an active, working faith, a faith that is constantly increasing in strength, your repentance is as the morning dew. It will give no permanent relief to the soul. A repentance

caused by a spasmodic exercise of the feelings is a repentance that needs to be repented of; for it is delusive." —*Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 108.

“ He specified the fruit they were required to bear in order to become the subjects of Christ’s kingdom; which were works of love, mercy, and benevolence. They must have virtuous characters. These fruits would be the result of genuine repentance and faith.” —*The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 2, p. 55. "Teach that the fruits of repentance are to be seen in the life in deeds of righteousness.

By lives of faith and devotion, and reliance upon the Word of God as the foundation of all faith, by acts of unselfishness and sincerity, teach them to make known the saving grace of Christ." —*Review and Herald*, February 18, 1909.

### Dangers of ignoring the call to repentance

Achan refused to repent and confess. As a result, both he and his entire family were stoned; then

their bodies and all their possessions were burned. A man will always reap what he sows. "While they were professing to be God's commandment-keeping people, their works denied their faith, and without true repentance for their sins they would have no part in the kingdom of Christ." —*Review and Herald*, January 14, 1873. The Apostle Peter made it clear: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering toward usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9). We should therefore realize from whence we have fallen and repent before it is too late. We should not be profane, or irreverent, like Esau, who would not repent. "Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." (Hebrews 12:16,17). We should not fight against the Holy Spirit as He invites us to repent. We should not be defensive about our wrongdoings. A repentant person will not continue in sin.

Probation will soon close, and we have no time to waste. The signs of the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ are almost fulfilled. Those who read the Scriptures should awake from their slumber and make a determined effort to accept the call to repentance given by the Holy Spirit. May God help all of us to come to true repentance so that fruits of true repentance will be manifested in our daily lives. May God bless you all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Tuesday, December 8,  
2020

# READING 4

## Self-Control

By A. Ngwenya, Zimbabwe

"And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness." 2 Peter 1:6.

The Word of God clearly tells us that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The Word of God also teaches that where there is faith there should be found good works, and that good works are included in obeying Christ. It has been the studied plan of the devil from the very beginning to plant seeds of sin in the human body, in this way corrupting our minds with sin. Satan works in such a way that the higher powers of our beings shall be subject to the lower powers of the body. When the lower powers of the flesh begin to rule, one acts in a way that forsakes godly reason. As a result, a person becomes a slave of himself because he became subject to the dictates of the flesh. The body should be servant to the mind, and not the mind to the body.

The plan of salvation shows us that the only way to suppress and overcome sin, and finally overcome the devil as well, is to practice temperance, or self-control. Our Savior, at the beginning of His ministry,

showed us that the only way to be successful in spiritual life is to be temperate in all things. Even when He was dying on the cross, He was temperate. It is written: "And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar." Luke 23:36. However, He could not allow His body to be defiled, thereby corrupting His reasoning powers. For our salvation, temperance is an important key, as it is written: "And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they [do it] to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring [it] into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away." 1 Corinthians 9:25-27.

"Man can reach an eminence in self-control and dignity that will raise him above the slavery of appetite and passion, where he can stand before God as a man, his name written in the books of heaven." —*Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene*, p. 146. Satan can use only an intemperate person and can drive the mind of such in

any direction: "Through intemperance some sacrifice one half, and others two thirds of their physical, mental, and moral powers and become playthings for the enemy." — *Child Guidance*, p. 394.

### Results of Intemperance

The world is corrupt and full of violence, sickness, crime, and more; if you would trace the driving force behind all this, you would find it to be the lack of temperance, of self-control. As the Spirit of Prophecy states, "Intemperance is at the foundation of the larger share of the ills of life. It annually destroys tens of thousands. We do not speak of intemperance as limited only to the use of intoxicating liquors, but give it a broader meaning, including the hurtful indulgence of any appetite or passion." —*Child Guidance*, p. 394.

### Temperance in All Things

"Temperance in all things of this life is to be taught and practiced.

Temperance in eating, drinking, sleeping, and dressing is one of the grand principles of the religious life. Truth brought into the sanctuary of the soul will guide in the treatment of the body. Nothing that concerns the health of the human agent is to be regarded with indifference. Our eternal welfare depends upon the use we make during this life of our time, strength, and influence.”

— *Child Guidance*, p. 394.

The plan of salvation is about cleansing from sin and providing complete restoration. But the plan of the devil is to continue in sin. Fear not. You have a Savior who died for you. He was tempted in all things, including intemperance, but He withstood. Remember how indulgences were sold by the Roman Catholic Church because priests professed to be able to forgive and cleanse sinners from temporal punishment, even after death. Many still indulge their appetites in eating and drinking, using drugs, and adopting other unhealthy habits.

“It is a most difficult matter to unlearn the habits which have been indulged through life. The demon of intemperance is of giant strength, and is not easily conquered. But if parents begin the crusade against it at their own firesides, in their own families, in the principles they teach their children from very infancy, then they may hope for success. It will pay you ... to adhere strictly to the principles of temperance in eating and drinking.” —*Christian Education*, p. 180.

### Temperance Precedes Sanctification

In the Bible, we are told that we need to ask Jesus to cleanse us from all bodily defilements and sanctify us. In our Christian walk, we should remember that the objective of this life is sanctification. Many will regret

hearing on the final judgment day, “I never knew you.” (Matthew 7:23). The Spirit of Prophecy cautions: “God’s people are to learn the meaning of temperance in all things....

“All self-indulgence is to be cut away from their lives. Before they can really understand the meaning of true sanctification and of conformity to the will of Christ, they must, by co-operating with God, obtain the mastery over wrong habits and practices.”

—*Child Guidance*, p. 396.

### In Eating

“True temperance teaches us to dispense entirely with everything hurtful, and to use judiciously that which is healthful. There are few who realize as they should how much their habits of diet have to do with their health, their character, their usefulness in this world, and their eternal destiny. The appetite should ever be in subjection to the moral and intellectual powers. The body should be servant to the mind, and not the mind to the body.

“Those who eat and work intemperately and irrationally, talk and act irrationally. It is not nec-

essary to drink alcoholic liquors in order to be intemperate. The sin of intemperate eating—eating too frequently, too much, and of rich, unwholesome food—destroys the healthy action of the digestive organs, affects the brain, and perverts the judgment, preventing rational, calm, healthy thinking and acting.”

—*Child Guidance*, p. 398.

The first step to temperance is to control our appetite. How? We are to ask ourselves, why do we eat and drink? and, what do we eat or drink? It seems a great number of people have forgotten the reasons for why they eat and drink. Most people’s eating habits are dictated by taste. They never ask themselves, how will I benefit from this? but, rather, how does it taste? This is why many people never eat at home, but choose restaurants instead, because there is where the food is generally cooked to gratify taste, but not to strengthen the body or build good blood. For example, most people prefer eating potato chips or fried potatoes rather than boiled potatoes. But boiled potatoes are healthier because they are easily digested and benefit the body. Whatever we eat and drink should build healthy blood to nourish body and brain, for good thinking and doing. Many in our church think that abstaining from flesh meats is all that pertains to temperance. Temperance is not just abstaining from anything harmful, but also the moderation of everything that is healthy. Temperance is the exercise of self-control.

### In Work

“We should practice temperance in our labor. It is not our duty to place ourselves where we shall be overworked. Some may at times be placed where this is necessary,

but it should be the exception, not the rule. We are to practice temperance in all things. If we honor the Lord by acting our part, He will on His part preserve our health. We should have a sensible control of all our organs. By practicing temperance in eating, in drinking, in dressing, in labor, and in all things, we can do for ourselves what no physician can do for us.

“As a rule,  
the labor of the  
day should not be  
prolonged into the  
evening....

I have been shown  
that those who do  
this often lose much  
more than they gain,  
for their energies are  
exhausted, and they  
labor on nervous  
excitement. They  
may not realize any  
immediate injury,  
but they are surely  
undermining their  
constitution.”  
— *Child Guidance*, p. 397.

We thank God for giving us the day of rest, the Sabbath. We live in a time when many people are chasing after riches and never seek rest until they have become wealthy. But the irony of it is that when they finally begin to rest, they die, losing their eternal life along with earthly riches. Why do they lose both worlds? It is because of intemperance in working. “There is one [alone], and [there is] not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet [is there] no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither [saith he], For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? This [is] also vanity, yea, it [is] a sore travail.” Ecclesiastes 4:8.

### In Dressing

“In all respects the dress should be healthful. ‘Above all things,’ God desires us to ‘be in health’—health of body and of soul. And we are to be workers together with Him for the health of both soul and body. Both are promoted by healthful dress. It should have the grace, the beauty, the appropriateness of natural simplicity. Christ has warned us against the pride of life, but not against its grace and natural beauty.” —*Child Guidance*, p. 398. Another cause of disease today is being improperly dressed. People have become slaves to fashion. Today’s fashion knows no weather. Most clothing doesn’t adequately cover the limbs, and they remain exposed to the heat or cold. The result is sickness. Few realize that whatever they wear affects their physical, mental, and spiritual health.

Satan is tirelessly working to corrupt the food and clothing industries, and in them he opens up opportunities for self-gratification and

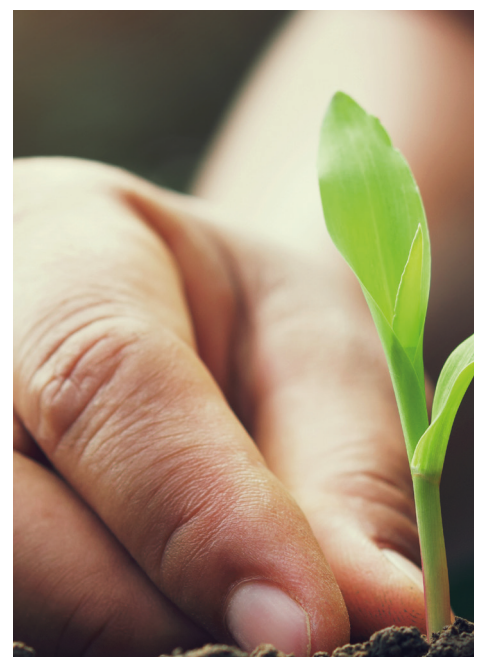
profit so that Christians completely forget about the end of the world.

### Temperance Is a Principle of the Religious Life

“Temperance in all things of this life is to be taught and practiced. Temperance in eating, drinking, sleeping, and dressing is one of the grand principles of the religious life. Truth brought into the sanctuary of the soul will guide in the treatment of the body. Nothing that concerns the health of the human agent is to be regarded with indifference. Our eternal welfare depends upon the use we make during this life of our time, strength, and influence.” —*Child Guidance*, p. 394.

Dear brethren and sisters, let us remember that only one life is granted to us here; and the inquiry with everyone should be, how can I invest my life so that it will yield the greatest profit? How may I live for the glory of God?

As we end the year let us review our lives, contemplating how we ran the race in 2020, and what changes can still be made while probation lingers. Be blessed. Amen. ■



## Perseverance

By D. Francis, Sri Lanka / India / USA

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" Hebrews 12:1(KJV)

As the children of God and we live with great hope to reach our Father's home. In this journey of life, we face many troubles and tribulations which are common to all humanity, while others are unique to the children of God. Many struggle with internal conflicts while others try to combat fears. Our lives are knitted with targets, goals, and dreams, mingled with fears, doubts, and disappointments. All these negative aspects affect our spiritual journey and growth. In Hebrews 6:19, we read, "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul..." The Christian journey is a combination of faith and hope. Our life is not merely a short sprint or short distance race, but it is a long-distance marathon. "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain." (1 Corinthians 9:24,

KJV). We need to be steadfast and run this race with a lot of perseverance and patience though we face many setbacks on the way.

### Perseverance - defined

"The verb persevere comes from the Latin root *persevereus*, which means "continue steadfastly, persist," and that word comes from two others, *per-* for "very" and *severus* for "strict." (<https://www.vocabulary.com>).

The word "perseverance" is not commonly used in the Bible, but instead, it has many synonyms. The Meriam Webster Dictionary defines perseverance as the "continued effort to do or achieve something despite difficulties, failure, or opposition"; "steadfastness." The Cambridge Dictionary defines it as "continued effort and determination." With these definitions, we could have a better understanding of our concept.

In the Bible, as well as in the Spirit of Prophecy, we find some synonyms for perseverance, such as diligence, endurance, dedication,

determination, persistence, tenacity, steadfastness, and many others.

"When we labor diligently for the salvation of our fellow men, God will prosper our very effort."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 86.

"Perseverance" – the key to achieving spiritual growth and success in life.

"True success in any line of work is not the result of chance or accident or destiny. It is the outworking of God's providences, the reward of faith and discretion, of virtue and perseverance. God gives opportunities; success depends upon the use made of them." —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 486.

Our success depends on our ability to use our God-given talents to its fullest potential. In this process, perseverance and self-motivation play a vital role. Spiritual, mental, and physical growth, socio-economic achievements, and overall success in life is the result of the prime application of perseverance or determined effort in collaboration with our faith in God and His providence.

In general, we, as humans, have a tendency of fear of failures. In

the 'parable of talents,' Jesus mentioned that the one who was afraid of failure hid his given talent and lost all of it at the end. We need to be prepared to take risks in life to maintain our faith and to achieve success. Its nothing more significant than what Jesus did "To Save Man He Took the Eternal Risk..."—*Signs of the Times*, January 5, 1915. Keep moving with faith in Christ.

Most of us love to be in certain comfort zones. We are frightened or lazier to move out of it. Sometimes we do not like any event, person, or decision which moves us out of that zone. But we need to keep moving. Every day we must step forward in our spiritual life with caution. "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man." Luke 21:36 (KJV)

### Perseverance – brings physical, mental and spiritual growth

"The whole system needs the invigorating influence of exercise in the open air. A few hours of manual labor each day would tend to renew the bodily vigor and rest and relax the mind."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 264, 265 (1876).

A weak mind can be influenced by the enemy easily towards discouragement, idleness, and wrongful habits. Practicing a healthy diet, exercise, hydration, spiritual meditation, proper sleep, prayer life, and good habits, will help us to combat the negativity in us. On the other hand, all these will enhance our perseverance and determination to move us towards the next levels of mental

and spiritual growth. "Be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak: for your work shall be rewarded." 2 Chronicles 15:7 (KJV).

We, as Christians, need to develop a positive attitude, and this will help us to develop better personality, and eventually increase our influence in society. Having positive hopes, expectations, and beliefs will build faith, and that will fuel our perseverance. Our faithful reactions and spiritual approaches will resolve many internal and external conflicts. Also, our balanced attitude will help us to widen our circle of influence in sowing among unbelievers the word of God. In turn, this will provide progress in life too. But, keep in mind that, when we are dealing with people, we face disappointments, criticisms, conflicts, and sometimes failures. The question remains, are we going to give up? Or move forward?

"If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward." Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (<https://www.enotes.com/jax/index.php/homeworkhelp/cite?questionID=343193>).

We always need to keep our goals in mind. We all have and should have goals in life. Our lives should be goal-oriented and well focussed. God is always goal-oriented. Most of the prophecies show God's goals or intentions. Every step we take, all that we do, anything that we want to do, we need to ask ourselves, "why am I doing this." This question will help us to put ourselves back on track. "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried

with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:7, KJV). Our prime goal is to meet our Saviour when He comes.

“ Devote your mind to spiritual things. Keep your mind from dwelling upon yourself. Cultivate a contented, cheerful spirit. You talk too much upon unimportant things. You gain no spiritual strength from this. If the strength spent in talking were devoted to prayer, you would receive spiritual strength and would make melody in your heart to God.”  
—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 434, 435.

### Perseverance – Christ the best example

As the Creator of the universe, do you think Jesus needed to per-

severe when compared with us? He was born to this world as one hundred percent human, and he had all the possibilities to be tempted, discouraged, attacked, etc. If Jesus could not be tempted like us, Satan was not going to waste his time attempting to tempt Jesus all the time. Jesus faced challenges more than all of us. From the time He was born, they tried to kill Him. His own community did not believe Him. (John 7:5). The religious leaders criticized Him and rejected His teachings. In the end, He was betrayed by His own disciple. So, Jesus needed to persevere with the original solution plan to the end. Jesus is the best example of perseverance. His strength was His prayer life.

None of these harmful elements or challenges could be able to stop Jesus from achieving the goal of the cross. "Daily beset by temptation, constantly opposed by the leaders of the people, Christ knew that He must strengthen His humanity by prayer. In order to be a blessing to men, He must commune with God, from Him obtaining energy, perseverance, steadfastness." —*Gospel Workers*, p. 255.

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was so disturbed with the heaviness of sin He was going to bear. He prayed earnestly to the Father, asking for help. All those around Jesus could not help Him much. He asked the disciples to pray, but they too were sleeping instead. The question before Jesus in the human perspective was, 'am I going to give up the mission'? We also come to specific situations, just like Jesus faced. Jesus needed external help at this time as a human. Support was provided to Jesus by heaven as a result of His earnest prayer. "And He will not turn from His mission. He will become the

propitiation of a race that has willed to sin. His prayer now breathes only submission: 'If this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done.'" —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 690.

Jesus displayed His perseverance with the help of the Father. Jesus is a prayer warrior. Jesus submitted His will to the Father's will. He focused on His ultimate mission. Whenever His human propensities overtook His mission task, He sought help from God the Father. Jesus is our example.

### Perseverance – an essential ingredient of prayer

"Continue steadfastly in prayer, watching therein with thanksgiving; withal praying for us also, that God may open unto us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds; that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak." Colossians 4:2-4, ASV.

We may identify five main elements of prayer in these bible verses. Firstly, Apostle Paul is asking the Colossians to be steadfast or continue in prayer. Not to give up but hold the faith in Jesus. Secondly, he mentions being watchful in our prayers. Thirdly, we find that our prayers should contain our heartfelt thanksgiving. Fourthly, we find that we should pray that our hearts should be receptive to the word of God, and also, His word should be shared among the others. Fifthly, we find here that Apostle Paul is requesting prayers for his mission, and thus, we need to pray for all the missions and the missionaries. To continue to be steadfast or to persevere in prayer, considering all elements of prayer will be a blessing to all of us.

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and

watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." Ephesians 6:18.

When we think of perseverance in prayer, we may recall the parables of Jesus mentioned in the gospels. We especially find the parable about a man who pleaded for bread to feed a friend who happened to visit him at midnight, hungry. (Luke 11:5- 8). This story is found in the book of Luke, next to the Lord's prayer. So it is evident that perseverance is an essence. Further, in the same chapter, we read the words of the Saviour, "And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Luke 11:9, 10, KJV.

Again we find another familiar parable of Jesus in Luke 18:1-8 about the widow and the wicked judge. The reason or purpose of this parable is, "Then, Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. – verse one. (NIV) Again Jesus mentioned the result of perseverance as: "And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for His chosen ones, who cry out to Him day and night? Will He keep putting them off? I tell you, He will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" verses 6 to 8 (NIV). Here, we find that Jesus is connecting faith and perseverance with salvation.

### Perseverance – the glorified, persevere till the end

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God

through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Romans 5:1-2.

My dear brothers and sisters, we are approaching the end of another year. This year was a very challenging one for many of us. A lot of people lost their loved ones due to Covid 19 pandemic, while others were affected socially and economically. But still, God helped us to get through this year with much heartfelt hope towards His glorious appearance. In the book of Revelation, the author, John, addresses the chosen as "saints." As we are going through the process of justification and sanctification, we are expecting to be glorified at the Lord's appearance. Once again, we need to ask ourselves the question, "are we going to give up this race?" "Or are we going to persevere till the end?"

"Christ has given His commission: 'Go ye into all the world.' Mark 16:15. All must hear the message of warning. A prize of the richest value is held up before those who are running the Christian race. Those who run with patience will receive a crown of life that fadeth not away." – *Testimonies for the Church*, vol 9, p. 136.

### Perseverance – Practical Lessons from a visionary

The legendary Dr. King was the Mahatma Gandhi of America. He followed the blueprint of Gandhi's "Ahimsa Satyagraha", the Non-Violent Protests, which paved the way to the expected civil rights freedom.

"Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the original name Michael King, Jr.,

(born January 15, 1929, Atlanta, Georgia, U.S. —died April 4, 1968, Memphis, Tennessee), Baptist minister and social activist who led the civil rights movement in the United States from the mid-1950s until his death by assassination in 1968. His leadership was fundamental to that movement's success in ending the legal segregation of African Americans in the South and other parts of the United States. King rose to national prominence as head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which promoted non-violent tactics, such as the massive March on Washington (1963), to achieve civil rights. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964.

"On April 3, (1968) King was back in Memphis, where the city government had sought an injunction to prevent him from leading another march..... King was no stranger to death threats, but they had increased since he emphasized his opposition to the Vietnam War. Indeed, before leaving for Memphis, King had informed his wife and parents that a price supposedly had been put on his head....."

"That night a rally was scheduled at Bishop Charles Mason Temple, a Memphis Pentecostal church. King was exhausted, had a sore throat, and was feeling ill. With a thunderstorm raging that was anticipated to hold down the turnout, he sent his best friend and chief lieutenant, the Rev. Ralph Abernathy, to speak in his stead. When Abernathy arrived at the church, he found a larger-than-expected crowd buzzing with excitement at the prospect of hearing King. Abernathy telephoned King, asked him to come, and promised that he would give the major address, leaving King to say but a few words, and King agreed.

"At the event, King spoke for more than 40 minutes, almost completely off the cuff, gathering ener-

gy and energizing his audience as he went, ultimately delivering one of his most emotionally soaring and rhetorically brilliant speeches... Finally, as he wound to a close, his speech became prophetic: 'We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop....Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now....I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land!...I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man! Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!'" Adapted from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* – articles written by David L. Lewis and Clayborne Carson (<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Martin-Luther-King-jr> and by Jeff Wallenfeldt (<https://www.britannica.com/event/assassination-of-Martin-Luther-King-Jr/The-Mountaintop-Speech>).

Today, thousands of African Americans in the USA enjoy their civil rights freedom in every aspect of life because of the persevering efforts and sacrifices of people like Dr. King. By God's grace, threats, sicknesses, rewards or kickbacks, temporary setbacks, etc., are not able to stop a goal-oriented person with perseverance and dedication.

In conclusion, "The strength acquired in prayer to God, united with persevering effort in training the mind in thoughtfulness and care-taking, prepares one for daily duties and keeps the spirit in peace under all circumstances." – *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 85.

"May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance." 2 Thessalonians 3:5, NIV. Amen. ■

## Surrender

By P. Hunger, Argentina / USA

When you hear the phrase “I surrender all,” surely the memory of a melody comes to your mind. “I Surrender All” is a hymn written by Judson Van DeVenter and sung today in several languages. Born on December 5, 1855, in Michigan, USA, Van DeVenter became a teacher and art supervisor in the public schools of Pennsylvania, as well as an active musician at his local church. Seeing his talents, his friends encouraged him to dedicate himself fully to evangelistic work. For five years, a conflict raged within his mind and heart between continuing as a teacher or dedicating himself to the work of evangelization. Judson himself said: “For some time, I had struggled between developing my talents in the field of art and going into full-time evangelistic work. At last the pivotal hour of my life came, and I surrendered all. A new day was ushered into my life. I became an evangelist and discovered down deep in my soul a talent hitherto unknown to me. God had hidden a song in my heart, and touching a tender chord, He caused me to sing.” (Hawn, Michael. “History of Hymns – I Surrender All.” *Discipleship Ministries.com*. <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-i-surrender-all> (accessed May 31, 2020)). Judson shared the good news of the gospel in the United States, as well as in England and Scotland, carrying words of hope with his messages and songs.

We are reaching the end of 2020, a year full of events that are clear signs that the end is very near. From the beginning of the year 2020, we saw one disaster follow another: fires, earthquakes, the Coronavirus plague, wars, crises in the global economy, famine, tornadoes, and more. Thousands of people lost their lives during these end-time events. Just as Van DeVenter’s friends urged him to serve God, the Lord invites us to surrender everything and thus save both our lives and the lives of those around us. It is time to make a decision and proclaim the good news to a world deep in darkness.

The Lord tells us: “My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways.” (Proverbs 23:26, AKJV). The Lord not only wants to bless us, give us peace, and guide us in the new year, but also invites us to place ourselves into His hands, so that we completely surrender ourselves to His service.

### Befriend God and Pay Your Vows

God’s call is this: “Acquaint now yourself with Him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come to you. For then shall you have your delight in the Almighty, and shall lift up your face to God. You shall make your prayer to Him, and he shall hear you, and you shall pay your vows.” Job 22:21, 26, 27 AKJV.

There are two sides struggling for the heart of man: Jesus and Satan. On the one hand, Satan offers us a plethora of diversions and pleasures. However, he also causes disasters that lead to destruction and death. On the other hand, Jesus shows us a different path, one that leads to eternal life. A half-hearted surrender will not give us the freedom we need from the hands of Satan. Only when we decide to give ourselves completely to God’s guidance will we experience peace through forgiveness and freedom from the chains of sin. This total surrender is linked to a commitment to serve God. The text says to “pay your vows.” What are these vows? These are none but the vows of loyalty and service.

The problem with the integrity of the church is in the idea that, for many, Christianity means adding Christ to our lives, but not distancing ourselves from sin. In other words, it is a change of thoughts but not behavior. True Christianity means total surrender to God; and this implies revival and reformation, a complete and total change in our interests and activities.

Josef Tson, a Romanian pastor and former president of the Romanian Missionary Society who survived years of persecution and exile under a cruel Communist government, was once asked about his perception of American Christianity. Josef said that the key word in today’s Christianity is “commitment.” But then he added

that this is not correct. "As a matter of fact," he said, "the word commitment did not come into great usage in the English language until about the 1960s.... When a new word comes into usage, it generally pushes an old word out. I began to study and found the old word that 'commitment' replaced – the word 'surrender.'"

"What is the difference between commitment and surrender? When you make a commitment, you are still in control, no matter how noble the thing you commit to. One can commit to pray, to study the Bible, to give his money, or to commit to automobile payments, or to lose weight. Whatever he chooses to do, he commits to. But surrender is different. If someone holds a gun and asks you to lift your hands in the air as a token of surrender, you don't tell that person what you are committed to. You simply surrender and do as you are told.... [People] love commitment because they are still in control. But the key word is 'surrender.' We are to be slaves to the Lord Jesus Christ." (*Cheong, Christian. "Commitment vs. Surrender." SermonCentral.com. <https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon-illustrations/81687/commitment-vs-surrender-by-christian-cheong>, accessed May 31, 2020*).

In reality, Josef Tson's perception can be seen worldwide. Many only adopt the name of Christians, but in their lives there is no total surrender to the transforming power of the Gospel. Where is the transformation of lives by the power of God? Where is the recognition of sin and the turning away from evil? Where is the consecration to the service of the Lord? True Christianity is not a sentimental, social, or ecumenical commitment, as is seen in our world today, but a total surrender to the will of God.

"When Jesus heard this, He said to him, 'You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me.'" Luke 18:22 NIV. The rich young man thought he lived a life committed to God, but his heart was not devoted to service. To sell everything is to surrender totally into the hands of God. We no longer live for ourselves. I don't know what God tells you is missing from your life, but today is the time to "sell" your own sense of

righteousness and your earthly idols, and share the joy of this change, the eternal treasures, with those who do not know God.

### We Can't Be Divided

The Psalmist tells us: "Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with their whole heart. With my whole heart I seek You; let me not wander from Your commandments!" Psalms 119:2, 10 ESV.

God has given us the freedom to choose which path to follow, and He will never force our steps. He wants us to look for Him with all our hearts. Blessed is he who gives himself wholly to this direction, for he will find true happiness.

"No repentance is genuine that does not work reformation. The righteousness of Christ is not a cloak to cover unconfessed and unforsaken sin; it is a principle of life that transforms the character and controls the conduct. Holiness is wholeness for God; it is the entire surrender of heart and life to the indwelling of the principles of heaven." –*The Desire of Ages*, p. 555.

### Serving with the Entire Heart and Soul

"And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." Deuteronomy 10:12, ESV.

When the heart rejoices in the Lord, it will rejoice in serving others. The Christian serves not out of obligation, but because his life continues to grow when he sees others happy. Carrying a message of hope not only gives strength to those who are tired and burdened by the difficulties of life, but also gives joy and strength to the messenger to continue doing his best for the Master.

To make a total surrender is to live a life of agape love that the Lord Jesus taught us about. He gave everything, even His own life, to save us, without expecting a reward. He did it simply because He loves us. "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13 BSB. To make a total surrender is to

surrender ourselves, our own desires, our tastes, to serve our neighbors. This is living agape love.

This is why Jesus repeated the thought again in Matthew 22:37, ESV: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."

God is faithful. It is true that if we give ourselves completely to Him, we will experience certain losses and/or disadvantages. However, the Lord knows what each of us needs, because He is the one who has given each of us the gift of life. God will not allow anything necessary to be lacking. "Behold, today I am going the way of all the earth, and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one word of all the good words which the Lord your God spoke concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled for you, not one of them has failed." Joshua 23:14, NAS.

### "I give up!"

In the early 1960s, the editors of Time Magazine were concerned about declining sales. Hoping to boost subscriptions, they designed an advertising campaign that would mail out offers to a large number of potential readers. At that time, the IBM computer was just being introduced into the business world. Excited to make use of cutting-edge technology, the magazine's marketing directors coordinated with IBM to create an automated program to send out the ads. However, as is common with computers, a technical glitch occurred. As a result, one surprised farmer in Wyoming received 12,634 subscription offers to Time Magazine. The farmer, who usually received almost no mail, read one letter after another, each advertising the identical offer. After skimming through a few dozen ads, he wrote out a check for the \$6 subscription fee and sent it to Time Magazine with a handwritten note saying, "I give up."

The year 2020 was full of messages from God for you, calling to you with tender love. You are still alive only by the mercy of the Lord. Make 2021 an opportunity to serve God. Surrender all your talents and strength to the service of the Lord, and prepare for His soon coming. God bless you! Amen ■

# BROTHERLY KINDNESS

## and Divine Love

T. Petkov, Bulgaria / USA

In the Bible we find many important topics, but nothing is as highly emphasized as the presence of love in the life and character of the believer. The Apostle Peter placed brotherly kindness and divine love at the top of his ladder.

"And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity." 2 Peter 1:7.

### Brotherly Love

Brotherly love is translated from the Greek word **φιλadelphia**, philadelphia. Brotherly kindness reflects the relationship we have with our family members but, even more so, with our spiritual family within the church. Jesus went even further, presenting brotherly kindness as a quality that believers should demonstrate not only towards their friends but also towards their enemies. In order to understand the importance and nature of brotherly love, we need to explore different aspects and applications of this love as it is presented in the Holy Scriptures.

### As a Commandment

The Apostle John presented brotherly love as a commandment which the Lord Jesus Christ has given to His followers. "A new command-

ment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." John 13:34. This means that the love presented as *philadelphia* is not just an emotional attachment from person to person, but it is also a principle that believers should apply in their daily lives. We also understand that, because the Lord presented brotherly love as a commandment, then practicing it is not optional. Our Lord simplified the Ten Commandments into two – love for God and love for our neighbor. Matthew 22:36-40. This means that the Ten Commandments are commandments of love, and only by practicing the principle of love may we fulfill the requirements of the law. "The second most important commandment" is love for our neighbor. Love for God is expressed externally in our daily practice as love for our neighbor. "And this commandment have we from Him, That he who loveth God love his brother also." 1 John 4:21.

### As a Fruit

Brotherly love is not naturally in our natures. Since the fall, selfishness, greed, and envy have taken possession of our sinful hearts. In order to have and express brotherly love naturally, we need to receive the fruit of the Spirit and be partakers

of the divine nature. "But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another." 1 Thessalonians 4:9. We can receive this fruit by faith in Jesus. If we have been born again, the Holy Spirit will take possession of our hearts; and love for our neighbors will spring forth naturally. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him." 1 John 5:1.

The very essence of love is God Himself. The only way to express love is to have God in our hearts. It is an amazing privilege that, by the grace of our Lord, we may receive this gift and reflect God in our characters. "No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us." 1 John 4:12.

### As a Testimony

There is no testimony more powerful than the expression of love. Jesus mentioned that "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another." John 13:35. Once again we see that the expression of brotherly love is not optional but is a natural result of the presence of the Lord in our lives. If we do not have this brotherly love,

we may be deceiving ourselves and have an imaginary faith or religious experience. The presence of brotherly love is not only a testimony for the outside world but is also a way to examine ourselves. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" 1 John 4:20. All sacrifices in the Old Testament were offered with salt, which means that only if love is present will our service to God be acceptable. Leviticus 2:13.

### As Loyalty and Ethics

Brotherly love is also expressed in the Scriptures as loyalty towards God, His church on earth, and His commandments. The Apostle Paul was one of the most successful missionaries. "Throughout his ministry, Paul had looked to God for direct guidance. At the same time, he had been very careful to labor in harmony with the decisions of the general council at Jerusalem, and as a result the churches were 'established in the faith, and increased in number daily.' Acts 16:5. And now, notwithstanding the lack of sympathy shown him by some, he found comfort in the consciousness that he had done his duty in encouraging in his converts a spirit of loyalty, generosity, and brotherly love, as revealed on this occasion in the liberal contributions which he was enabled to place before the Jewish elders." —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 402. If we want to follow in the footsteps of the apostles and fulfill our mission in the world, we have to apply the ethical principles of love, unity, and loyalty. Backbiting fellow pastors or leaders, spreading false accusations about them and others, is the destructive work of the enemy. A brief observation from the General Conference level shows that the main reason why members leave the church is not doctrinal disagreement but, rather, personal conflict and unresolved issues among the brethren. We are also to use Christlike leadership in our churches, following the example and advice of the Apostle

Paul. "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." Philippians 2:3. When leaders and members are bound together with brotherly kindness, the enemy will be helpless in his efforts to destroy our souls and take away our salvation.

### As a Knowledge of God

We are used to prioritizing theoretical knowledge of the Scriptures as a means to know God. Many theological discussions on doctrine have taken place over the centuries. Battles and wars have been fought throughout history in order to establish or eliminate certain beliefs. Sometimes believers, following their selfish desires to appear as great discoverers of "new truth," introduce strange teachings that create division among church members. This is the opposite of brotherly love. The Bible says that, if we do not possess the gift of God and express it in love for our neighbor, we do not know God. "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." 1 John 4:7, 8. Considering the writings of the apostles, we may say that the achievement and expression of love is the final, most elevated, and ultimate purpose of Christian belief. All other doctrines are just a means to this end. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." 1 Corinthians 13:1, 2.

### The Absence of Brotherly Love

Since the Apostle Peter depicted brotherly kindness and charity at the top of his ladder, we may get the impression that love is something to be

achieved in the future or at the end of our Christian experiences. However, in the Holy Scriptures we see that the absence of brotherly love at any time is condemned. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." 1 John 3:14. We are saved "by grace" "through faith" but not by works (Ephesians 2:8); but, if the grace and salvation we receive freely from Christ does not bring forth in us the spiritual gift of brotherly love, then we do not really believe in Christ and have not yet received His grace by faith. The Holy Scriptures describe this condition as deceiving ourselves, and it is clearly expressed in the message to the church of Laodicea in Revelation 3:17. Furthermore, the Apostle John compared the absence of love, or the presence of hatred, as equal to murder. "Who-soever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." 1 John 3:15. Not only may we transgress the Ten Commandments with our physical actions, but the sphere of our dreams, desires, motives, and thoughts is also subject to divine judgment. The concept of brotherly kindness should be a serious matter of reflection and self-examination and a point of daily prayer.

### Divine Love

Charity, in English, is the translation of the Greek word **ἀγάπη**, *agape*. *Agape* means divine love and describes our love for God as well as the love that God has for us. Sometimes it is difficult to differentiate between *agape* (divine love) and *philadelphia* (brotherly kindness), because divine love is often expressed in our daily lives as love for our brethren. However, the Scriptures provide some information that will help us understand the greatness and magnificence of divine love.

### No Fear

Divine love convinces us of the existence of God, His salvation, and

His providence, so that death or anything else will no longer torment the believer. "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." 1 John 4:18.

Fear is part of our human instincts and manifests itself in different situations in different ways. Many times, we may fear to share the gospel with others, assuming that we may be rejected or ridiculed. What if the demonstration of our faith comes at the cost of life, and we have to make a decision to transgress God's commandments or die? Which would you choose?

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Christ answered this question "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it." Matthew 16:25.

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The pioneers of our church chose to die as martyrs rather than transgress the commandments. Agape love is connected with incredible strength and the presence of the Holy Ghost. The descriptions of the executions of many martyrs are impressive, considering how they faced their deaths with songs and praises on their lips. Following the example of our Master, many also offered a prayer for their enemies: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Acts 7:60.

## Perfection

In different religions and cultures, perfection is presented differently. Some Hindu gurus achieving "perfection" begin to demonstrate supernatural powers, such as levitation and others. According to the Bible, achieving spiritual perfection is not related to the possession of supernatural powers, but, rather, with the reflection of the supernatural divine character. "And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness." Colossians 3:14. According to the Apostle Paul, all other gifts of the Spirit are temporary and serve the believers only to spread the gospel and to achieve more fully the reflection of the di-

vine character in their lives. "Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away." 1 Corinthians 13:8.

## Self-sacrifice

One of the demonstrations of divine love is giving one's life for the benefit of others. "Greater love [agape] hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13. Selfishness, on the other hand, will fight to preserve and defend one's own personal interests. The example of self-sacrifice and willingness to suffer loss for somebody else's benefit is the ultimate proof that selfishness is overcome, that the Spirit of God has taken total control of our minds and emotions. The perfect example of divine love among humans is our Lord Jesus Christ. "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." John 10:11. However, the Scriptures tell us that His followers possessed this same gift of agape love. Stephen demonstrated this in his life and death. The Apostle Paul preached to his executioners at the very end of his life. "But even the hardened soldiers who attended him [the Apostle Paul] listened to his words and with amazement saw him cheerful and even joyous in the prospect of death." —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 509. At the end of time, true Christians will also demonstrate this love in their characters and behaviors.

## Assumes the Guilt of Others

Another demonstration of divine love is being willing to assume the guilt of somebody else. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, the first expression of their fallen human nature was to defend themselves and cast the blame on somebody else. Eve pointed to the serpent, Adam pointed to Eve, and, indirectly, both blamed God for their own disobedience. This is the condition of human nature

up until our day. Only the presence of the supernatural, divine nature in us makes it possible to express and manifest divine love.

## One ladder for all

The ladder has a deep symbolic and spiritual meaning. The Spirit of Prophecy explains that it is a symbol of the Saviour Jesus Christ. "Christ, who connects earth with heaven, is the ladder. The base is planted firmly on the earth in His humanity; the topmost round reaches to the throne of God in His divinity. The humanity of Christ embraces fallen humanity, while His divinity lays hold upon the throne of God." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 147. Many other Bible verses describe the experience of accepting our Lord Jesus Christ as a personal Saviour as the most important one, which indeed connects us with the heavenly kingdom and secures our salvation by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us consider the verse found in 2 Timothy 1:9: "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began...." Salvation is a gift given to us by Jesus Christ even before we were born. There is no doubt that Christ and He alone is the only way to salvation. "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Acts 2:21.

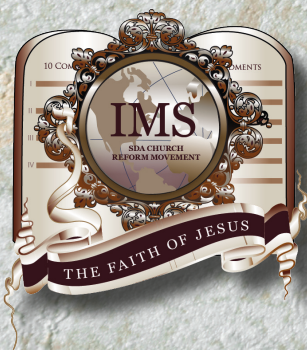
At the moment we accept our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Spirit of God takes possession of our hearts, we have the opportunity to confess our faith. The promise of our Lord goes into effect immediately. All steps of Peter's ladder are imputed to us by faith in Jesus because He becomes our representative before the heavenly judgment. Let us look unto Jesus because He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, our Saviour and Advocate. Amen. ■

“ ... do your best  
to add to your faith,  
virtue; to his virtue,  
understanding;  
to understanding,  
own domain;  
to self-control,  
constancy; to constancy,  
devotion to God;  
to devotion to God,  
brotherly affection;  
and to brotherly  
affection, love”



**READINGS**  
Week of Prayer

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International Missionary Society  
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General Conference