

JULY-AUGUST 2016

THE

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REAL TRUTH™

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

The Statue of Liberty stands prominently on the left side of the cover, set against a backdrop of a sunset sky with soft, orange and yellow clouds. The city skyline of New York City is visible in the distance behind the statue's base.

The *Real Story* of American Freedom

**Trapped: Yemen's
Never-ending Civil War**

Two Keys to Success!

**The Hidden Economy of
Drug Trafficking**

What Does God Think
of Political Debates?

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REAL TRUTH[™]
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VOL. XIV | NO. 5 | JULY-AUGUST 2016

A R T I C L E S

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■ **SEARCHING FOR LIFE:** Yemenis dig for survivors under the rubble of houses that were destroyed in the old city of Sanaa, Yemen's capital, following an overnight airstrike (June 12, 2015).

PHOTO: MOHAMMED HUWAIS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Trapped: Yemen's Never-ending Civil War
Citizens of the fractured Middle East nation continue to suffer and historical examples paint a bleak picture of its future. Yet there *is* hope for the Yemeni people.
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FRONT COVER: The Statue of Liberty stands in New York Harbor. The structure, which is officially named "Liberty Enlightening the World," was a gift from France in 1886.

PHOTO CREDITS: All photographs from Thinkstock unless otherwise noted.

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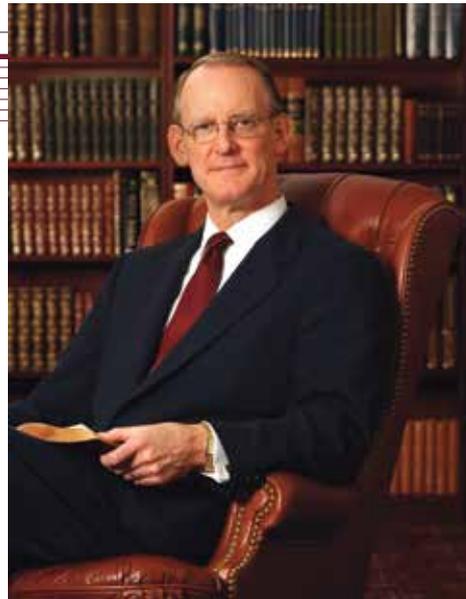
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PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



Two Keys to Success!

EVERYONE WANTS TO be considered successful, and to *be* successful. Yet most have no idea *how* to achieve SUCCESS. And they are not sure *how* to recognize it if they see it—either in themselves or in others. Supposed “higher” education has never taught it. Nor have most understood that there are basic, specific LAWS that must be employed to reach it.

Just what *is* success? So many seek it, having never defined it. As a result, very few people ever really achieve *true* success. And most never actually sit down and try to analyze the *reasons* for their failures. While many are certainly capable of recognizing that they have failed—they cannot explain *WHY*!

Though some might feel they are *destined* to fail, this is not true. Men and women of all ages *can* achieve success. Yet they must understand and practice the *right formula*—and only after they understand exactly *what* they are trying to achieve!

Assumptions About Success

Many believe that success involves achieving a certain amount of WEALTH. Their only purpose for being is to accumulate money and material goods. The goal is to see who can die with the most toys. They seem to believe that only by having a significant “net worth” (and many possessions) can they say that they have

“arrived.” Yet these same people never find true happiness at the end of the “money rainbow.”

Others come to believe that success is a reflection of how much POWER they have. It is as though the measure of their lives is counted by their *influence* over people, events or even economic, governmental or world affairs. Such people usually have controlling personalities. To them, success is how much—or how many—they *control*. Generally speaking, these people are *more* miserable than those who seek wealth. And they often make others around them even more miserable than themselves. They usually live in fear of losing their power.

Still others hope to achieve FAME. These people are often driven by a need to be known. The more who are aware of *their* name, the better. They seek to possess name recognition. Of course, *everyone* would love to enjoy at least their 15 minutes of fame.

But not everyone believes that fame equals success. And those who are famous represent probably the *most* miserable “success” category.

In every case, the people who *appear* to have achieved success have gained a certain level of status. Whether that success involves wealth, power and influence, or fame, a certain status in comparison to others has been reached. In other words, success involved elevating oneself above others.

Very few are considered to be a success without having obtained one or more of these commonly described elements of status.

Think for a moment! And be honest. How many people can you think of who you consider truly successful, but who do *not* fit into one of these categories?

You Can Succeed

The general assumption is that success is largely a byproduct of one's natural ability. It is as though "you have it or you don't." Most think they have little control over their own success or failure. They have been programmed by common assumptions to believe that they cannot do much to change their level of achievement in life.

Is this true? Is success or failure entirely connected to talents one is born with?

I have hired many people, and fired a few. For some years, I owned a successful company. I inherited a small chain of retail stores from my parents, and we continually sought hired help. I found that only a certain few worked hard, while others did not. Past a point, their success or failure seemed to have little to do with ability or talent. I learned that people's success was far more connected to the desire to produce, learn, grow and achieve than any other reason.

At the same time, I found that virtually all who did not succeed could have—IF they had known and applied the laws to success. I came to realize that people fail by choice, not by inherited traits, meaning their genetics. I learned that people have far more control over the direction of their lives than they realize, or are willing to admit.

Sadly, however, most languish believing there is little or nothing they can do to achieve the success they long for. Yet you can be different!

First Key

Few things are as easy as they seem. Recognize that things can go wrong, or can be harder and more complex than initially anticipated.

Often, one has to sit down and think through *how* to best tackle unexpected obstacles and hurdles

that appear on the path to success. Invariably, there are so many of these in life that a wise person trains himself to expect the unexpected.

While it is important to anticipate unexpected roadblocks in your quest to achieve, it is not nearly as important as demonstrating the RESOURCEFULNESS to *surmount* them. This is the first principle for success. Whatever obstacles fall across your path must be addressed and resolved. This takes determination and the willingness to think through *alternatives*—various possible *solutions*—that can be applied so that you can progress toward your goal.

If life was always easy, and if the path was always smooth sailing, achieving success would be relatively easy. Yet life is *not* like this. Unanticipated problems, difficulties, pitfalls and resistance require constant RESOURCEFULNESS for one to succeed.

You must carefully train yourself to remain calm in crisis. Panic accomplishes nothing, except to panic others around you and waste time. I learned long ago that fretting, worrying and panicking never removed the obstacle that I was facing. It did not change or even diminish it. This reaction merely delayed me, often causing loss of precious time that could have been spent traveling toward the next obstacle, had I employed RESOURCEFULNESS immediately after spotting whatever problem confronted me.

My Uncle Frank, my mother's younger brother, was one of the most astute men I have ever known. During his 30-year tenure with *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, he wrote or guided all of their best ads, and his leadership multiplied sales several times over by a great many millions of dollars. He was also an accomplished Lincoln, Custer and Civil War historian, and strategist. He was a very successful man who possessed a great imagination. I have sought to copy him since I was a small child.

It was a combination of all of the above qualities that enabled him to once tell me: "David, you must always out-think your opponents."

The first time he said this to me, I did not really grasp how important this principle was. In time, I began to realize it was virtually all-important. I came to realize that most people do not do this—and have never been *taught* to do it.

Opponents are not always people. Every problem, difficulty, resistance, hurdle and roadblock that you face is, in a sense, an opponent. Determine to out-think them! Look each one in the eye and say, "It's you or me, friend—and it's not going to be me!"

Practice this and you will get better at it. It will become more natural. Eventually, you will even find yourself thriving on it, enjoying the challenge of defeating enemies that want to defeat you. The "thrill of victory" will begin to regularly replace the "agony of defeat."

Applying calm, careful reasoning to problems that you face will help you achieve true success!

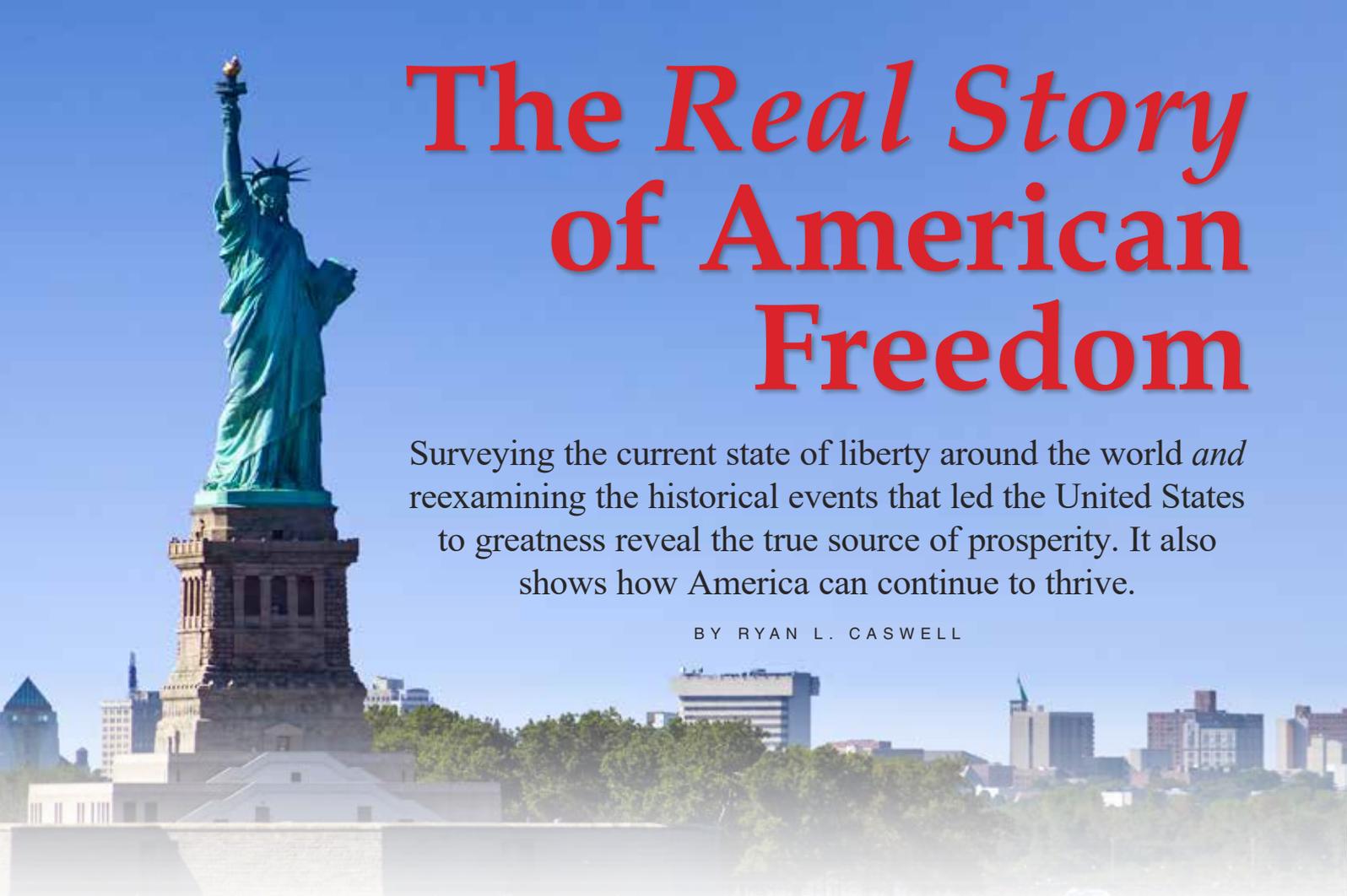
Second Key

The second principle for success is perseverance. To habitually practice resourcefulness, one will almost automatically find himself on the edge of practicing perseverance. These two qualities go hand-in-hand.

Enjoying the sweet taste of success comes at a price. Unfortunately, most are not willing to *pay* it. As with a person choosing to buy a particular watch, and then finding that it is too expensive—even though it is the one carefully *chosen* and *desired*—most will simply settle for a cheaper watch. They are unwilling to save for the purchase because they do not want to "pay the price." They accept something less when they did not need to.

Achieving success requires sticking to the goal. It requires PERSEVERANCE, sometimes called *stick-to-it-iveness*. Winston Churchill admonished World War II Great Britain to "never, never, never give up." With the help of other Allied forces, they went on to victory against Adolf Hitler and the Axis powers—changing the entire course of

Please see **PERSONAL**, page 26

A large, clear photograph of the Statue of Liberty in New York City, viewed from a distance across the water. The statue is green and stands on a stone pedestal. In the background, the New York City skyline is visible under a clear blue sky.

The Real Story of American Freedom

Surveying the current state of liberty around the world *and* reexamining the historical events that led the United States to greatness reveal the true source of prosperity. It also shows how America can continue to thrive.

BY RYAN L. CASWELL

THE WIND AND SEA whipped at the tiny Mayflower as it crossed the Atlantic Ocean. Waves battered the creaking vessel, which had been at sea for more than a month.

Those on board fought freezing temperatures, dysentery, severe storms, diseases and a host of other challenges. Supplies dwindled and the ship's 20-plus despairing crew members and more than 100 passengers wondered if they would ever see land again.

The merchant vessel was not designed to hold the extra 102 men and women squeezed into its cargo hold—a cramped, windowless living space only five-and-a-half feet tall—some of whom were fleeing religious persecution. Before traveling west, they had lived in the Netherlands and Britain, but had not found freedom.

No place but the New World would grant them the ability to live as they believed.

After a 66-day voyage, the ship finally arrived at Plymouth Harbor in November 1620.

Even after reaching land, a harsh winter forced the travelers to stay on the vessel for several more months. As freezing temperatures wore on, starvation set in. Without clean food or adequate shelter, over half of the original passengers died from exposure to the cold or starvation.

Despite their challenges, those on board who had been religiously persecuted focused on attaining something greater than their individual lives—they sought freedom. They saw physical trials as a small price to pay for the right to practice what they believed. Their actions paved the way for the U.S. to become the Land of the Free and Home of the Brave, a place where people could live as they saw fit.

From the pilgrims to America's Founding Fathers, freedom has always been woven into the fabric of U.S. society. Early Americans believed all men were created equal and entitled to seek life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

This mindset spawned the most powerful democratic country in history. Since then, America has stood as a symbol of hope. *Any person*, through hard work, determination and exercising the freedoms granted to them, could build a better life.

Most accept without question that FREEDOM is what drove the U.S. to greatness and the very reason it has become the global standard for prosperity. Yet is the ability to choose one's own destiny *really* what secured America's place among the greatest nations in history?

Defining Liberty

The definition of freedom is different for everyone. To some, it is the ability to exercise personal liberties such as



holding a job, starting a business, or providing for a family. For others, it is freedom of the press or the free access of information. For yet others, it is the choice of a particular religion.

Many countries have established national holidays that celebrate their freedom—most of which are modeled after that of America’s Independence Day on July 4.

In South Africa, political freedom is commemorated on April 27, when the first democratic election was held in 1994. India celebrates the end of Great Britain’s colonial rule on August 15. Mexico recognizes its country’s freedom from Spanish colonization on September 16. The French celebrate freedom from monarchical rule on July 14, the date they stormed the Bastille—which was a turning point in the French Revolution. Israel celebrates the establishment of the modern Jewish State on the 5th of Iyar, which falls between April and June on the Roman calendar. And on February 1, America observes “National Freedom Day,” which commemorates when all slaves gained their freedom under President Abraham Lincoln.

While there has been some success in attaining a certain amount of freedom worldwide, news headlines are still filled with reports of slavery,

political oppression, tyranny and corruption, especially in underdeveloped countries. According to the Global Slavery Index, a reported 46 million people live in situations where they are forced to provide free labor, be it physical or sexual.

For decades, nations have thought that securing American-style freedoms would bring prosperity, peace and abundance. Yet the state of the world proves it is not so simple. In fact, freedom is actually *declining* across the globe.

Sad State of Freedom

Examining the amount of liberty worldwide reveals it is disappearing despite nations yearning for it like never before. It also shows how unique America’s success story really is.

The U.S. watchdog organization Freedom House produces an annual report titled “Freedom in the World,” which measures the state of freedom internationally. It assigns each country a value of “free,” “partly free,” or “not free.”

After gathering reports from over 90 analysts worldwide, its 2016 study projected an overall decline in freedom for the 10th consecutive year. Of the 195 countries and 15 territories included, 86 countries were ranked as

“free,” while 59 were “partly free” and 50 were “not free.”

This means a whopping *36 percent of the global population lives under tyranny!*

Such a steep decline in freedom can be attributed to parallel conflicts along with ongoing political suppression in China, according to the report.

Take Russia and Ukraine, for example. In 2014, the southern Ukrainian state of Crimea voted to become part of Russia. Many called into question the legitimacy of the poll results and believed Moscow illegally annexed the region.

Another example is Azerbaijan, an oil-rich country, which allegedly violated property rights and forcibly assumed control of private land to continue oil production.

Neighboring Kazakhstan was also accused of broadening laws against religious gatherings in homes and sending secret police to arrest offenders.

In addition, Belarus, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan consistently earn the worst freedom ratings, according to the report.

Of the 18 countries in the Middle East, Israel was considered the only “free” nation, with 12 nations, or 66 percent of the region, classified as “not free.” These rankings, in almost every

case, were caused by the 2011 Arab Spring uprising.

Ironically, this political movement was an attempt to *bring* greater freedom.

While protesters deposed certain leaders throughout the region, they failed to bring stability. Places such as Libya showed promise after the uprising, but weak transitional governments have given place to terrorist groups that seized control.

The civil war in Syria, which has now claimed an estimated 500,000 lives, has been responsible for the greatest humanitarian crisis in recent history. Mass killings, chemical warfare, persecution of clergy and civilians, use of child soldiers, and widespread rape have resulted in a massive exodus and put a strain on the infrastructure of neighboring countries.

Syria's war and instability in Iraq have resulted in the rise of the Islamic State terror group. Because of such developments, Gulf nations are building up their militaries, cracking down on political dissenters, and expanding sentencing for cybercrime violations. This area is widely regarded as the "least free" region in the world today.

Sub-Saharan Africa continues to struggle as well with 82 percent of its 49 countries either "not free" or "partly free." According to the report, this region is characterized as "volatile," as government coups and political schisms regularly affect it.

On top of this, the area continues to grapple with terrorist attacks, such as the 2015 siege of a luxury hotel in Bamako, Mali. Reports after the event indicated that the government used this as an excuse to further restrict personal freedoms.

In addition, terror group al-Shabab killed almost 150 individuals in an attack on a university in Garissa, Kenya. This prompted the government to enhance its national counterterrorist campaign, a move that allegedly employed secret extrajudicial killings, kidnappings and unwarranted political suppression.

Africa's decline is accompanied by the desertion of power by many

Western democracies. The European Union, England, America and Germany have been focusing on domestic issues and reducing aid to these locations. Additionally, the U.S. has pulled back from strategic conflict zones in Pakistan and Iraq, which have experienced an increase in sectarian violence.

How Is America Different?

In light of these worldwide conditions, the United States and other Western nations stand out even more as anomalies. Not only do most citizens of these countries live in relative peace, they can exercise political, civil and religious freedoms openly. Virtually all, even the poorest in these societies, are more prosperous than their counterparts in the rest of the world.

In the United States, a commonly held belief by politicians, preachers and leaders is that the hard work of common Americans brought about their prosperity. Their extraordinary successes and breakthroughs certainly do suggest a uniqueness to the country, but it is not the only way it happened.

Many also credit the Founding Fathers and their political ideas that birthed America's governing bodies. This includes the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights, which are supposed to have guaranteed its citizens preeminence in the world.

On its face, these arguments seem reasonable, especially when considering America's position in the world.

While the United States represents around 4.5 percent of the global population, it controls 29 percent of the world's total gross domestic product. Its economy is the largest in the world, twice that of China, and is almost unmatched in terms of per capita income per household.

Additionally, no other country is home to the variety and amount of mineral wealth, oil, natural resources, and arable land readily available.

In terms of manufacturing, America was the first nation to employ standardization in construction, vastly outmatching the output of other countries throughout the 19th century. An influx of immigrants bringing cheap

labor, new skills, and inventions over the last 100 years has bolstered the country's productivity and technological sectors.

Militarily, while the nation has suffered setbacks in recent decades, it remains the largest and most dominant military player in the world—BY FAR. According to the Lexington Institute, in 2012, America boasted 50 percent of all military spending globally. It was responsible for ending World Wars I and II, the Cold War, and dozens of smaller conflicts, and continues to have the potential to be a virtually unstoppable military force.

This picture stands in stark contrast to the rest of the globe, except for certain other Western countries. Given that nations have attempted to replicate the winning American model over and over—and been met with middling or worse results—its uniqueness must have a different cause than mere freedoms.

In fact, a great UNSEEN HAND guided the U.S. to greatness.

Why Is America Different?

Most are unaware that the blessings received by America were foretold millennia ago as a result of the obedience and faith of the biblical patriarch Abraham. He was the original "founding father" of the ancient nation of Israel. Due to his obedience to God, a powerful prophecy was given and greatness was promised to his ancestors: "That in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and your seed shall possess the gate [sea gates] of his enemies; and in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because you have obeyed My voice" (Gen. 22:17-18).

These same blessings were passed from Abraham to his son Isaac and then to Jacob, who was later renamed Israel. God made similar promises to Israel (Jacob) for his obedience: "... be fruitful and multiply; A NATION and a COMPANY OF NATIONS shall be of you..." (35:11).

There are only two entities throughout all of history that fit such descriptions—America (a nation) and the United Kingdom (a company of nations). The U.S. originates from the ancient nation of Israel, and its people are the descendants of Abraham. Through him, the U.S. has received birthright blessings from God.

America has risen to prominence and become one of the most abundant nations ever as a direct result of God's blessings, *not* the efforts of men.

This is the *real story* of why Americans enjoy such freedoms.

Yet God's blessings were not promised to last forever. To learn more, read David C. Pack's free book, *America and Britain in Prophecy*, available at rcg.org/aabibp.

Freedom Is Not Everything

If America was able to bring about freedom and prosperity through its own power, then surely it could guarantee lasting happiness to its citizens.

Yet this has not been the case.

The blessings that Abraham secured were due to his faith and obedience to God. Abraham understood that God presented him and all others who would come after him the opportunity to follow His ways and receive blessings. Many conditional promises God made are listed in Deuteronomy 28, which detail both blessings from obeying God and the ill effects for those who disobey. Abraham firmly understood God's Way and chose to follow it. As a result, his descendants reaped the benefits of his obedience.

Realize: If America would follow God's Law—they could secure true and continued happiness and prosperity!

Although the U.S. has never followed the Bible's commands and statutes to the letter, many were used in the founding of the nation. In addition, people used to both read and attempt to live God's Word as best they understood it. This all had the potential for blessings on an individual level.

Yet America is pulling away from Bible-based religion. A Pew Research

Center study from 2014 found that the number of people who identify as Christians has dropped by roughly 8 percent in the last seven years. In addition, the study found that Millennials (those between the ages of 18 and 24) are far less likely to affiliate with organized religion, with over 36 percent unaffiliated with any denomination. This number is only slightly lower among the previous two generations of Generation X and the Baby Boomers.

Interestingly, nearly a quarter of Generation X has left organized religion altogether and now identify as either agnostics or atheists. Also, nearly one-in-five U.S. adults raised in a religious home went on to give up their faith in adulthood. Of those polled, one-third were raised Catholic, of which 41 percent no longer identify with that religion. These were by far the worst losses found in the study.

As the U.S. has become more secular, it is increasingly focused on physical prosperity. Five years ago, Worldwatch Institute released a study titled "The State of Consumption Today," in which its author stated, "The failure of additional wealth and consumption to help people have satisfying lives may be the most eloquent argument for reevaluating our current approach to consumption."

Put simply, in a materialistic society, the goal of earning ever-increasing amounts of money has proven to be unfulfilling. And when citizens become apathetic toward the blessings they enjoy and toward the God who provided them, a decline in society is unavoidable.

Pursuing Happiness

The missing piece in American prosperity—and societies around the world—is true joy. But even with blessings from God of immense abundance, man is still ill-equipped to achieve true happiness and fulfillment on his own. While he has sought to implement systems of government, religion and politics to ensure prosperity, no society has achieved lasting peace and happiness for all. Humanly

devised systems are always temporary.

Without God's guidance, man's pursuit of prosperity and happiness always leads to a wrong end.

Yet true joy is achievable! The God of the Bible is willing to teach us His laws, which result in happiness. The ancient King David understood this, and declared: "In Your [God's] presence is *fullness of joy*" (Psa. 16:11).

Jesus Christ also promised His followers PEACE and JOY (John 14:27; 15:11). These two qualities are also fruits of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23.

This passage describes the *Spirit* of God. When converted, a Christian must build on these characteristics, which in turn produce God's character—resulting in an immense amount of joy!

Understand. Exercising freedoms in any form, unless tempered by God's Law, will *always* produce bad fruit. But living His Way and building His character *always* yields lasting joy.

Real Truth Editor-in-Chief David C. Pack expanded on the search for joy in his article "You Can Live the Abundant Life!": "Never has the world had so much, yet been so miserable. Depression, unhappiness, confusion, frustration, unfulfilled hopes and dreams, dissatisfaction, emptiness—and hopeless misery—describe humanity the world over.

"The United States Constitution guarantees people the right to 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.' While the framers of the Constitution understood they could guarantee the American citizenry certain civil liberties and freedom from oppression, they understood they could not guarantee happiness. They could only seek to guarantee one's right to 'pursue' it.

"Many are pursuing happiness, but in all the wrong places!"

To understand how you can secure true and lasting happiness, read the rest of Mr. Pack's article at rcg.org/yctal. God longs to give all nations and individuals a joy-filled life—for all who will pursue it. □

The Hidden Economy of Drug Trafficking

While most understand the extent of the drug problem at the street level, this is merely the end result of a vast array of financial transactions that support everyone from average farmers to entire nations.

BY EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

THERE ARE MORE than 500 million farms worldwide. Most hold in high regard those who make a living burying seed in the ground and later harvesting fully developed plants to feed humanity.

But what if their venture satisfied a different hunger—the incessant cravings of a quarter of a billion illegal drug users worldwide?

Suddenly, the profession would not sound so praiseworthy. Yet, far from the more recognizable powders, pills and vials, most illicit drugs begin like the vegetation farmers typically sell at markets.

Whether the yellow flowers and reddish berries of the coca bush, with leaves that are processed to make cocaine, or the brightly colored petals and tubular stems of the opium poppy that produce a sap used to make heroin, most would unsuspectingly stroll past whole areas of such plants. Even a field of cannabis, the base for marijuana and hashish, can easily slip past the undiscerning eye.

These plants do have worthwhile derivatives that generate income. Coca leaf tea, for instance, is sold for altitude

sickness, a common condition in the Andes Mountains of South America where it is grown. The Coca-Cola company still imports tons of the oval-shaped leaves every year for its proprietary soft-drink formula. Chemicals in opium poppy are used to produce pain medications. And hemp, a cannabis byproduct, is known to be superior to other materials, such as cotton, when manufacturing paper, rope, clothing and other fabric-based materials.

Nevertheless, the conversion of these plants to illegal drugs bolsters a \$320 billion a year, multinational, illicit drug industry. This staggering figure places drug trafficking among the most profitable forms of commerce in existence. The operation covers the cultivation, production, distribution and sale of illegal substances as defined by drug prohibition laws.

The worldwide distribution of illicit crops resembles that of lawful commodities—such as coffee, cacao (used to make chocolate), sugar cane, and other common food items. In both cases, plants are grown and harvested in only a handful of fertile regions of the world and moved through multiple production and delivery channels.

Each step in the process requires established infrastructure and expertise. Successfully moving *legal* products to the end-user has far-reaching financial implications as it funds an army of laborers, business entities, and governments.

So too does the growth, transport and production of illegal drugs. Trafficking these items is the economic engine of not only vast criminal networks, but also legitimate, legal ones. As with the addicts they support, those embedded in this process are bent on ensuring a continual product flow.

Any chance of eliminating the worldwide drug problem includes the seemingly impossible task of abolishing the hidden economy that makes it possible.

Current Market

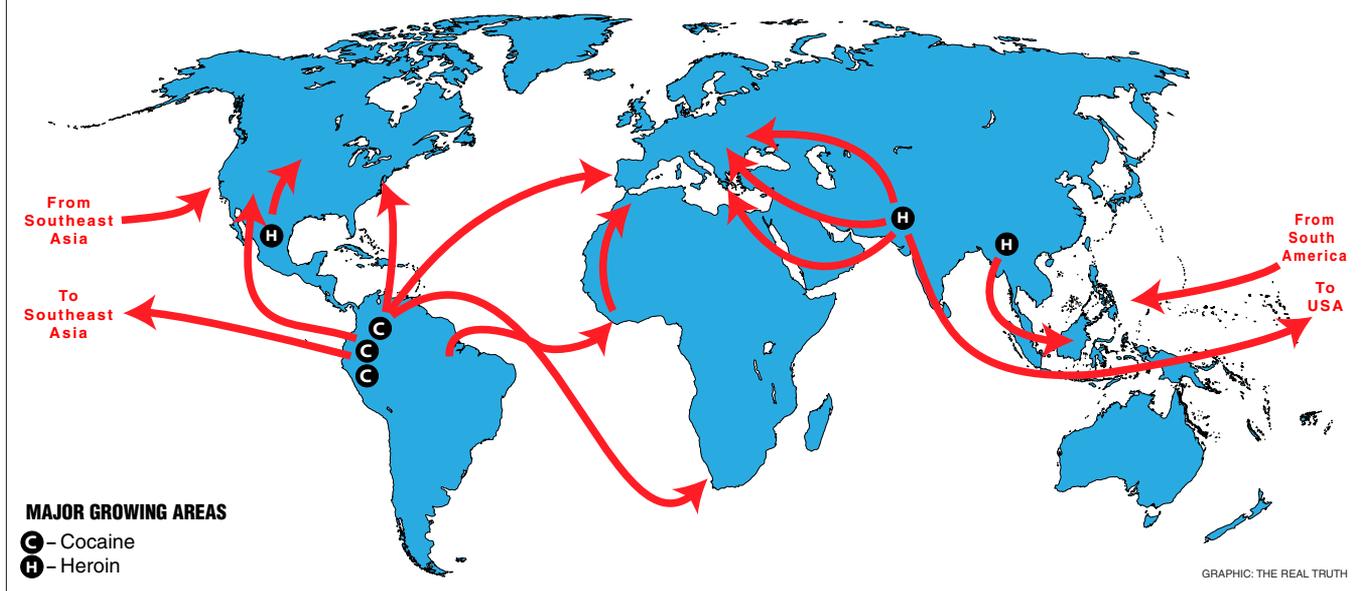
The customer base for illegal drugs shows no sign of waning. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's 2015 World Drug Report,

■ **CASH CROP:** Afghan farmers harvest opium sap, which is used to make heroin, from a poppy field in Kandahar province (April 12, 2016).

PHOTO: JAWED TANVEER/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



Main Trafficking Routes for Cocaine and Heroin



246 million people used illicit drugs in 2013 (the latest numbers available), an increase of three million over the previous year. Heroin, cocaine, marijuana and amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) are the chief illegal substances.

Worldwide, the number of opioid users—combining those using natural, synthetic or semi-synthetic opium products—stands at 48.9 million people. This includes those who abuse prescription pain medication as well as heroin. According to the report, the global cultivation of opium poppy in 2014 reached its highest level since the 1930s.

In the 1960s, most opiate-based addicts began with recreational use. By the 2000s, though, 75 percent of addicts abused prescription opioids such as Vicodin, Percocet and OxyContin.

Astonishingly, 90 percent of prescription opioid abusers eventually turn to heroin!

Heroin-related deaths in the U.S. soared from 5,925 in 2012 to 8,257 in 2013, reaching the highest level in the past decade.

Cocaine has an estimated 17 million users worldwide. The United States and nations of the European Union make up more than 80 percent of the global market for the drug.

Coca bush cultivation has been on a steady decline since the 1980s. This is

mostly due to more effective eradication of the coca bush by government authorities and increased seizures of cocaine during transport.

The greater availability and lower cost of methamphetamine, a cocaine alternative, has also been a factor. Despite it all, however, cocaine still has more users than heroin. Though the cocaine market is shrinking in the U.S., it is increasing in South America and second only to cannabis trafficking in Europe.

Cannabis is the world's most popular illegal drug, with nearly 182 million users as of 2013. It can be consumed as herbal cannabis (marijuana) or cannabis resin (hashish).

The U.S. accounts for about 19.8 million of the world's marijuana users. It remains illegal under federal law, but it has been legalized in 24 states for recreational or medical use. Its use continues to increase as public perception of it as a harmful drug declines. This is despite its increasing level of potency, measured by THC content, which has risen from about 4 percent in 1995 to 12.05 percent in 2013, according to the 2015 National Drug Threat Assessment Summary.

The future market for cannabis worldwide is strong as its cultivation and use increases in North and South

America, as well as in Europe and Africa.

Though mostly birthed in a lab instead of a field, amphetamine-type substances (ATS) such as crystal meth and ecstasy (MDMA) affect the market for illegal drugs and are equally trafficked. There are an estimated 33.9 million users of amphetamine, methamphetamine and prescription stimulants.

Points Traveled

Nations where plant-based drugs are cultivated are few in number and tend to look the same: they are marginalized, have limited government control, lack infrastructure, and have higher levels of poverty.

Afghanistan and Myanmar supplied well over 90 percent of the world's opium poppy between 1998 and 2014. Coca comes almost exclusively from the South American countries of Colombia, Peru and Bolivia. Cannabis and ATS sources are more widespread.

From these points of origin, illicit drugs are trafficked to various destinations around the world.

The 2015 World Drug Report stated: "The markets for opiates in Africa, South-West Asia, parts of East Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Oceania are mainly supplied by South-West Asia

(Afghanistan), while some markets in South-East Asia and Oceania are also supplied by South-East Asia (the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar). The Americas are mainly supplied by Latin America (Colombia and Mexico), with the exception of Canada, which to a significant extent is supplied by Afghan heroin."

"Cocaine is usually trafficked northwards from...South America to North America and across the Atlantic to Europe via the Caribbean or Africa, by a variety of means, including air and sea."

Unlike the coca bush and opium poppy, which only thrive in limited regions of the globe, cannabis is grown nearly everywhere—from small-scale homegrown sites to large-scale industrial farms. Herbal cannabis is produced in almost every country, while hashish production is limited to a few countries in North Africa, the Middle East, and Southwest Asia.

Marijuana transport is big across the northern and southern borders of the United States. Europe is the world's largest consumer of hashish, though Western Europe appears to be dominated by herbal cannabis. Asian cannabis consumption is below global levels even though it is the most commonly used illegal substance in Asia. Cannabis use in Africa is high, approaching twice the global average.

Much of the world's methamphetamine is produced in East and Southeast Asia, though production is expanding to other regions such as Mexico and Africa. In Europe, amphetamine and ecstasy dominate the market,

but methamphetamine is increasing in availability.

Supply Chain

Farmers tucked away in the mountains of Peru or the jungles of Southeast Asia do not see themselves as cocaine or heroin growers. To them, a coca bush or opium plant is as much a cash crop as wheat. The market ultimately dictates what they plant.

The ratio of income per hectare of opium versus wheat was 10 to 1 from 2004-2007—as poppy collected \$5,200 per hectare against \$545 for a comparable amount of wheat. Although the ratio fluctuates yearly, it increased to 11 to 1 in 2011.

Planting the most lucrative crops can be the difference between a farmer affording to feed and educate his family or living a destitute existence in

an already poor area of the world. Knowing that traffickers will simply go to a neighboring plot, or in some cases use threats, is all it takes to push a reluctant farmer to join the drug-trafficking economy.

This cultivation of raw plant materials is the first in a series of steps that take illegal drugs to the point of consumption. Limited supply and high demand create a nearly perfect business opportunity for distributing drugs to clients all over the world.

In business terms, this flow of goods and services is known as a supply chain. Each link in the chain is operated by specialists seeking to maximize profits.

After cultivation, the next step is processing. Farmers are rarely involved at this stage, though some illegal trafficking organizations merge the first two steps to streamline production.

A Hide-and-seeK Game

At the U.S.-Mexico border, drug smugglers engage in an endless shell game, trying to outwit U.S. customs inspectors to sneak their loads into the country.

What Customs Inspectors Do:

Tap body panels, listen for solid sound where it should be hollow

Circulate among cars looking for suspicious signs

Check driver documents

Check underneath vehicles for signs of drug storage

Walk drug-sniffing dogs past vehicles

Carrier of Choice

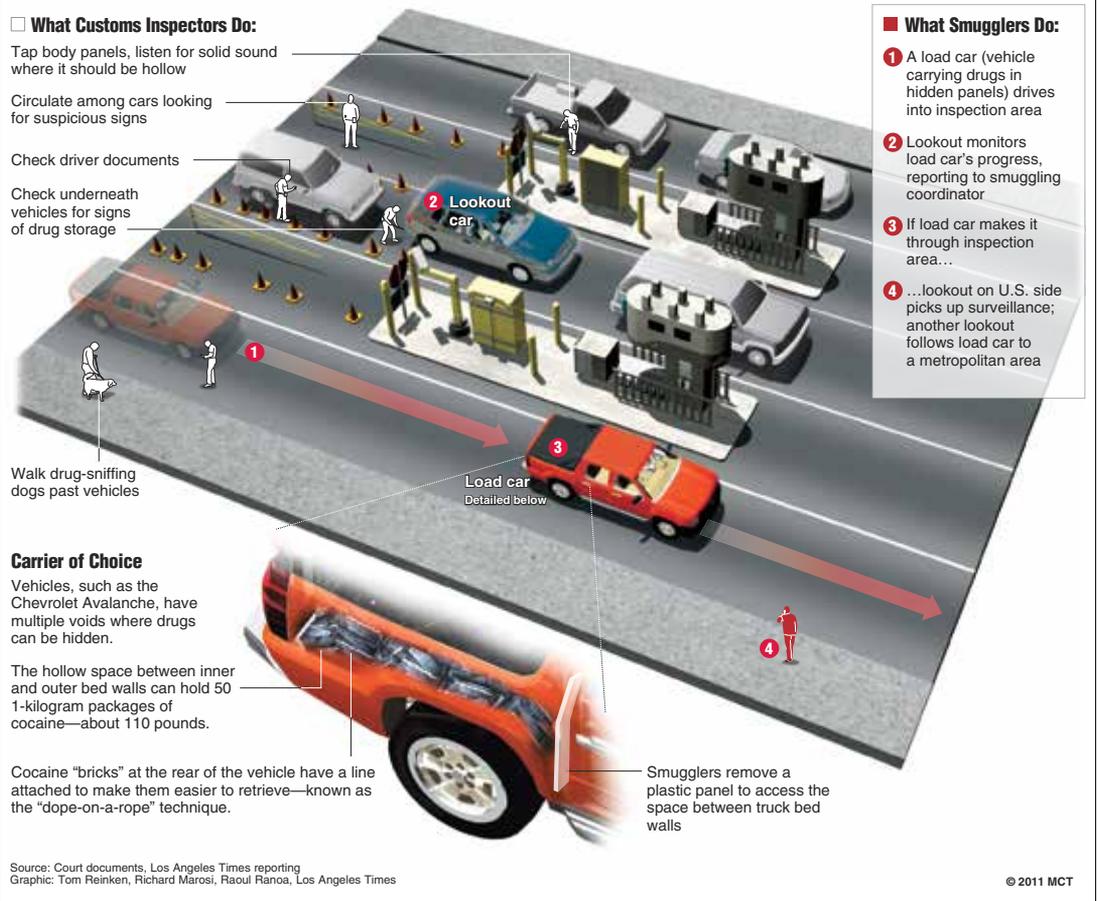
Vehicles, such as the Chevrolet Avalanche, have multiple voids where drugs can be hidden.

The hollow space between inner and outer bed walls can hold 50 1-kilogram packages of cocaine—about 110 pounds.

Cocaine "bricks" at the rear of the vehicle have a line attached to make them easier to retrieve—known as the "dope-on-a-rope" technique.

What Smugglers Do:

- 1 A load car (vehicle carrying drugs in hidden panels) drives into inspection area
- 2 Lookout monitors load car's progress, reporting to smuggling coordinator
- 3 If load car makes it through inspection area...
- 4 ...lookout on U.S. side picks up surveillance; another lookout follows load car to a metropolitan area



Source: Court documents, Los Angeles Times reporting
Graphic: Tom Reinken, Richard Marosi, Raoul Ranco, Los Angeles Times

© 2011 MCT

During processing, naturally occurring plant alkaloids are stripped for conversion to street drugs. Harmful materials, such as gasoline and hydrochloric acid for cocaine or chloroform and acetate anhydride for heroin, are used in this process. Realize that even those willing to simply sell these precursor materials to drug processors benefit financially.

International smuggling comes next in the chain. Product is moved by land, sea or air for a fee.

Annual drug seizures by law enforcement give insight into this movement. According to the 2015 World Drug Report, 59 percent of the total amount of drugs seized were from land transports, often on road or rail, making it the most popular method of smuggling. Criminals often work with drivers who are paid directly to allow drugs to be smuggled with legal freight or in personal vehicles.

Though air smuggling is frequent, the quantities moved are usually small. The total captured by air represented only 6 percent of the overall quantity seized. These lesser amounts are stashed in luggage or parcels to better elude detection.

Transport by sea, though representing only 8 percent of the number of seizures by law enforcement, disproportionately represented 35 percent of the amount of drugs seized, making maritime transport the way to move the largest amount of product per individual shipment.

Smugglers are typically paid to move drugs by wholesalers, the next link in product movement. Wholesalers, usually drug cartels, are well-funded and distribute narcotics on a wide scale to large and medium-size retailers. Representing the final link in the supply chain, retailers are on the front line and distribute directly to users.

Most of the profit in the drug trade is earned on the front line. Retailers face the most risk from law enforcement and generate about 65 percent of total proceeds. Wholesalers get 25 percent, smugglers 9 percent, and cultiva-

tors and processors a meager 1 percent. It is not unusual for \$500 worth of raw drug materials produced by a farmer to garner \$300,000 on the street!

The illicit drug market tends to be horizontally integrated, meaning each step of the supply chain is controlled by independent entities. This separation, while not as efficient, isolates the risk to the overall operation and product flow.

For instance, if a smuggler is busted with an illegal product, it is extremely difficult to trace it to the drug processor or cultivator. The processor in this case simply employs another smuggler and business goes on.

Entrenched Networks

Transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) are drawn to drug trafficking due to high profits. Unlike trafficking human beings, weapons or precious stones and metals, drugs are a consumable product in need of constant renewal. Drug cartels from places such as Colombia, the Dominican Republic, and Asia seek to capitalize and carve out a piece of the action.

Of all TCOs, those in Mexico are among the largest and most sophisticated. Observing how they operate provides a glimpse into the difficulty law enforcement agencies face in eradicating the drug problem.

Mexican cartels dominate drug trafficking in the United States. They benefit not only because of proximity to the wealthy U.S. market, but also because of proven business savvy and organization. They run their groups like corporations. They think long-term and reinvest in their enterprises. Familiar cartels such as the Sinaloa and Los Zetas are often protected and admired by citizens as well as by those who benefit financially from their operations.

As with legal firms, many Mexican cartels have layers of staff—from front-line employees to mid-level supervisors to background managers. They also have what are known as *ley* or “law” employees who are primarily law enforcement officials working on behalf of trafficking organizations in exchange for bribes.

According to a report from the Organization of American States, a typical drug-trafficking franchise in a given city or region employs anywhere from 61 to nearly 600 internal employees and 109 to 1,000 *ley* workers.

This is far greater than most legitimate Mexican firms, 99 percent of which have 50 or fewer employees. The mean salary of internal drug employees is about 1.3 times the mean wage in Mexico and six times the nation’s minimum wage.

Not all those being paid are direct employees of the organization, however. Those desperate to earn a living can be compensated as lookouts or couriers. In such cases, they can make more money than they would otherwise without ever having to physically touch the drugs.

Mexican TCOs also compensate established firms who support the business—often through handshake agreements. For instance, cartels invest millions of dollars for the construction of elaborate tunnels connecting safe houses on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. The creation of these tunnels employs engineers, mining experts, and heavy-equipment companies. The drug industry is so profitable that the cost of these subterranean structures can be recuperated in a few months.

Drug trafficking in Mexico is worth over \$50 billion annually to the nation. It is estimated that a complete loss of the industry would shrink the country’s economy by more than 63 percent, according to *drugabuse.net*, a drug-treatment non-profit organization. This impact sheds more light on the difficulty of fully eliminating drug trafficking from places like Mexico, despite the risk of imprisonment or death.

Mexican cartels also employ friends and family based in America. These members are sent to U.S. hub cities to manage stash houses containing drug shipments and bulk cash drug proceeds. This activity pumps drug funds into the American economy.

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WHAT DOES GOD THINK OF POLITICAL DEBATES?

They fight, they argue, they bicker, they posture for favorable opinion. The nation watches. Yet few think about how the Author of the Bible sees televised arguments between politicians.

EVERYONE LOVES A good debate, or so it seems. Watching a political candidate verbally clash with his opponent using biting quips and well-timed barbs makes for good drama, even for anxious onlookers who have already made up their minds.

In the modern age of political campaigns, debates are akin to verbal jousting. The winner is determined by which candidate can do the most damage to his opponent's public image—who can most effectively sow the seeds of doubt in the minds of the public—who can come back with a witty, stinging retort and cause his opponent to flinch, waver or fall off his game.

But consider. Despite their questionable entertainment value, do debates actually *inform* the undecided? Does a candidate's passionate plea sway people into thinking, "That's my guy! I can get behind him"? Or do debates simply confirm what is already in a voter's mind? In other words, does watching verbal contests of matching wits and swapping rhetoric simply validate onlookers' political leanings?

Perhaps the greater question is whether debates affect elections. The answer to this is yes.

Decades ago, there was John F. Kennedy versus Richard M. Nixon. Both men wanted to become the next president of the United States. Most who listened to the radio broadcast of their first debate thought Nixon won.

But those who *watched* the same debate—history's first televised one

between two opposing presidential candidates—felt differently. The suntanned Kennedy came across as relaxed, cool, calm and collected, while Nixon looked tense (perhaps due to an injured leg), wore the stubble of a five o'clock shadow, and perspired profusely, which made him seem uncomfortable and unkempt. Many historians claim that this first debate was a turning point for Kennedy and resulted in him narrowly defeating Nixon in the general election.

There was also President Gerald Ford versus Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter in their presidential debate held in San Francisco, California, in 1976. When asked by *New York Times* journalist and Pulitzer Prize-recipient Max Frankel about the Russians and their dominance over Eastern Europe during the Cold War years, President Ford

said, “There is no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe and there never will be under a Ford administration.”

Incredulous, Mr. Frankel asked the president to clarify: “I’m sorry... Did I understand you to say, sir, that the Russians are not using Eastern Europe as their own sphere of influence in occupying most of the countries there and making sure with their troops that it’s a communist zone...?”

Here was a chance for Gerald Ford to recover from his startling assertion, which clearly was incorrect. Instead, he doubled down: “I don’t believe, Mr. Frankel, that the Yugoslavians consider themselves dominated by the Soviet Union. I don’t believe that the Romanians consider themselves dominated by the Soviet Union. I don’t believe that the Poles consider themselves dominated by the Soviet Union. Each of those countries is independent, autonomous; it has its own territorial integrity. And the United States does not concede that those countries are under the domination of the Soviet Union.”

With that, his bid for the White House was all but finished.

Then there was incumbent President Ronald Reagan, who was down in the polls when he sought reelection in 1984. His opponent, Senator Walter Mondale, appeared to be gaining traction whenever President Reagan’s age was brought up (Mr. Reagan would have been the oldest man elected to the Oval Office). On more than one occasion, people wondered if a 69-year-old senior citizen—who, by definition, would have been well past his prime years—would be physically or mentally healthy enough to endure the daily pressures of serving as de facto leader of the free world.

Using his famous off-the-cuff wit during a debate in Kansas City, Kansas, Mr. Reagan said of his rival: “I will not make age an issue with this campaign. I am not going to exploit for political purposes my opponent’s youth and inexperience.”

From then on, the question of Ronald Reagan’s age was no longer as

relevant in the public’s view. He went on to win a second term.

In these real-life examples, the aesthetics of a favorable appearance, spur-of-the-moment remarks, and witty zingers carried more weight than what values or quality of character each candidate possessed.

This is even more true today, in which debates have turned into a comical primetime soap opera of empty promises and sound-bite insults.

Oddly, the person most capable of verbally destroying his competitors will ultimately be the one who places his hand on God’s Word to be sworn into office come January.

Despite this use of the Bible—along with that of other politicians who make a solemn oath on it when they enter office—almost no one stops to consider what the Author of the Book actually thinks about the very debates that help place these men and women in positions of power.

Why the Appeal?

Debating appeals to our very nature and drives our thinking. As human beings, we are free. Free to question, to wonder, to doubt, to protest, to take exception to anything or anyone who goes against our personal way of thinking.

The natural mind questions. It assumes it knows better. And it is not naturally humble. It does not voluntarily lower itself to ask: “Why am I so quick to express *my* opinion? What makes *my* thoughts so important that everyone should hear *me*? What makes *me* the so-called authority on this or that subject?”

Truly, it is a rare person who sits back and observes before forming a judgment or opinion.

Human nature is prone to act without thinking and quick to respond with pure emotion rather than choosing to wait. In the New Testament, the apostle James, Jesus’ half-brother, admonished, “Wherefore, my brethren, let every man be *swift* to hear, *slow* to speak, *slow* to wrath” (Jms. 1:19).

The Bible also instructs, “He that is *soon angry*”—quick-tempered—

“deals foolishly” (Prov. 14:17). When people cannot control their emotions, their emotions control them. Sooner or later, they end up making decisions they will regret.

Many road rage incidents escalated because this verse went unheeded.

Take New Orleans, where a former NFL athlete was slain outside the famed French Quarter after a fender-bender accident. The arrested assailant was booked with second-degree murder, a charge that involved shooting the former football player at least eight times, including in the back, as well as wounding the deceased’s wife.

All this because the individuals involved got caught up in the heat of the moment and exchanged words fueled by rage. They were not “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” And because at least one person was so wrapped up in his emotions, he let his passions drive his thinking.

What does this have to do with debates, political or otherwise? Engaging in debates, even from the sidelines, encourages our human nature to run amok—to give ourselves over to whatever feeling, urge or whimsy strikes us. Yes, political debates can be somewhat informative regarding issues, but most sessions quickly devolve into bouts of boasting and insults. In this regard, the Bible warns, “There is a way [course of life] which *seems* right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Prov. 14:12).

This is the sad reality of the human condition: “The heart [mind, seat of thought, inner person] is *deceitful* above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9).

Human beings’ natural state—lacking the much-needed extra component of God’s Holy Spirit for guidance, which God freely gives to those whom He calls to repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38)—is deceitful. That mind and its nature cannot be trusted. Not even a little.

Each person considers himself better off than he actually is. No wonder, then, that God declares: “There is *none* righteous, no, *not one*: there is

none that understands, there is *none* that seeks after God. They are *all* gone out of the way, they are *together* become unprofitable; there is *none* that does good, no, *not one*" (Rom. 3:10-12).

Human nature whitewashes its true character and whispers, "I'm not *that* bad." Yes, it *is* that bad. Even worse! This should be no surprise since our nature is acquired from the "god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4), the great serpent who "deceives the whole world" (Rev. 12:9)—Satan the devil.

How effective is Satan at worldwide deception? God's Word vividly describes him as "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2). This evil being broadcasts feelings and thoughts of jealousy, rage, envy, competition, strife, wild lust, greed, pride and envy. The devil injects this thinking into an unsuspecting mankind. And the overwhelming majority do not even believe he exists! They think of him as a "cute" cartoon figure or some other type of harmless costumed character.

The way we live might *feel* right—it might please and even titillate our senses of sight, touch, taste, hearing and smell—but there are certain life decisions that rise above the limitations of the physical senses. These require precise spiritual direction—sound judgment based on the laws

of God, which the Bible defines as *righteousness* (Psa. 119:172).

When we make a deliberate decision to observe His commandments and statutes, God says that it "shall be our righteousness" (Deut. 6:25).

Think. What if every political candidate running for the highest office in the land said to himself, "*Who am I* to profess to have all the answers? *Who am I* to claim that I have the best solutions to America's problems? *Who am I* to suggest that I'm better than everyone else running for office?"

Such a person would never even consider running. Unsurprisingly, this level of genuine humility has never found a place in presidential campaigns.

Have you ever witnessed a candidate attempt to bridge gaps with his opponent and concede, "I have never considered that. I see your point"?

Mixture of Right and Wrong

Understanding human nature and what inspires it puts political debates into perspective. The Word of God reveals and explains our human condition—what drives us, motivates us, and permeates our thinking.

At the core of every man and woman is carnal nature. Even at its best, it is a *mixture* of both good and evil. For example, sometimes we are moved to commit acts of compassion and mercy such as giving a

coat to someone shivering in freezing rain or anonymously donating money to a worthy cause. Other times, we secretly do, say and think things that we would never want revealed to the public.

Jesus Christ, as humanity's Creator (I Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15-16), taught, "For from within, out of the *heart* of men"—the fountain and seat of thought, desires, appetite, affections, purposes, passions, will and character—"proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man" (Mark 7:21-23).

The nature of man is described in more excruciating detail in the book of Galatians: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest [obvious], which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, *variance*, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (5:19-21).

The word "variance" can mean *quarrel, strife, discord* and DEBATE—a vivid picture of the whole political

Please see **DEBATE**, page 21



■ **SPECTACLE:** An audience watches a presidential primary debate at the Flint Cultural Center in Flint, Michigan (March 6, 2016).

PHOTO: CLIFF HAWKINS/GETTY IMAGES

TRAPPED:

YEMEN'S NEVER-ENDING CIVIL WAR

Citizens of the fractured Middle East nation continue to suffer and historical examples paint a bleak picture of its future. Yet there *is* hope for the Yemeni people.

BY DAVID J. LITAVSKY

AT 5 MONTHS OLD, a Yemeni girl in a hospital bed has already suffered more than many do in a lifetime. Oxygen and IV tubes dangle from her body, and she clings to life similar to the way her wrinkly, malnourished skin does to her bones. Despite medical intervention, her heart stops beating days later as she succumbs to starvation.

Later, hospital staff prepare the bed for another who will likely suffer the same fate.

This is the all-too-common end for the 300,000 starving Yemeni children who live without regular access to food, medical attention, and safety. As the nation's year-plus civil war continues, this number ticks upward.

The conflict between Yemen's government and rebel groups—which is complicated by various terrorist organizations and tribal factions—has the average citizen trapped and helpless. Even young Yemenis not threatened

with starvation live in a failed system where they grow up with little or no education, money or hope. They face a future of scavenging food and a just-scraping-by existence.

The resultant humanitarian crisis from war is crushing Yemen, the poorest sovereign state in the Middle East. Unemployment stands above 40 percent. Fourteen million people require food assistance or are at risk of starvation, Jamie McGoldrick, the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in the nation, reported. In addition, seven million live in areas prone to airstrikes and violent attacks.

According to the International Organization for Migration and the UN Refugee Agency, about 2.5 million have left their homes. Yet most are stuck within Yemen's borders, an area roughly four times the size of the U.S. state of Alabama.

Three million Yemeni youth are unable to attend school. Summing up their plight, Mr. McGoldrick told *Euronews*: "So for [the children] it is a life with pain, no life at all but pain. And if you look at the situation regard-

ing health structures, the inability for people to bring food into this country, to bring medicine into this country, to bring fuel into this country, is hampering the possibility for them having a future."

For most in the nation, there is only one place to go to attempt to escape the horrors surrounding them: basements. Unlike northern Africa and Syria, from which migrants are fleeing by the thousands into Europe, Yemen and its surrounding region is a geographical maze. Relocating outside its borders—and even within the country—is often an impossible dream.

A Yemeni's path to Europe would involve passing through life-threatening, mountainous territory either controlled by Houthi militants, terror groups, or aggressive tribal factions. Those who do cross the border into Saudi Arabia must travel thousands of miles through mountains and deserts amid further threats of violence before they can reach Turkey. At any point during the journey, there is a possibility of running into a band of ill-meaning bandits.

■ **MIREN IN CONFLICT:** Top left, forces loyal to Yemen's president, Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, show their weapons as they take part in an operation against al-Qaida (April 23, 2016). Top right, Yemeni children pose inside a tent at a makeshift camp after fleeing from fighting in Sanaa (April 16, 2016). Bottom left, Yemenis stand amid the rubble of houses following air strikes in Sanaa by the Saudi-led coalition (Sept. 16, 2015). Bottom right, pro-government forces drive armed vehicles during clashes with Houthi militants in Yemen's southern province of Lahij (May 13, 2016).

PHOTOS: SALEH AL-OBEIDI/ (TOP LEFT, BOTTOM RIGHT); MOHAMMED HUWAI/ (TOP RIGHT, BOTTOM LEFT); AFP/GETTY IMAGES





For those who can afford a boat ride out of the country—which include Yemen’s small higher class of lawyers, judges, medical workers, computer engineers, and university lecturers—escape to Africa via the sea is easier but equally risky. Attacks by Houthi gunmen or Somali pirates are common.

In one case, according to *NPR*, a Yemeni hospital worker “paid \$300 to board a repurposed cargo ship at the port in the southern coastal city of Aden. Houthi rebels fired on them as they waited to board.”

In another instance, “...rockets allegedly fired by the same rebels sank a fleeing ship and killed at least 40 people.”

Of the 2.5 million Yemenis that have left their homes, only about 60,000 have escaped the country’s borders. Most of these traveled by land to neighboring Saudi Arabia and Oman, or by sea to Djibouti.

Others flee to humanitarian camps, which provide little security. One such IDP (internally displaced person) camp had four bombs dropped on it by Saudi warplanes. A survivor of the blasts told the online news organization *Middle East Eye*: “We thought we would be

safe here, but the airstrikes follow us wherever we go.”

“At least at home we had food, we had our farmland, we had our goats. Here, we are starving. There is absolutely no one helping us.”

Those who do stay behind—the majority of citizens—are under the constant threat of shelling, gunfire or an airstrike. The United Nations reported that of the over 6,200 people killed in the civil war, about half have been civilians slain indiscriminately by gunfire or airstrikes.

Without a place to go, many Yemenis are left with just one option: hope that tomorrow will not bring more of the same.

Middle East Powder Keg

Naturally, human beings are sympathetic. Many devote their lives to devising and implementing solutions of every form. Humanitarian aid groups bring food and equipment for shelter and healthcare to provide for the Yemenis who need help.

Even nations that get involved have a noble desire to create stability in the region. Each solution in this case, however, breeds contention and additional

problems for others. Yet the future of the Yemeni state and its 24 million citizens hangs in doubt. So what can be done to save the population from reentering the dark ages?

Before looking at potential solutions to Yemen’s crisis, it is helpful to better understand the situation first.

The current civil war in Yemen is another example of tensions between long-time enemy Sunni and Shiite Islamic factions. It is primarily being fought between two political-religious groups: (1) Sunni Muslim forces loyal to President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi’s government (based in the coastal, southern city of Aden), and (2) the Shiite Muslim Houthis (based in the north), who have taken control of Sanaa, Yemen’s capital.

BBC explained: “The Houthis are members of a rebel group, also known as Ansar Allah (Partisans of God), who adhere to a branch of [Shiite] Islam known as Zaidism. Zaidis make up one-third of the population and ruled North Yemen under a system known as the imamate for almost 1,000 years until 1962.

“The Houthis take their name from Hussein Badr al-Din al-Houthi. He led

the group's first uprising in 2004 in an effort to win greater autonomy for their heartland of Saada province, and also to protect Zaidi religious and cultural traditions from perceived encroachment by Sunni Islamists."

In 2012, when Mr. Hadi was elected president of a unified Yemen, the Houthis objected to his rule, citing state corruption. They captured Sanaa and ousted Mr. Hadi in January 2015.

Complicating the picture is the fact that al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) claims over a quarter of Yemen's territory. The militant Islamist group is not aligned with either Mr. Hadi or the Houthis. Instead, it has taken advantage of the power vacuum by expanding its influence and staging deadly attacks against Yemen's government forces, the Houthis, and citizens.

Also, smaller tribal entities are trying to gain a footing amid the chaos. In late 2014, Sunni radical group San'a Province claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing in Sanaa that killed 152 people. The group affiliated itself with the Islamic State terror group (commonly called ISIS), which is seeking to eclipse AQAP's influence.

Because of political instability and loss of infrastructure, some Yemenis are turning toward jihadist groups such as AQAP and ISIS to provide basic necessities.

International Business Times explained: "Half of Yemen's 24.4 million people don't have access to clean water—the most basic of human needs...But there's a group working to change that. A group that...much to the delight of its parched residents—unveiled a freshly dug well in the country's arid southern territory." That group is AQAP.

"AQAP is one of the U.S.-designated terror organization's most powerful divisions and since the beginning of 2016, the group has quietly seized vast swaths of Yemen, undercutting its rival, the Islamic State group, which has been the main focus of the West's counterterrorism strategy for the last year. ISIS may have dominated international media coverage, but in Yemen, AQAP has overshadowed its

younger sibling with its grassroots approach, providing essential public services to gain the trust of the local population. The group has also been willing to share power with local governing institutions before it establishes its own so-called caliphate."

With the state splintering into pieces, key regional and international players have entered the arena to prevent its total collapse—even further complicating matters.

Helping or Hurting?

Stability in Yemen is important for peace in the entire Middle East. *BBC* explained: "Yemen is strategically important because it sits on the Bab al-Mandab strait, a narrow waterway linking the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden, through which much of the world's oil shipments pass. Egypt and Saudi Arabia fear a Houthi takeover would threaten free passage through the strait."

Also, Yemen and Saudi Arabia share an over 900-mile border. The Saudis want to ensure their lands are secure from the Houthis.

Saudi Arabia claims that its archrival Iran, a Shiite nation, is supporting the Houthis with financial aid, weapons and training. Iran's strategy is allegedly to use the group as a proxy of influence.

To counter the Houthis advance and concerns over Iran's involvement, a coalition of Arab and African nations led by Saudi Arabia is backing Yemen's government.

The coalition deploys jets to seek-and-destroy military targets in Houthi-controlled areas. There are, however, growing reports that it also indiscriminately bombs civilians—sometimes in retribution for military infringement. In September 2015, after 45 United Arab Emirate soldiers were killed by Houthi forces near the capital of Sanaa, UAE jets retaliated by dropping bombs on the city overnight. Thirty civilians were killed.

The coalition is also blocking imports by sea. While affecting the Houthis marginally, the blockade has greatly worsened starvation in a nation that relies on imports for 90 percent of its food.

Increasing instability and the threat of terror attacks emanating from the area have drawn the United States into the fray. Washington provides Mr. Hadi's government and the Saudi coalition military support. But America's primary objective in Yemen is to stop AQAP from expanding its influence, wealth and ability to carry out long-ranging terror attacks.

Washington has also expressed concern that Mr. Hadi's security forces and the Saudi coalition do little to stop al-Qaida in the region. Realizing that the Houthis are more engaged in fighting AQAP, White House officials have been "scrambling to contact Houthi leaders and assure them that the United States doesn't consider them an enemy," *Los Angeles Times* reported.

"Why so much eagerness for a working relationship with a group that wants less U.S. influence in its homeland, not more?" the media outlet continued. "Because the Houthis and their allies are now in charge in Yemen, one of the main battlegrounds in the long U.S. war against Al Qaeda. And the Houthis hate Al Qaeda."

Yet the Pentagon has been unable to establish contact with the Houthis. Their slogan, "Allah is great, death to America, death to Israel, curse on the Jews, victory to Islam," reveals why.

Instead, the U.S. is urging the Saudi coalition to limit its use of force in the hopes of saving more lives and stabilizing the region. It is also putting consistent pressure on Yemen's government to engage in peace talks with the Houthis.

Both sides have been reluctant to come to terms. Even if a ceasefire agreement was brokered, it could open the door for more complexity. For one, it would allow large numbers of citizens to flee within a short period of time, as people tend to move when fighting stops. Though this sounds positive for Yemenis, it would likely throw gasoline on the refugee crisis fire already vexing Europe and the Middle East. Refugees would then have little hope of finding a better life even if they were able to exit the country.

Worse—a ceasefire could fuel greater conflict. *The New York Times*

reported: "...Yemenis scarred by the vicious fighting, past broken promises and deepening divisions say they fear that any truce would just be a prelude to an even uglier war, fought between regions, religious sects—even neighbors."

"'People have feelings of revenge,' said Mohamed Nagy, whose house is on a hill less than a mile from one of the front lines in Taiz, a city that residents boasted was a beacon of culture and intellectual life in Yemen before it was transformed into one of the country's deadliest battlefields."

"The reconstruction of souls, by both sides, will take a long time," Mr. Nagy told the paper.

Old News

Yemen has been trapped in a cycle of factional violence and division for more than 1,000 years. From AD 1047 to 1517, control of the area shifted between local dynasties, kingdoms and tribes. The city of Sanaa was conquered by invading forces nearly once every 100 years throughout this period.

As long as a common enemy was present, Yemeni peoples united. During the 16th and 17th centuries, the Ottoman Empire vied for control of Sanaa. Sunni and Shiite Yemenis joined forces and engaged in back-and-forth battles against the Turks for territory.

After these invaders were expelled, however, conflicts between Zaidi Shia tribes in the north and Sunni feudal systems in the south continued. By the mid-1800s, with Sanaa fractured by tribal rivalries, the city's citizens were so desperate for a return of order that they appealed to the Turks to rule them. The Ottomans invaded in 1849, but failed to take the city. Despite this, the Ottoman Empire continued to hold some territory in Yemen until 1918.

During World War I, Yemen came under the influence of the British Empire and was effectively divided at the war's end. North Yemen, called the Zaidi Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen (1918-1962) and later renamed the Yemen Arab Republic (1962-1990), was an independent state with the Zaidis generally in power. It existed until 1990

when it unified with South Yemen, which was a British protectorate.

Shortly after unification in 1990, southerners "began complaining of political and economic marginalization by the government in Sanaa, and fought a civil war in 1994 in a failed attempt to reverse the unification," *BBC* reported. Tension continued to mount between north and south over unequal access to power and resources.

The Houthis and Hadi-led government are the modern figures of this millennia-old divide, which is now further complicated by the involvement of AQAP and ISIS, as well as regional and global powers.

Man's Pattern

World history is a cycle: actions breed problems, which breed problem-solvers, who breed solutions, which breed unintended effects. As long as problems exist, man searches for solutions. Yet each of these solutions invariably prove the "law of unintended consequences."

Recognizing this overall pattern shows a dire reality: man is incapable of creating lasting solutions. All of his plans backfire or have negative side effects. With this in mind, it may seem that Yemen is truly trapped in a never-ending war.

Yet grasping this truth leads to the best possible news for the faltering state and its suffering people.

Since man is incapable of governing himself, he needs outside help. The Bible reveals that someone can—and WILL—solve *all* of his problems.

Chapter 2 of the book of Daniel explains that "the God of heaven" will "set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (vs. 44).

DO NOT dismiss this verse as either outdated Hebrew literature or too fantastical to ever come true. The Bible is filled with prophecy, which can be likened to history written in advance. When God says He will do something, He brings it to pass. Prophecy is one of the key ways to prove the validity of this Book. If you have not done so

already, read *Bible Authority... Can It Be Proven?* at rcg.org/bacibp. It removes all doubt that God's Word provides an outline for what will come upon the world.

Back to Daniel 2:44. This verse reveals two unique details regarding the kingdom that God will set up: (1) it will last forever, and (2) it will not be ruled by men.

For the majority of those in charge—governors, presidents, tribal leaders, and terrorist masterminds—this comes as horrible news. They will be out of jobs and power.

But for the average person, such as Yemenis trapped in a cycle of war, God's kingdom will be a welcome relief.

Consider what the Bible says conditions will be like in cities. The following passage from the book of Zechariah is a future scene for Jerusalem, but these conditions will also be enjoyed worldwide: "Thus says the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age" (8:4).

This is welcome news for places like Yemen—where an airstrike can come at any moment.

Verse 5 states what will come for children: "And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof."

For thousands of years, even man's most successful empires, nations and kingdoms have risen and waned. None have ever brought lasting hope for the future.

Even with today's most powerful nations and numerous humanitarian groups helping, Yemen remains in a lingering, debilitating war.

The government that God says He will establish will bring true lasting peace and prosperity for which Yemenis long. The generation stuck in the thicket of violence and poverty today *will* be rescued.

To learn how and when this will occur, read the comprehensive book *Tomorrow's Wonderful World – An Inside View!* at rcg.org/tww. It proves beyond a doubt that the future of Yemen—and the world—is bright. □

DRUGS

Continued from page 12

National- and neighborhood-level U.S. gangs also form relationships with Mexican TCOs for drug distribution, enforcement of drug payments, and protection of trafficking routes. At 1.4 million strong in 33,000 different groups, these gangs rely heavily on drug revenue. They engage in violent criminal activity such as robbery, assault, threats and intimidation to ensure it continues.

Yet the biggest challenge to stopping the illegal economy may be the movement of drug funds into lawful enterprises. Drug profits, usually in the form of cash, are routinely smuggled or laundered into the legal financial system.

This money laundering, which is extremely difficult to track, aims to legitimize illegal funds. Money is pulled into legal endeavors such as construction, real estate, legal gambling, and the hotel industry.

These activities further spread the impact of the drug trade.

Inability to Cope

Law enforcement struggles to penetrate and upend the world's elaborate drug-smuggling system.

Consider stopping the flow of heroin in vehicles at just one border checkpoint in San Diego, California. More illegal

opiate is seized there than anywhere else in the United States. Officials compare it to looking for a needle in a haystack.

Now add all the other checkpoints, all the other drugs, all the other modes of transportation, and all the world's other borders. The picture becomes overwhelming.

Removing one element of the trafficking system is not enough. The profit potential is so high and the system so elaborate that someone can quickly step in to replace each part of it. The world's governments lack the cooperation and resources to keep up. This does not mean they do not try.

With the "war on drugs" deemed a failure in some circles, decriminalization remains near the top of the list of supposed solutions. Proponents feel that since drugs drive crime, legalizing them would have the effect of reducing violence and government corruption. They also feel regulation and control of the industry would lead to economic growth, similar to the way alcohol and tobacco boost the economy.

Opponents have a much more succinct rationale—drugs are dangerous and a hazard to the health of people. Making them legal and more available is a bad thing.

Alternative development, another proposed solution described in the 2015 World Drug Report, is directed toward creating a legal economy for farmers who grow the crops in the first place. The project is "aimed at reducing the

vulnerabilities that lead to involvement in illicit crop cultivation and ultimately eliminating such cultivation...In the long run, this can attract investment and help to develop the necessary infrastructure, thereby changing and sustaining the livelihood of rural communities."

The goal is clearly to fight the war on drugs from the supply side. If drugs are unavailable in the first place, then people cannot abuse them.

A concern with this approach is that drug use is increasing across the board. It is not difficult to see that people will find a way to get high no matter what.

The core of the problem is that millions do not possess the emotional and physical resources to cope with their problems. They often take chemical shortcuts for temporary relief. Yet the nature of drugs is such that once you try them, it is not long before you are hooked.

The enormous international drug-smuggling network exists to feed this unending habit.

Being tough on drugs takes its toll. Though there is some effect, containment is very expensive. The cost of the war on drugs is in the billions as nations must scramble to secure their borders and wealthier countries must invest in poorer nations to help eradicate crops and intercept drugs and precursor materials.

Sadly, the drug trade has become a form of international warfare—and mankind is losing the fight. □

DEBATE

Continued from page 15

campaign process, including when candidates go head-to-head on television.

In the arena of politics, one can see the spirit of competition and strife at work—the pursuit for one-upmanship at virtually any cost. Witness the grandstanding, the fake humility, the tossing about of accusation, the slander, and the not-so-subtle questioning of personal integrity.

The same attitude of division permeates mass media, sports, business

practices, and politics. It is fully on display—front-and-center—in every arena of society.

All of this is diametrically opposed to what God has in mind for mankind. He wants to work with those who yield to Him. When a person does so, he can begin to exhibit the fruits of God's Spirit: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:22-23).

Love, meekness and temperance are nowhere to be found on the debate stage!

Content of Character

Human beings are easily impressed by a person's image, facial profile, style of clothing, and eloquence of speech, rather than substance of character.

Yet it is not so with God. Look at the Old Testament. When King Saul disqualified himself from reigning over ancient Israel, God instructed the prophet Samuel to look for a replacement among the sons of Jesse in the tribe of Judah.

Samuel was so impressed with the stature of the eldest son, Eliab, that he

said, “Surely the LORD’s anointed is before Him” (1 Sam. 16:6).

God flat-out disagreed: “Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD sees not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart” (vs. 7).

While men look at one’s outward appearance, God looks at a person’s character—what he will do when under pressure, whether he will obey God’s laws no matter the circumstances. Will he always strive to seek God’s divine guidance? Or will he rely upon human reasoning and popular opinion?

In all, the seven sons of Jesse passed before Samuel. God’s ultimate choice came as a surprise. It was young David, a shepherd considered the “runt of the litter” among his brothers. But he was God’s choice.

David was indeed a handsome lad, but merely a boy on the cusp of manhood. Yet God selected him to lead Israel because of his willingness to seek God above all else. The book of Psalms, much of which was written by David, confirms this.

Note that David was far from perfect. He sinned—and sometimes in a big way. But David also repented big. He left a track record of allowing God to shape and mold his character into the form that his Creator envisioned.

The king had to undergo a multitude of trials and high-pressure situations that tested and tempered the metal of his character. While the man from Judah did become king over all the tribes of Israel, it did not happen overnight.

If Abraham Lincoln were alive today, the vast majority of people would be more concerned with his towering physique and homely, gangly appearance rather than the content of his character. Lincoln would likely fail to measure up to the Hollywood expectations of how a presidential candidate should appear.

The news and entertainment media have been more than willing to embrace U.S. presidents that have smooth appearances—just as they are more than willing to gloss over and even ignore their personal conduct behind closed

doors. Think of the infamous examples from the 20th century.

Similarly, the voting public tends to overlook politicians’ faults as long as they are charismatic.

While millions admire Martin Luther King, Jr., these same millions have forgotten his words: “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the *content of their character*.”

God’s Part

Before giving in to the temptation to root for any particular candidate in a heated debating match, we must ask, “What does God think? Who has He decided should be in office?”

“Before giving in to the temptation to root for any particular candidate in a heated debating match, we must ask, ‘What does God think?’”

This question becomes even more important when looking at the biblical book of Daniel. It declares, in a context of end-time prophecy, that God “*removes kings, and sets up kings: He gives wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding*” (2:20-21).

In chapter 4 of the same book, it adds that “the most High rules in the kingdom of men, and *gives it to whomsoever He will*, and sets up over it the basest of men.”

While this does not mean that all elected leaders are handpicked by God, He does select them as needed to fulfill His purpose and further His Master Plan for mankind. This is especially true of the most prominent nations.

Also, note that a candidate’s advancement to a political office is not evidence of some sort of “divine seal of approval” or God’s personal endorsement. God is merely allowing human beings to set up and continue their own systems of government. There is, however, coming a time when all governments will bow to the superiority of the Almighty. (To learn more, read *What Is the Kingdom of God?* at rcg.org/witkog.)

Ask: Does it make sense to be emotionally vested in a candidate whom God does not support?

At this time, God is allowing mankind to form and set up governments as it sees fit. But the Creator of the universe does have a very specific idea on how to rule nations. The central message of the Bible is the gospel of the kingdom of God. Put another way, this is the good news of the GOVERNMENT of God.

Who will rule in this soon-coming supergovernment?

God is now carefully selecting individuals with whom He knows He can work—those who will not buck under His direction, who will fear and deeply respect His guidance, who will freely acknowledge that they fall woefully short, and who *want* Him to correct their paths through life. These individuals recognize that they are incapable of leading themselves: “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23).

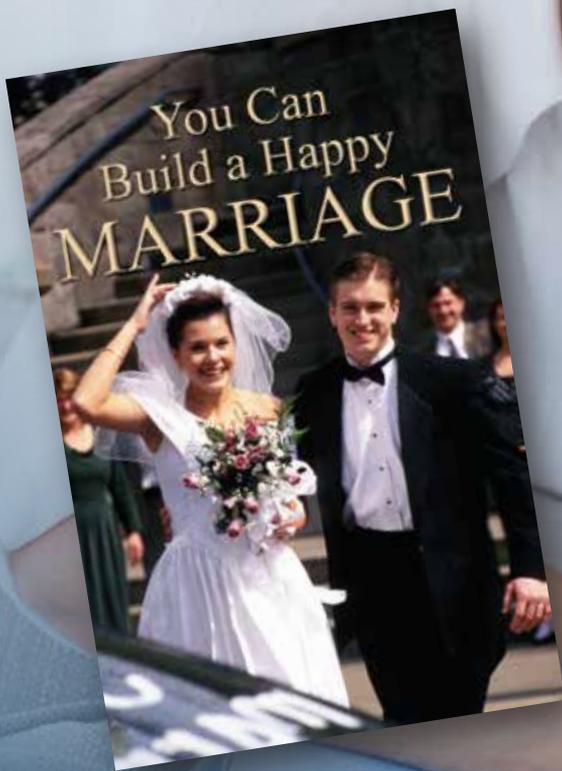
Such individuals declare, “O LORD, correct me, but with judgment; not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing” (vs. 24).

Have you ever heard someone in a political debate answer that he knows he cannot “direct his steps”? Or that he needs God’s correction to see the right way to live?

Given the current state of affairs, these questions seem patently absurd.

God is in control. He is shaping events to occur according to His timetable and overarching Plan for humanity. He will determine who should win in every important election. Do you dare go against His decision? □

Lasting Happiness Is Possible!



With divorce so common in today's society, the idea of "growing old together" with a spouse can seem like a fairy tale. Yet the Bible provides bedrock, time-tested principles that—if applied—can ensure your marriage lasts, and is filled with joy. Read the booklet *You Can Build a Happy Marriage* at rcg.org/ycbahm to ensure you and your spouse keep your vows for life.

Scarlet Fever Makes a Comeback

IMAGINE YOUR CHILD comes to you complaining of a stomachache and sore throat. Most likely you would think it was just a common cold or, at worst, the flu.

But as the symptoms worsen, his body temperature skyrockets and he begins to vomit. At this point, you would probably rush to the doctor. Imagine your surprise when the doctor gives you the prognosis: your child has scarlet fever!

Most parents would feel a wave of fear and uncertainty rush over them. *Scarlet fever? Wasn't that eradicated in the early 1900s?*

Yet this situation has been a reality for many thousands in Great Britain over the last few years.

Scarlet fever terrorized Victorian Great Britain in the 19th century, killing tens of thousands. Largely forgotten, this old disease has been sweeping across Europe TODAY, baffling scientists as to why it has returned. There were just over 2,000 reported cases in Great Britain annually leading up to last year, but almost 18,000 cases in England and Wales in 2015.

Why has it returned?

Scarlet Fever History

While it is unclear exactly when scarlet fever was first recorded in medical history, the ancient physician Hippocrates noted it in approximately 400 BC when he described patients with sore throats and bright skin ulcers.

About 1,400 years later, in AD 1000, physicians vividly described a measles-like disease that was much more dangerous. The first likely description of the illness showed up in the 1553 book *De tumoribus praeter naturam* by Giovanni Filippo Ingrassia, a Sicilian physician, in which he referred to it as *rossalia* or *rosania*.

Before scarlet fever could be treated with antibiotics, the disease killed more than 20,000 people in 1840 in Europe alone. During the Industrial Revolution, it frequently swept through urban areas as people lived in close quarters and hygiene was less than desirable.

The disease, which usually strikes children under age 18, first manifests itself with a rash and/or red bumps on the chest and abdomen. A severe sore throat (often full-blown strep throat) then occurs. It can sometimes be so severe that open ulcers form in the throat. This is usually followed by intense fever, chills, loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting. According to *eMedicineHealth*, during the mid-1800s, death occurred in 15 to 20 percent of cases.

Two primary factors contributed to the end of the epidemic in pre-antibiotic Victorian England. First, the advent of milk pasteurization, which required heating it at high temperatures. This helped kill bacteria that was easily transferred in raw milk.

Second, a scarlet fever serum was developed from horses that also greatly reduced human mortality beginning in 1900.

Perhaps the greatest tool in the fight against it, however, came in the 1920s when British scientist Alexander Fleming accidentally discovered penicillin in his laboratory at St. Mary's Hospital in London.

All of these discoveries slowly transitioned it from feared killer to an ailment that could be easily treated. Today, it is roughly equivalent to the flu virus in severity.

Europe's State of Affairs

So why is this disease sweeping across nations in 2016? Schools, parents and family doctors have been warned about the disease as levels have reached a 50-year high. They have been told to beware of scarlet fever as the once-feared Victorian disease has made an alarming comeback.

According to Public Health England, outbreaks in the country have risen steeply—with 6,157 new cases since September 2015. The figures also show that 17,586 cases occurred in England and Wales in 2015. This is the highest total since 1967.

For now, health officials in Great Britain are unclear as to why it has returned. Yet the sharp rise may reflect the long-term natural cycles in disease frequency seen in many types of infection.

According to Dr. Theresa Lamagni, head of streptococcal infection surveillance for Public Health England: "Symptoms usually clear up after a week and the majority of cases will resolve without complication as long as the recommended course of antibi-

otics is completed. Potential complications include ear infection, throat abscess and pneumonia. Patients who do not show signs of improvement within a few days of starting treatment should seek urgent medical advice.”

Resurging Diseases

Scarlet fever is not the only disease making a comeback. According to numbers compiled by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), from January to mid-April 2014, 129 cases of measles were reported in the United States. This is noteworthy because usually only about 60 are reported each year!

Consider also that 10 years ago, a significant multistate outbreak of the mumps occurred, with 6,584 reported cases in the U.S. Usually, only about 20 cases are reported annually.

A 2012 study published in the *Journal of Pediatrics* reported

California’s worst whooping-cough outbreak in memory, with more than 9,000 people reporting cases in 2010 in the state alone. This is thought to be spurred by a lessening of the effectiveness of old vaccines, according to *Time* magazine.

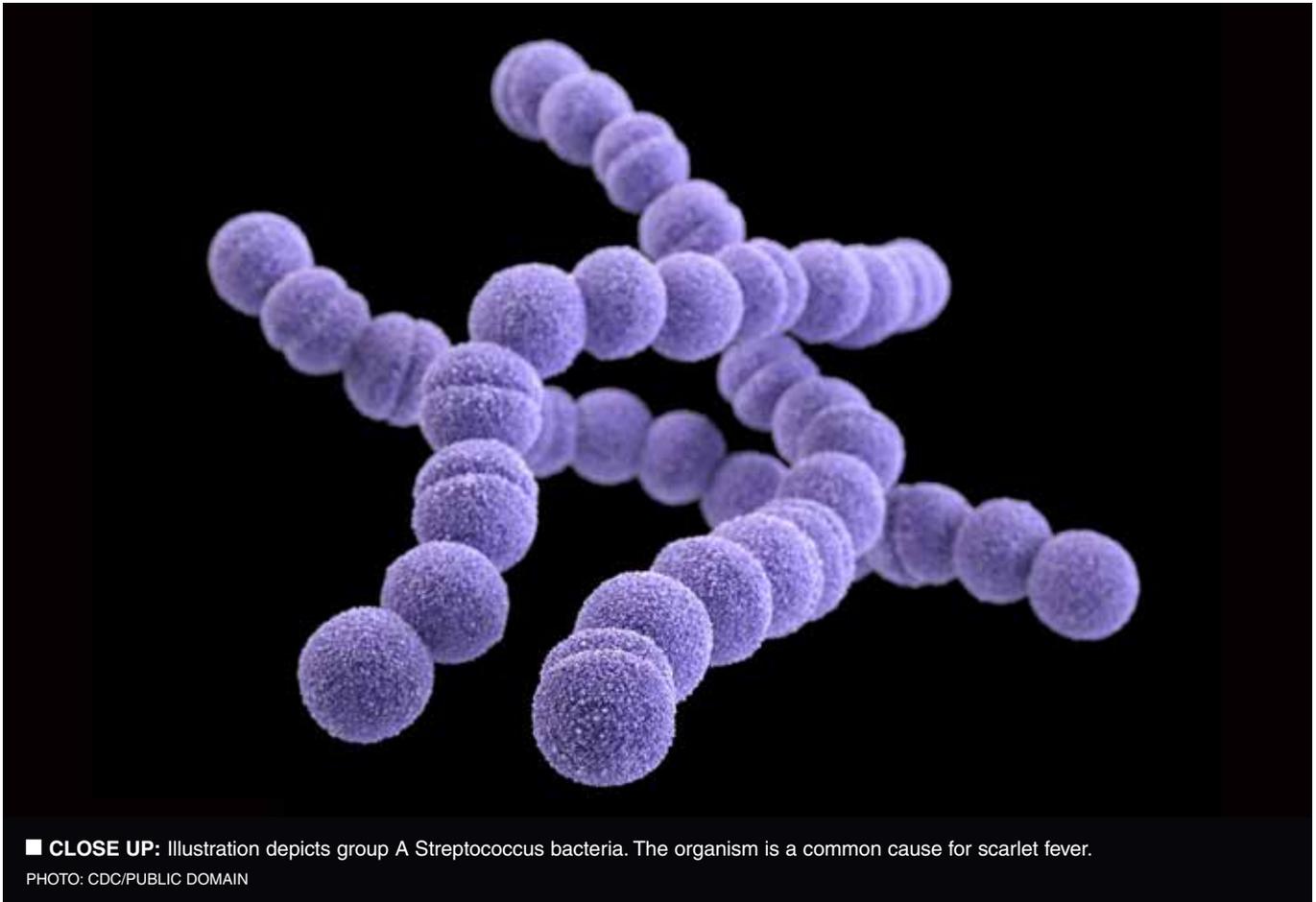
California was hit with the malady again in 2014. According to the California Department of Public Health, the outbreak hit “epidemic proportions” when 3,458 new cases were reported between January 1 and June 10—well ahead of the numbers during the same period of the 2010 outbreak.

Shockingly, bubonic plague made a comeback around the world as well with cases being reported in Africa, Asia and South America. *Health* magazine reported that “there have been 16 reported cases of plague, with four deaths, in the United States this past year. Most recently, a 16-year-old girl

from Oregon was sickened and hospitalized after apparently being bitten by a flea on a hunting trip.”

During the 1800s, tuberculosis killed one out of every seven Americans and Europeans that were infected by it! According to *Health*, “It was believed that tuberculosis could be eliminated from the world by 2025, according to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. But it persists, killing between 2 and 3 million people globally each year. Though most Americans don’t consider TB a threat, it’s showing signs of a resurgence: there were 9,421 reported US cases of TB in 2014, according to the CDC, and 555 deaths in 2013 (the last year for which data are available).”

Although man’s knowledge of science and medicine hurtles forward at an unprecedented pace, we are a long way from solving some of the oldest diseases known to man. □



■ **CLOSE UP:** Illustration depicts group A Streptococcus bacteria. The organism is a common cause for scarlet fever.

PHOTO: CDC/PUBLIC DOMAIN

PERSONAL

Continued from page 2

world history. I have often thought that this great statesman's inspiring stir-to-action speech, in which he explained that the British would, to paraphrase, "Fight them in the air, fight them in the fields, fight them in the cities, and fight them on the beaches," was one of the most remarkable examples of PERSEVERANCE and continuous, undying courage that I have ever seen. An entire generation may have turned and survived on this single man's words!

As a child, I was never allowed to be a "quitter." While my father usually let me choose certain sports, hobbies or school coursework, he never allowed me to quit after I made my choice. That was out of the question—*unthinkable* to him.

As a result, the thought of quitting or giving up is one of the most repugnant things I can think of. I am enormously grateful for having been forced (for I would not have naturally chosen this way) by my father, and additional circumstances later in life, to practice PERSEVERANCE in the face of resistance.

If, upon facing a trial or opposition, one is resourceful one, two or three times, and then gives up—*quits*—resourcefulness was not enough to ensure success. STICK-TO-IT-IVENESS—PERSEVERANCE—is necessary. Understand that you must press on—and on—AND ON!

If you can train yourself to paint a house, ride a bike, or play the piano, you can train yourself to think—and live—this way. Do not let yourself believe or settle for less!

Train yourself to be repulsed at the very *idea* of quitting. Train yourself to be ashamed and embarrassed at just the thought of it. Tell yourself that whatever options may be at your disposal, quitting is not one of them, as long as you have established the right goal. The last thing you must ever allow to creep into your mind is to neglect the vital law of PERSEVERANCE, which requires patient continuance toward your objective.

Incessantly, relentlessly, persistently and continually stick to your goal! Never give up! Never become a quitter! Never throw in the towel!

More Qualities

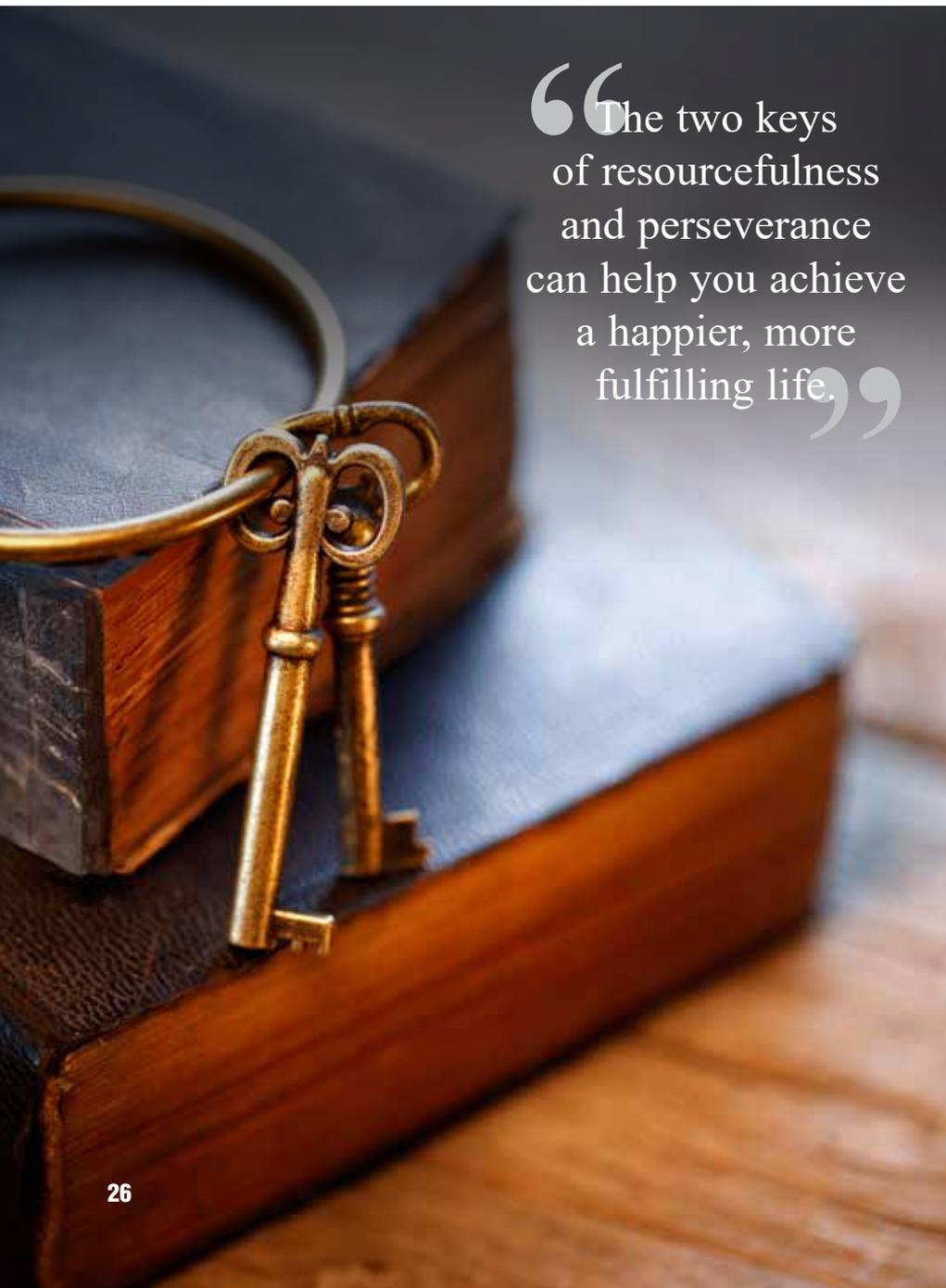
The two keys of resourcefulness and perseverance can help you achieve a happier, more fulfilling life. Yet there are also many other aspects of character that are generally considered to be virtuous qualities.

For example, one must be courteous, loyal, hardworking, honest, always on time, dependable, patient and much more to have any hope of being successful in the world.

Even these, however, are not enough to truly be successful. To do so, you must follow the laws to success.

In total, there are SEVEN LAWS to success. Each is a crucial building block to help you accomplish your goals. These can be found in my informative and eye-opening free booklet *The Laws to Success*, which can found at reg.org/tlts.

When diligently applied, these laws WILL provide the formula for lasting success in your life! □



“The two keys of resourcefulness and perseverance can help you achieve a happier, more fulfilling life.”

What Is the “Unpardonable Sin”?

Would a merciful Creator warn against committing an *unforgivable* sin without making clear what it is?

BY DAVID C. PACK

MANY WORRY they have committed the “unpardonable sin.” We read their letters. But just what *is* this sin? Do only converted people commit it—or can non-Christians? The answers are not what you think.

Jesus spoke of a sin that “shall not be forgiven...neither in this world, neither in the world to come” (Matt. 12:31-32). This sin is most often referred to as “the unpardonable sin.”

Widespread confusion surrounds this subject. So many people worry they *may have* committed, or *did* commit, the unpardonable sin. Yet most do not know how to recognize the sin that “shall not be forgiven.”

Can one *know* if he has committed this sin—or *know* that there is still hope because he has not? These are vitally important questions. They require clear, PLAIN answers!

Mass Deception

As a longtime pastor who has worked with many thousands, I have counseled scores of people who were racked with fear, anxiety and concern that they were guilty of the unpardonable sin. It was often painful to watch confusion, misunderstanding and guilt so unnecessarily grip people who still sincerely wanted to serve God, after believing they had committed this unforgivable sin. In many cases, they were absolutely *certain* they were guilty of it. Invariably, after counseling, it was clear that they were not. But convincing them of this was sometimes not easy.

I have often had to explain that the very act of *being concerned* is its own proof one has not gone far enough to be guilty of this sin. Still, many continued to agonize that they had been condemned by God—with no hope of being restored to the Christian path. It often took long hours—*much* counsel and explanation—to reassure them that they had not committed the unpardonable sin! I was not always successful. Some still *gave up* seeking and obeying God because they had lost hope!

Over two billion people profess to be Christians. While they have slight differences in doctrine, they share generally similar beliefs.

The truth is, most never truly *study* the Bible. Many others never even open it. Most professing Christians have *no idea* what their Bible teaches—on almost any subject. Their beliefs are derived from *assumptions* based on what they have been TOLD it says.

This is perhaps most true about *what a Christian is*. Before the subject of the unpardonable sin can be understood, the definition of a Christian must be established. Again, billions believe they are Christians. They can also readily give *their* definition of a Christian, but not the *Bible* definition.

Certainly ALL who profess to be Christians want to be saved! This goal cannot be separated from either the question of what is a Christian or that of what is the unpardonable sin. Consider for a moment: If one is not a *true* Christian, then the issue of the unpardonable sin may be largely irrelevant. We will clarify this later.

On the other hand, if one *is* a true Christian, but commits the unpardonable sin, however it is defined, he will *not* be saved. This much is not hard to understand—but it is very important. So, understanding the sin that “shall not be forgiven” certainly *is* relevant to the real Christian! *He* must be very careful not to commit this sin.

First, consider salvation from another viewpoint. If one *desires* to be saved, learns what he must be saved *from*, understands that salvation is a *gift*, but does not know *how* to receive it, what good does God’s offer do him? All of this has everything to do with what a Christian is. Do not be sure you know the answer.

Surely no sincere person who understands even the Bible’s most basic teachings thinks God will save those who are *not* Christians (Acts 4:12). Yet almost no one understands the Bible definition of a Christian!

Since only *true* Christians will be saved, we must know what is a true Christian. As with any doctrine, we must examine what God’s Word teaches. Then we will be prepared to discuss the unpardonable sin.

What Is a Christian?

Let’s understand how *God* defines a Christian. There is a single verse to which we can turn that defines a Christian. But it is not the popular idea taught in the so-called “Christian” world.

The apostle Paul wrote, “For as many as are *led by the Spirit of God*, THEY are the sons of God” (Rom. 8:14). A Christian is one who has the Holy

Spirit leading him. But is having God's Spirit absolutely *essential* to being a Christian? Paul added, "You are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, *he is none of His*" (vs. 9)!

It is that simple! One either has the Spirit of God, and *is* a Christian, or does *not* have it, and is *not* a Christian—is "none of His." All who are truly converted must have the Holy Spirit in them.

But what does this *mean*? And is this all there is to Christianity and conversion?

Human beings do not have life inherent within them. They are not born with an immortal soul (Gen. 2:7; Ezek. 18:4, 20; Matt. 10:28). Since you are not immortal, your life will span a certain allotted time, after which you will die. That is absolute (Heb. 9:27). Unless God intervenes in your life, you have no future—no hope—beyond a limited time of about 70-80 years.

You *must* receive the Holy Spirit. But *how*?

Most believe there are no requirements—no *conditions*—to being saved. This is not true. The following verses prove that there are *three* conditions that must be met just to receive the Holy Spirit. Let's now settle some basic understanding.

On the day Christ established the New Testament Church, the apostle Peter gave a powerful sermon. It was so convicting that 3,000 were baptized. Before baptism, many had asked, "What shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Peter answered, "*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (vs. 38). This is God's plain command to: (1) *Repent* and (2) *be baptized*—in this order—to receive the gift of God's Spirit! Mark 1:14-15 adds that Christ taught one must also (3) *believe the gospel* of the kingdom of God.

From baptism forward, the new convert is led by the Holy Spirit. Once we are ready to discuss the unpardonable sin, this will be critically important to remember.

What Repentance Means

To *repent* means to CHANGE. The repentant mind reflects a completely different, CHANGED attitude. It has gone from the way of pleasing the *self*, to seeking to please *God*. It wants to submit to God and His Way!

Human nature is vanity, jealousy, lust, greed, envy, resentment, foolishness and more. It is the way of grasping for self—looking out for self. Notice: "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh *cannot* please God" (Rom. 8:7-8).

This passage shows that receiving God's Spirit is crucial if one hopes to please God. Verse 6 says, "For to be carnally minded is *death*; but to be SPIRITUALLY minded is *life and peace*." The spiritually minded have the Holy Spirit. Christ called God's Spirit the "Spirit of truth" (John 15:26; 16:13). He said it would *lead* the convert "into all truth."

Perhaps the most important truth a Christian can be led to see is a proper understanding of himself—and the forces at work within his human nature. Ephesians 2:2 reveals that Satan is the "prince of the power of the air." As the "god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4), he broadcasts a "spirit of disobedience" into the masses around the world. His way is *opposite* to the Way of God. He broadcasts a *spirit* of hostility and rebellion against all things of God. Satan teaches the way of "get," instead of the way of "give" (Acts 20:35).

The converted, *Spirit-led mind* resists Satan's broadcast (I Pet. 5:9; Jms. 4:7). It is a mind that wants to grow. It exalts God, humbles itself, and seeks to please God in *every* possible way. Such a mind wants to draw near to God through prayer, study, fasting, meditation and regularly exercising God's Spirit—the five TOOLS of Christian growth! It abhors itself (Job 42:5-6) and sees itself as a vile piece of fleshly junk not worthy of God's marvelous grace and mercy. Repentance is an ongoing, continual ATTITUDE of wanting to change, to do better—to

daily *grow, overcome* and become more like Jesus Christ.

The repentant mind "hungers and thirsts" after God's righteousness (Matt. 5:6). That mind believes, through use of *Christ's own faith* (Eph. 2:8; Rev. 14:12), that Jesus is his personal Savior and that He has paid the death penalty (Rom. 6:23) for the new child of God, now no longer condemned.

The one who has just received God's Spirit has been given a tiny bit of the MIND OF CHRIST and the *power and nature* of God. Peter wrote that Christians are "partakers of the DIVINE NATURE" (II Pet. 1:4), which is God's nature. Human nature, once the sole custodian of the mind, is to be slowly *replaced* by God's *divine nature* through the presence and growth of the Holy Spirit within us. Receiving God's Spirit does not mean that one has suddenly lost human nature. That nature remains *present* and ACTIVE—in opposition to God's nature. It is critical to come to understand this ongoing battle within the converted mind—and how some misunderstand it and fall into believing they can no longer be forgiven. (You may wish to read our booklet *Did God Create Human Nature?* at rcg.org/dgchn.)

Some background greatly helps in establishing what is the unpardonable sin.

"Blaspheming" Explained

Throughout His ministry, Jesus was attacked and accused by religious leaders who felt threatened by what He taught. On one occasion, Christ had healed a blind and dumb demon-possessed man. The onlookers were amazed when this man could suddenly see and speak. But the scribes and Pharisees, it says, "went out, and held a council against Him, how they might destroy Him" (Matt. 12:14). Shortly after this, a Pharisee confronted Jesus asking where His power to perform this healing came from—and accused Him of casting out demons by Satan's power: "But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow does not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils" (vs. 24).

Jesus knew *exactly* what was happening and saw their motives were to *deliberately* attack and accuse (vs. 25). So He explained how Satan's kingdom could not be divided and *survive*. He continued, "He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathers not with Me scatters abroad" (vs. 30).

Incidentally, this means that Jesus' Church is *unified*. Some become confused about this. Consider. Even Satan knows that his kingdom cannot be divided and remain "standing." Certainly, Christ is at least as smart as the devil! People either gather where Christ is gathering, or they are not part of His Church!

This background introduces Christ's often-misunderstood statement about the unforgivable sin. Let's read it: "I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the *blasphemy against the Holy Spirit* shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaks a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, *it shall not be forgiven him*, neither in this world, neither in the world to come" (vs. 31-32).

Mark's account concludes in a slightly different way, so it is also helpful to read: "All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit has never forgiveness, but is in *danger of eternal damnation* [judgment]" (3:28-29).

Matthew explained that "*all manner of sin and blasphemy*" SHALL be forgiven, but that "blasphemy and speaking against the Holy Spirit" are unforgivable. It is critical to know the Greek word used for blasphemy is the same, whether it is against the Holy Spirit or the Son of man, Jesus Christ. The key must be *who* or *what* is spoken or blasphemed against, not the act itself.

What is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Is it simply taking God's name in vain—swearing? Is *any* form

of swearing blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?

The key to understanding this is to properly define the word *blaspheme*. The Greek word, here translated "blaspheme," means "*intentional* indignity offered to God or sacred things." This is important to grasp. INTENT is involved.

The scribes and Pharisees knew what they were doing. Remember, they held a council for the specific purpose of *plotting* against Christ. Their actions were not a result of sudden anger or impulsive, short-sighted thinking. They had *intent*—pre-meditated and deliberate INTENT—to discredit and murder Christ, even though they knew He was sent from God and acted through God's power!

Some sins are committed because they have been carefully thought out toward a particular end. Deliberate *planning* has been involved, as with the Pharisees. When such willful, pre-meditated *intent* comes into play, one is in grave "danger of eternal damnation," as we saw.

Many ask if non-Christians can commit the unpardonable sin. The Pharisees were certainly not converted—not Christians. Yet Christ said their intent placed them in danger of committing this sin. There is the answer!

Many religious leaders today, who *profess* to believe in Christ, are modern "Pharisees." They *deliberately* misrepresent our doctrines—and *deliberately* call us false prophets. This Work of God is reaching people in all countries and territories of the world in great numbers. And these false prophets, from the false "Christianity" of this world, love to accuse us of being false prophets, because they, like the scribes and Pharisees who were threatened by Christ's teaching and healing, are threatened by the good works of truth we are teaching.

Herein lies another irony. All who are still *concerned* that they have committed the unpardonable sin almost certainly have not. But many who are not concerned *may* either

have committed it or are in danger of doing so!

Anyone can foolishly curse or use God's name in vain, and almost immediately be sorry and repent. But the unpardonable sin is when a person *deliberately hardens* himself against God's Spirit, and the power and guidance of that Spirit. Usually, such people become deceived (Heb. 3:13) early in this process, but later *willfully* choose to continue in their actions until they destroy both their conscience and any further desire to repent.

Willful Sin

Do not confuse WILLING sin with WILLFUL sin. Some, believing they have committed the unpardonable sin, exclaim, "But I *willingly* sinned." Certainly it is true that every time a person sins, they were *willing* to do it. The Bible does not warn specifically about "willing" sin, but rather against "willful" sin. Of course, it does warn against *all* forms of sin.

Let's now examine Hebrews 10:26-29 to begin understanding *willful* sin: "For if we sin willfully after that we have received the *knowledge of the truth*, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose you, shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and has *done despite unto the Spirit of grace?*"

Willful sin has to do with ignoring important knowledge—TRUTH.

People quench the Holy Spirit by overriding the way it guides them over a long period of time! Some become "*hardened* through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13). But this hardening process does not occur overnight. It takes time. People must persistently *choke* God's Spirit. Eventually, this ongoing action becomes "willful,"

or premeditated, deliberate. Chapter 10, verse 29 explains that those who practice sin have “trodden [Christ] under foot.” They have counted His “blood” as “unholy.” This leads to the all-important statement that they “have done despite unto the Spirit of grace.” The key is they have committed *willful sin*—meaning *full of will!*

Let’s consider the attitude of the Pharisees. First some setup: “As He spoke these words, many believed on Him [Jesus]. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, *If you continue in My word*, then are you My disciples indeed” (John 8:30-31). This is basic Christian instruction. Christians believe in Christ’s sacrifice, and then practice—continue in—His word!

Some stop at the “believe on” stage. They do not go on to *practice* Christianity. They do not actively *copy* the life of Christ. Their thinking—and Christianity—comes from entirely different motives.

Six verses later, Jesus confronted the very ones who just “believed on Him.” Notice how quickly their attitudes became hostile and murderous: “...you seek to kill Me, because *My word* has no place in you...you seek to kill Me, a man that has told you *the truth*, which I have heard of God...If I say *the truth*, why do you not believe Me?” (vs. 37, 40, 46).

These are extraordinary statements! They reflect the attitudes of so many today. Many who claim to “love Jesus” do not obey His words. These are deceived and unconverted. They have been seduced into believing in a false conversion. On the other hand, the few truly converted Christians today are seen as un-Christian by the world because they reject popular, but false, doctrines.

The Pharisees and certain others *appeared* to want to follow Jesus Christ—maybe even initially thought themselves sincere—while holding deceitful, murderous thoughts below the surface.

To intentionally plot, act or move against God’s Spirit is also to consciously *know* what you are doing in

attributing the power of God to the devil. Jesus was warning the Pharisees that this is what they were in danger of doing. When one deliberately—with knowledge—ignores, squelches or quenches the warning pricks coming from the Holy Spirit within a converted mind, they are passing the threshold of the unpardonable sin. They are making a “willful” decision not to respond to God’s Spirit. This blasphemes the work of His Spirit.

Therefore, ANY sin that is continued—practiced—and remains unrepented of—by willful choice—becomes unpardonable. God will not forgive it because it has not been repented of!

Resisting Temptation

Jesus taught His disciples to understand the pulls of human nature at work within them: “That which comes out of the man, that defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness” (Mark 7:20-22).

These attitudes, pulls of the flesh, and wrong patterns of conduct are at work within *everyone*. They leave us fertile for temptation by Satan, the master “tempter” (Matt. 4:3).

The apostle James explained how temptation can turn into sin: “Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of *his own lust*, and *enticed*. Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death” (Jms. 1:14-15).

In short, you must put out wrong thoughts and attitudes before they lead to action. Do not ease up or assume victory before these feelings are gone!

The apostle Peter added, “Be SOBER, be VIGILANT; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour: whom *resist steadfast* in the faith”—this means you must *know* the true faith—“knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (I Pet. 5:8-9). James added, “*Submit* yourselves

therefore to God. *Resist* the devil, and he will flee from you” (4:7).

You are not alone in struggling to overcome sin. All people face the same problems. Understand! “*All have sinned*” (Rom. 3:23) and “sin is the transgression of the law” (I John 3:4). *All* have broken God’s Law. But God promises that “sin shall not have dominion over you” (Rom. 6:14).

Paul explained forces at work within him: “For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I...For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do” (7:15, 19).

This pictures what we all face. When you feel like this, *battle!* RESIST! After you have been truly converted, use God’s power within you. Call out to Him for help and always remember that you must, “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double minded” (Jms. 4:8).

Fulfilling this in your life is not an overnight process. It takes much time and effort.

Seek God through earnest, regular, believing prayer. Commune with Him daily. Pray without ceasing (I Thes. 5:17-18). Study your Bible (Matt. 4:4). Drink it in as God’s Word spoken to you—as though God were talking to you *personally*, in the same way you talk to Him through prayer!

Above all, do not get discouraged and give up when a temptation is severe and appears unrelenting. Never forget that, “There has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it [or escape]” (I Cor. 10:13).

This is God’s sure promise to all who strive to overcome!

To learn how to *claim* this promise and with God’s help CONQUER sin in your life, read the article “You Can Overcome and Prevent Sin” at rcg.org/articles/ycoaps. □

WEATHER & ENVIRONMENT

Global Coral Bleaching Could Impact 500 Million People

The period of coral bleaching that began in October 2015, the longest and most widespread such event recorded in history, is expected to continue well into 2017, the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) reported. The resultant coral die-off could impact up to half a billion people and threaten the \$29.8 billion that reefs provide to world economies each year. Authorities point to El Niño weather patterns and rising ocean temperatures as the cause.

“Many hundreds of millions of people are dependent in some way on the goods and services provided by coral reefs, with over 100 million directly dependent on coral reefs for their survival,” think tank Reef Resilience explained on its website.

For example, “In developing countries, coral reefs contribute about one-quarter of the total fish catch, providing food to an estimated one billion people in Asia alone.”

Although coral reefs cover less than one-tenth of a percent of the ocean floor, they support about one-quarter of all marine life. According to the United Nations Environmental Program, one square mile of coral can produce 45 tons of fish and other seafood each year.

Sometimes called “the rainforests of the sea,” coral reefs buffer the coastline from pounding waves. The loss of protection by them could expose coastal cities to the full impact of waves from tropical storms.

Scientists have even tapped the rich biodiversity of coral reefs to treat cancer, HIV, cardiovascular diseases, ulcers and other illnesses.

Bleaching primarily occurs when corals are stressed by warmer water temperatures, pollution and overfishing. As a result, the corals expel symbiotic algae, called zooxanthellae, which live on their exoskeletons and provide food.

The algae also contribute to the coral’s vibrant color. The rejection of the algae starves the coral of nutrients, which changes the coral’s color to white. After prolonged starvation, the coral dies.

The Great Barrier Reef has been significantly impacted

by the global event: 93 percent of the famous 1,500-mile coral stretch has suffered damage, according to aerial surveys by Australia’s National Coral Bleaching Taskforce.

Professor Terry Hughes, who worked with the taskforce, told the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*: “We’ve never seen bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef of that severity and when bleaching is that strong it affects virtually all coral species.”

The current bleaching continues a worsening trend. In 1998, 42 percent of the reef was damaged by bleaching. In 2002, it occurred again, affecting 54 percent of the underwater ecology.

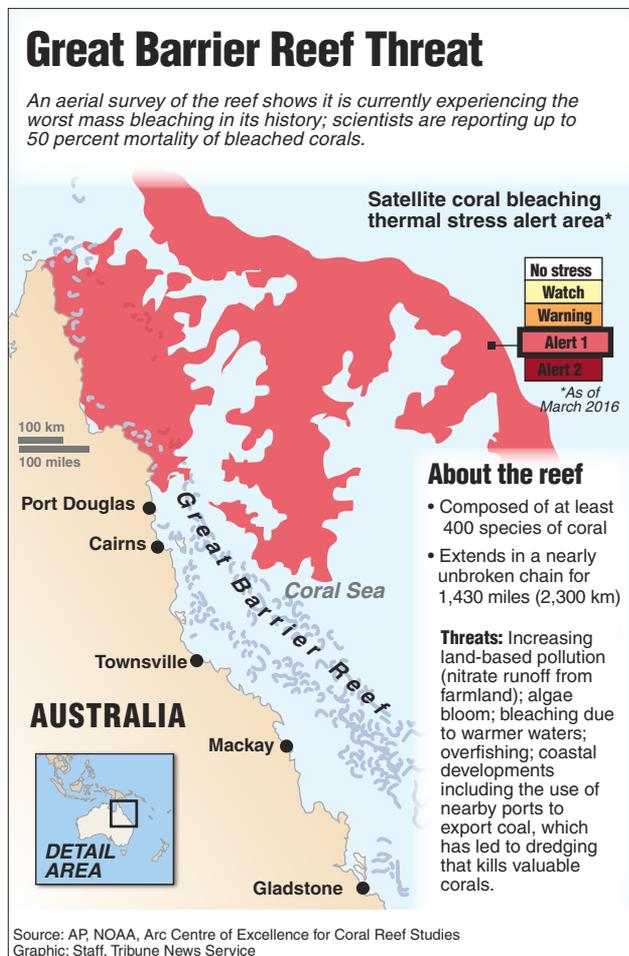
The most recent event, however, has caused the most damage to date—four times worse than the last one, according to scientists.

Though a certain percentage of the reefs are expected to come back to life within a year, some stretches suffered “extreme” damage. In a 600-mile stretch spanning from Port Douglas to Australia’s northeast tip, 50 percent of the bleached corals are expected to die.

According to Andrew Baird, a professor from James Cook University, “At some reefs, the final death toll is likely to exceed 90 per cent. When bleaching is this severe it affects almost all coral species, including old, slow-growing corals that once lost will take decades or longer to return.”

Regarding the global forecast of the current bleaching, Coral Reef Watch, a satellite service of NOAA, reported on its website that this problem may last longer than expected, and some damage could be permanent.

“Coral-threatening conditions are expected to continue and spread to new areas for the rest of the year and possibly into 2017. Parts of some reefs are likely to be wiped out. Others will be so damaged that they won’t recover for decades, if ever.” □



ECONOMY & PERSONAL FINANCE

Two-thirds of U.S. Households Would Struggle to Cover \$1,000 Emergency

If hit by an unexpected \$1,000 emergency, 66 percent of Americans are unprepared to cover the cost, a poll by Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found.

The study spanned all levels of incomes. Three-quarters of those in households making less than \$50,000 per year, two-thirds of households earning \$50,000 to \$100,000, and 38 percent of those making over \$100,000 are unprepared for a sudden \$1,000 need.

If faced with such a crisis, *The Associated Press* reported: “A third [of Americans] said they would have to borrow from a bank or from friends and family, or put the bill on a credit card. Thirteen percent would skip paying other bills, and 11 percent said they would likely not pay the bill at all.”

As for those who would reduce spending to raise money for the bill, *CBS* stated, “Americans said dining out would be the first place they would cut back, while only one-third said they would be very or somewhat likely to cut spending on alcohol.”

“In the face of trying times, Americans may not want to imagine giving up that glass of wine or beer while contemplating a growing stack of bills,” the news outlet said.

A Google Consumer Survey poll revealed that 37 percent of Americans have savings accounts with either a zero-dollar balance or the minimum balance requirement. Another 21 percent do not have a savings account at all.

Yet financial hardship typically occurs to six out of 10 Americans

per year, according a Pew Charitable Trusts study, mostly resulting from major car repairs and lost income.

Economists believe that while Americans’ poor savings habits stemmed from the 70s and 80s (during which the value of the dollar declined at a higher rate than funds increased in interest-earning savings accounts), these have been further augmented by flat wages and a rising cost of living caused by the financial crisis of 2008.

“People are extremely vulnerable if they don’t have savings,” Caroline Ratcliffe, a senior fellow at the Urban Institute, told *AP*. “And it’s a cost to taxpayers as well. Lack of savings can lead to homelessness, or other problems.” □

WEATHER & ENVIRONMENT

Ash Tree Will Be “Wiped Out” in Europe, Journal Reports

Europe’s ash trees have the potential to be destroyed as a result of the fungal disease ash-dieback, as well as an invasive beetle, according to a review published in the *Journal of Ecology*.

Trees that are infected by ash-dieback, also known Chalara, do not recover. The infection begins in the leaves and spreads throughout the branches before consuming the entire organism.

The fungus appeared in Europe in 1992 and spread to the United Kingdom in 2012. Up to 90 percent of Denmark’s ash trees have been infected, and, according to author of the review Dr. Peter Thomas, 95 percent of the UK’s ash trees are at risk. Over 100,000 have already been destroyed in Northern Ireland as a result of the disease.

The emerald ash borer is also threatening to consume the Continent’s ash trees. The bright green beetles, which give birth to larvae that bore under the trees’ bark, are spreading west from

Russia at a rate of 25 miles per year and are believed to have reached Sweden. Dr. Thomas stated that “between the fungal disease ash dieback and...the emerald ash borer, it is likely that almost all ash trees in Europe will be wiped out—just as the elm was largely eliminated by Dutch elm disease [in the 1980s].”

The environmental and aesthetic impact of a mass ash tree die-off would

be dramatic. Dr. Thomas reported that “over 100 species of lichens, fungi and insects are dependent upon the ash tree and are likely to decline or become extinct if the ash was gone.”

“Some other trees such as alder, small-leaved lime and rowan can provide homes for some of these species...but if the ash went, the British countryside would never look the same again.” □



PHOTO: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CC BY 2.0

Vigilante Killings on the Rise in Venezuela



■ **DISCONTENT:** Protesters block a street with garbage near the presidential palace in Caracas, Venezuela, in response to severe food and medicine shortages (June 2, 2016).

PHOTO: JUAN BARRETO/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

During one of the worst crime spikes in Venezuela’s history, mobs are increasingly taking the law into their own hands. The South American nation has experienced 74 instances of killings by citizen mobs during the first four months of 2016, compared to two during the entirety of 2015.

The heightened violence has been spurred by frustration that police and the justice system are not reacting appropriately to an increase in criminal activity, which has been caused by economic inflation, food and fuel shortages, along with political upheaval.

Last year, 268,000 people in the nation were charged with crimes

ranging from robbery to murder, three times more than the year before. Despite this, only one in 10 were sentenced. According to *The Associated Press*: “Robberies are so rarely investigated that most victims don’t bother to file a report, government surveys have found. And while police used to make 118 arrests for every 100 murders, they now make just eight [for every 100].”

All of this has pushed citizens to act. According to one poll, the majority of Venezuelans believe that citizens have the moral right to claim their own retribution for crimes committed against them.

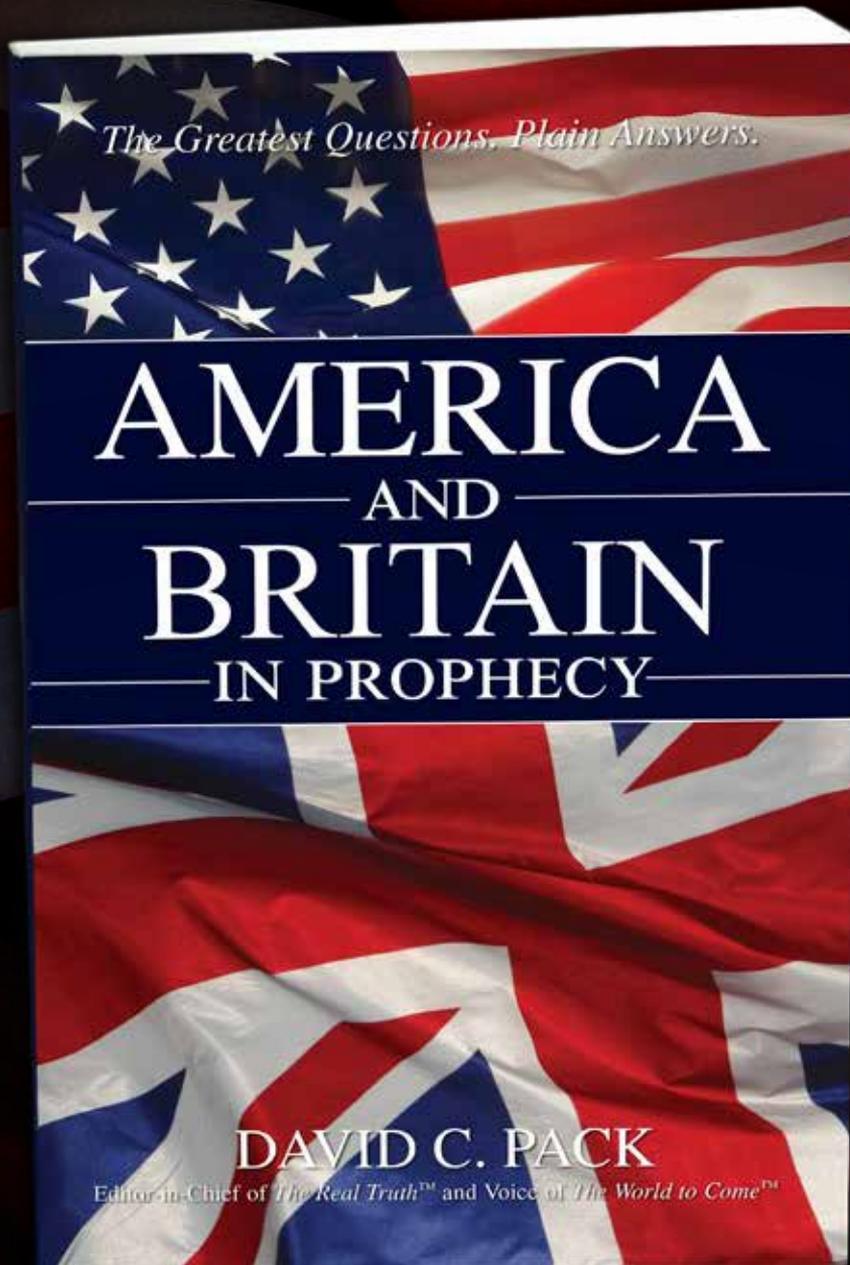
In one such scenario reported by *AP*, a man was chased down the street in Caracas for stealing five dollars

from an elderly man. A mob pursued the perpetrator until they caught him, beat him to the ground, doused his head and chest with fuel, and lit him on fire. He was hospitalized with severe wounds and died two days later.

Vigilante activity in Venezuela, once one of the safest and richest nations in Latin America, has significantly changed the quality of life for citizens.

“Life here has become a misery,” Roberto Briceno-Leon, director of the Violence Observatory, told *AP*. “You walk around always stressed, always scared, and lynching offers a collective catharsis. You can’t do anything about the...inflation, but for one moment, at least, the mob feels like it’s making a difference.” □

What Does the Future Hold?



The most prosperous and influential civilizations have come and gone with no exceptions. Will America and Britain's future be the same? The answer to this question is key to understanding what the world will look like in just the next few years.

Unknown to most, the Bible speaks volumes about these two nations. Using history and prophecy as a guide, the book *America and Britain in Prophecy* explains exactly what is in store for these two superpowers. Order your free copy at rcg.org/aabibp.