

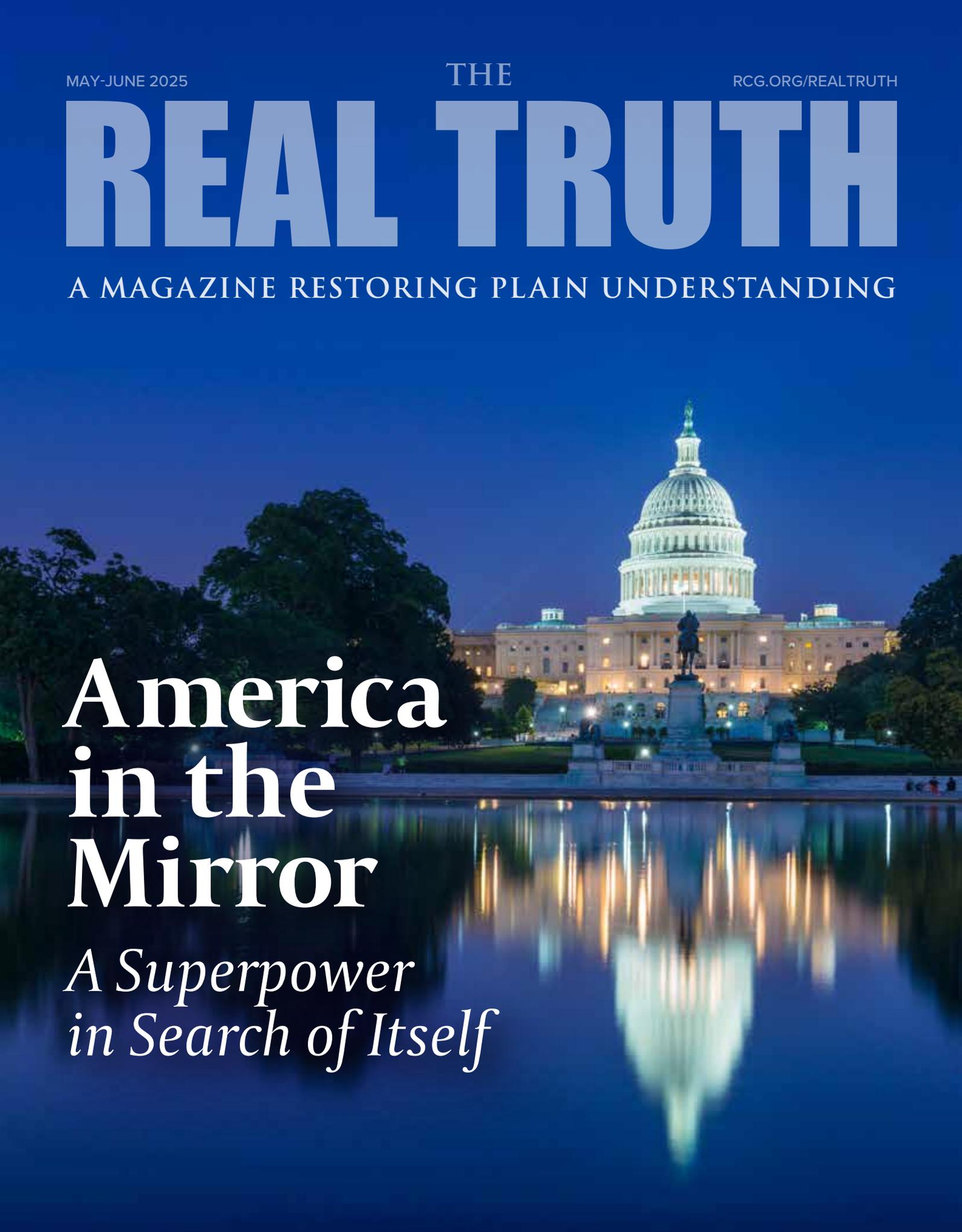
MAY-JUNE 2025

THE

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REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING



America in the Mirror

*A Superpower
in Search of Itself*



5 Principles for Healthy Social Media Use

Applying lessons from the Bible will help you stay grounded and intentional in your social media habits.

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Front Cover: The U.S. Capitol building at dusk.

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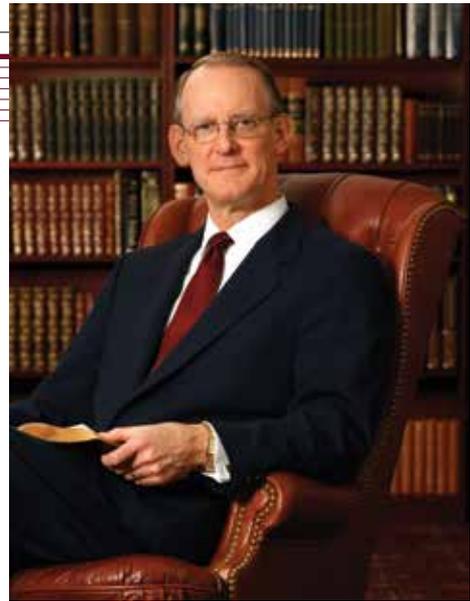
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PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



The Unseen Sin of Our Age

SOON AFTER delivering Israel from Egypt in a mighty display of power, God gave mankind the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. The first two are: (1) “You shall have no other gods before Me” and (2) “You shall not make unto you any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them” (Ex. 20:3-5).

The *tenth* commandment—“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house, you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is your neighbor’s” (vs. 17)—is directly related. The apostle Paul warned in Colossians 3:5, “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and *covetousness, which is idolatry.*”

These three commands forbidding other gods, idolatry and covetousness are intricately connected. They are also at the core of a spiritual crisis plaguing mankind, but understood by few!

While some Christians understand idols of any kind—including crosses, statues and pictures supposedly depicting God—violate the plain words of Exodus, a more subtle and perhaps even deadlier violation of these commandments pervades the Western world.

God explained to the prophet Ezekiel that there are those who “*set up their idols in their heart*” (Ezek. 14:3). Proverbs shows that as a man “thinks in his heart, *so is he*” (23:7). Examining mindsets, attitudes and thoughts—what is in one’s heart—is key to discerning this most pervasive form of idolatry.

My book *America and Britain in Prophecy* explains the Bible’s clear identification of modern Israel—primarily Western, English-speaking nations. (Jews form only one of the 12 tribes that sprang from the patriarch Israel, that of *Judah.*) God warns Israel, “Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus says the Lord GOD; Every man of the house of Israel that sets up his idols in his heart, and puts the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and comes to the prophet; I the LORD will answer him



Top, the collection point for outbound and inbound deliveries at Amazon's new logistics center in Dummerstorf, Germany (March 26, 2025). Bottom left, a shopper carries bags through the Oxford Street financial district in London, England (May 10, 2024). Bottom right, the Apple retail store on Huaihai Road in Shanghai, China (April 13, 2025).

TOP, BERND WUSTNECK/PICTURE ALLIANCE VIA GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM LEFT, LEON NEAL/GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM RIGHT, YING TANG/NURPHOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES

that comes according to the multitude of his idols” (Ezek. 14:4).

The grave consequences of this are next laid out: “That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all *estranged from Me* through their idols” (vs. 5). Nothing could be more serious! These idols *separate* humanity from their Creator.

God then gives the solution: “Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD; *Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations*” (vs. 6).

Repent means *change*!

But what are these *idols of the heart*? Recall Paul connected *idolatry* to *covet-*

ousness. The Greek word for “covetousness” here means *avarice*—great greed. In a society built on materialism and a focus on the physical rather than the spiritual, this sin is *everywhere*.

The “god” of materialism is worshiped more than the true God. It is “served” above all else. The desire for more things and pleasure is the primary driver of society. While God is the giver of every good and perfect gift, which certainly includes many wonderful physical things this life has to offer, our focus on the physical should never outweigh our focus on God and His way of life.

Christ did not dismiss physical needs—but He placed far greater weight on the spiritual when telling Satan the devil: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4).

Later in Matthew, He was asked, “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” (22:36).

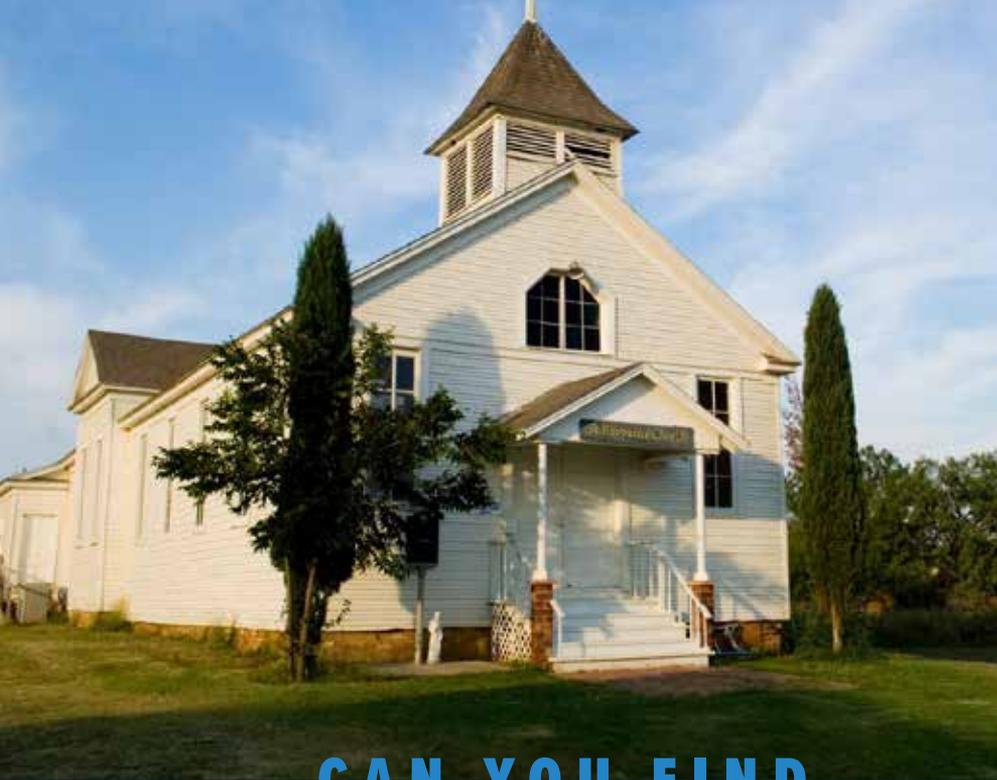
His answer greatly amplified the commandments given at Mount Sinai: “Jesus said unto him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment” (vs. 37-38).

Ask: What do I value more than God? What do I put before God? What idols—visible or “in the heart”—can I identify?

Learning how to truly change and develop a spiritual mindset is at the core of what it means to be a Christian. It is not easy, but there is a very achievable path laid out by the God “who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (I Tim. 2:4).

My booklet *What Is True Conversion?* and “True Conversion—Explained!” *World to Come* video series explain from the scriptures how to escape these hidden sins of the heart and how to instead pursue eternal life!

Review them now to learn what the *entire* world will learn in the soon-coming Kingdom of God. □



CAN YOU FIND

GOD'S CHURCH TODAY?

Jesus Christ declared, "I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). Since He promised His Church would never be destroyed, where is it today? Jesus gave identifying signs in the Bible to locate it.



Order *your* free copy of
Where Is God's Church? at
rcg.org/wigtc





Rescue workers survey the site of a building collapse in Bangkok a day after an earthquake struck central Myanmar and Thailand (March 29, 2025).

LILLIAN SUWANRUMPHIA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

EARTHQUAKES in the Bible

From Mount Sinai to the end of the age, God uses earthquakes to reveal His power and purpose.

BY GARRICK R. OXLEY

IN LATE March, a 7.7 magnitude earthquake struck near Mandalay, Myanmar. The shaking reached as far as Bangkok, about 800 miles away. Many thousands died. Cities crumbled. For one family, it will be forever etched in their memories.

A viral video released by *Sky News* showed two teenage sisters and their grandmother trapped beneath the collapsed concrete of an apartment building. While blood trickled down the elderly woman's forehead, the two girls recorded goodbye messages—hoping their family would find them after they died.

The girls' father, who initially believed they were dead, later posted on Facebook, "They called out to each other from above and below, but there was no sound from the outside. As hours passed, they became disheartened and held hands with grandma, crying."

The news outlet reported, "Left alone for some time, the girls took matters into their own hands and used the hammer to make a gap for them

to escape." It added that "rescuers returned and managed to pull the girls out. Their 75-year-old grandmother was 'gasping for breath' and could not fit through—but was also later rescued."

Earthquakes have a way of bringing everything to a standstill to command our attention. In Myanmar, it paused the nation's long-standing civil war. And they live on forever in the memories of those who experienced them or witnessed them in the news.

You may recall other major quakes over the years, such as the ones in Haiti in 2010 and 2021 that killed hundreds of thousands, or the 7.8-magnitude earthquake that hit southern Turkey in 2023.

The violent shaking of the ground is sudden and unpredictable. Earthquakes leave death, homelessness, disease and destruction in their wake.

Yet why do they occur?

Science explains the mechanics: Tectonic plates grind and snap. But the Bible goes further by revealing that earthquakes are sometimes more than

random events—they are instruments God uses to speak. This is seen in both history and prophecy.

Amos 1:1 references an earthquake that took place during the reign of King Uzziah as a historical marker. Over 200 years later, in Zechariah 14:5, the same quake is mentioned.

The book of Haggai shows the prophetic side: “For thus says the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and *I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations*, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts” (2:6-7).

God uses earthquakes to get people’s attention and turn their focus to Him.

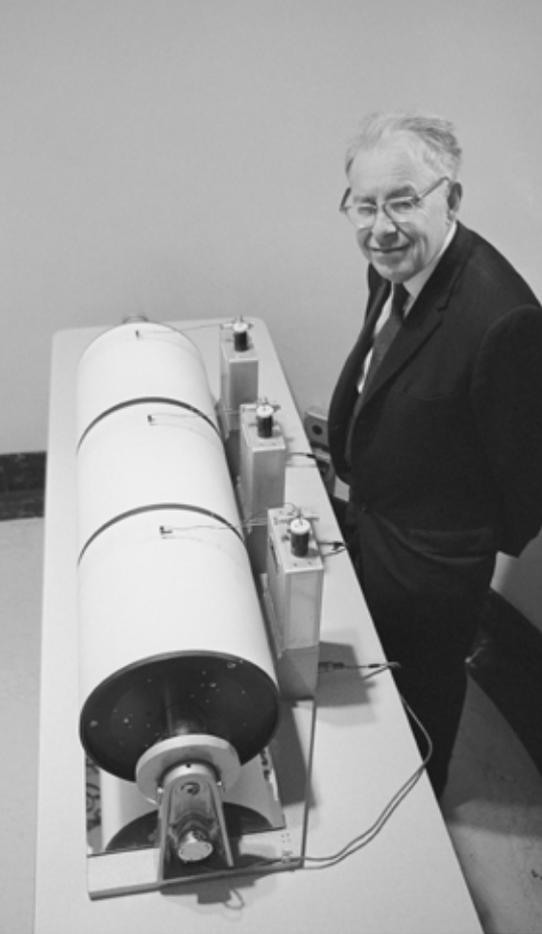
Is Every Earthquake from God?

If the Bible shows God causes earthquakes, does that mean every tremor in the modern world comes from Him? The simple answer is no.

Ecclesiastes 9:11 teaches an important principle that helps explain events like the quake that hit Myanmar. It says that “time and chance happens to them all.”

Not every earthquake in today’s headlines is a divine act. When a quake strikes, it is usually “time and chance” working in conjunction with natural factors. This is part of living in our broken, unpredictable world—conditions that God allows *for now*.





Top left, the earthquake of 1667 in Dubrovnik, Croatia. Middle, guards raise the Haitian national flag outside the quake-destroyed ruins of the Presidential Palace (Nov. 16, 2010). Bottom left, a split on the north end of East Street in San Francisco, California, from an earthquake in 1906. Top right, Charles F. Richter posing next to his Richter Magnitude Scale (May 7, 1966). Bottom right, earthquake survivors walk on the debris of collapsed houses in search of relatives, in Sichuan Province, China (May 14, 2008).

TOP LEFT, KEN WELSH/DESIGN PICS/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES; MIDDLE, HECTOR RETAMAL/AFP; BOTTOM LEFT, UNDERWOOD ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES; TOP RIGHT, BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES, BOTTOM RIGHT, CHINA PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES

In the coming Kingdom of God, Revelation 21 explains that “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (vs. 4).

This means that, until God’s Kingdom is here, there will continue to be suffering, from natural disasters and various other tragedies.

However, you do not need to live in fear of the next big earthquake. God promises protection to those who seek Him.

Psalms 46 says: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, *though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof*” (vs. 1-3).

This describes a mindset of someone who calmly trusts in God, even in the face of chaos.

Expressions of God’s Presence

Sometimes, when God shows up, the earth literally moves.

Exodus 19 tells the story of the children of Israel assembling at Mount Sinai. Just before God gave the Ten Commandments, “Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke

of a furnace, and *the whole mount quaked greatly*” (vs. 18).

Picture yourself at the foot of Mount Sinai, waiting for God to appear. You feel yourself tremble, not just from the earthquake, but from knowing that the Creator is about to speak.

This display prepared the Israelites to receive His Commandments, recognizing that the One giving them was a Being of divine authority.

I Kings 19 also uses an earthquake to teach us about God’s power, yet there is an interesting contrast to the previous account. It says: “And he [the prophet Elijah] came there unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him...And He said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice” (vs. 9, 11-12).

At Sinai, God’s presence was overwhelming. But in Elijah’s story, it is almost the opposite. The prophet watched as wind shattered rocks, the earth shook and fire blazed. Instead, God spoke in the “still small voice” of His Holy Spirit.

The power of God can be mighty and vast, but it can also be subtle and delicate. It all depends on how He chooses to use it.

God did not just shake the earth in the Old Testament. At the moment of Jesus Christ’s death, the ground trembled once more: “Jesus, when He had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and *the earth did quake*, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after His resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with



him, watching Jesus, *saw the earthquake*, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God” (Matt. 27:50-54).

This supernatural earthquake helped those who witnessed it realize Jesus really was the Messiah.

When Christ was resurrected, God used yet another temblor to underscore what had happened: “And, behold, *there was a great earthquake*: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it” (28:2).

In each account, there is no evidence that anyone died or that mass destruction took place. These tremors were carefully engineered by God to show His power and presence.

Divine Judgment

Earthquakes can do more than just warn or announce God’s presence—they can also bring punishment.

Numbers 16 records a rebellion so brazen that God answered by splitting the earth open. Korah and 250 men challenged Moses’ God-given authority—and paid the ultimate price.

When the conflict reached a breaking point, Moses said: “Hereby you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of my own mind. If these men die the common death of all men...then the LORD has not sent me. But if the LORD make a new thing, *and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up*, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then you shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD” (vs. 28-30).

God was ready to punish those who rose up against His chosen leader. The divine method of judgment would provide undeniable proof to all Israel that God had selected Moses.

Verses 31-33 show Korah and his group’s fate: “And it came to pass, as he [Moses] had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them [Korah, Dathan, Abiram and all their families]: and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their hous-

es, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation.”

God has power over His Creation and uses earthquakes to punish when needed. Yet He also carefully controlled what happened. Only those selected by God for death were swallowed up.

Prophetic Events

Some of the most powerful earthquakes in the Bible have not happened yet.

In Luke 21, the disciples asked Jesus, “Master, but when shall these things be? And what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?” (vs. 7). His response listed

global trends that would mark the last days—false religion, unrest, wars. Then in verse 11, Christ added this: “Great earthquakes shall be in diverse places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven.”

Earthquakes are not random tremors in this context. They are part of a pattern—clear signals that significant events are unfolding in God’s prophetic plan. Matthew 24:7 and Mark 13:8 echo this, showing that seismic activity is one of the recurring signs tied to major world change.

Revelation 6 contains another massive earthquake. The chapter describes the opening of the “seven seals.” As each is opened by Christ, climactic events take place.



A monk walks past a collapsed building in Mandalay, a few days after the deadly Myanmar earthquake (April 1, 2025).

SAI AUNG MAINS/AUNG MAIN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Verse 12 states, “And I beheld when He had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, *there was a great earthquake*; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood.”

The following verses make clear just how “great” this earthquake will be. It is not confined to just the ground here on the planet: “And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casts her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” (vs. 13-17).

Later in the book, God again uses an earthquake as prophecy advances. It accompanies a pivotal event—the death and resurrection of the “two witnesses”—and the punishment of God’s enemies.

It says, “And they [the resurrected two witnesses] heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up here. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them. And the same hour was there a *great earthquake*, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven” (11:12-13).

Revelation 16 describes the most powerful earthquake the world will ever experience. When the seventh vial is poured out, it unleashes thunder, lightning—and a quake like no other: “There was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great” (vs. 18).

The result is staggering: “Every island fled away, and the mountains were not found” (vs. 20).

These verses serve as a sobering reminder. As devastating as modern earthquakes are, they are nothing compared to what God has foretold.

Reshaping the Earth for the Kingdom

Beyond destruction, God will use earthquakes to help mankind during His Kingdom. Billions of people will be resurrected and given opportunity to seek Him and receive eternal life. The Earth must be reshaped to provide habitable places for them to live.

Isaiah foretold this change: “Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together...” (40:4-5).

Chapter 35 expands the picture: “The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose...for in the wilderness shall waters break out” (vs. 1, 6). Dead, dry places will become fertile and full of life.

This reshaping of the earth will help create the conditions for peace, safety and stability for everyone: “They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid...” (Mic. 4:4).

Even ruined cities will be rebuilt. Ezekiel records: “The desolate land shall be tilled...and the waste cities shall be fenced, and inhabited” (36:34-35).

Such earthquakes show our Creator’s love and care for mankind. God will make sure that everyone has the land they need for a happy and abundant life. To learn more about what this time will be like, read David C. Pack’s free book *Tomorrow’s Wonderful World – An Inside View!* at rcg.org/tww.

Becoming Unshakable

For some readers of this magazine, earthquakes are a constant in life. Nations located in the Pacific Ring of Fire, such as Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines and others, regularly see seismic activity. So do places in

the United States like California and Alaska. Many other people live in locations where earthquakes are rarely or never felt.

Yet God says there is a shaking coming that EVERYONE will feel.

Hebrews 12 says: “Whose voice [God’s] then shook the earth: but now He has promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word...signifies the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain” (vs. 26-27).

The New Living Translation renders verse 27 more clearly: “This means that all of creation will be shaken and removed, so that only unshakable things will remain.”

Being unshakable here does not mean we selected a location to live that is not near a fault line or that we built our homes with impervious construction materials. It means being unshakable *spiritually*.

Can you hear God’s voice through His Word? Are you spiritually unshakable? When God brings His Kingdom and advances other prophetic events we examined, will you be ready?

Jesus explained how to become unshakable in Matthew 7:24-27.

Those who hear His words and do them are like a man who built his house on a solid foundation: “And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock” (vs. 25).

Others built on sand. They heard the words—but did not act: “And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it” (vs. 27).

Your foundation is your future. Earthquakes will come—literal and spiritual. But those who build on God’s truth will never fall.

To learn more about Jesus’ sayings and how they can give you a strong spiritual foundation, read our free book *The True Jesus Christ – Unknown to Christianity* at rcg.org/ttjc. □

An Israeli soldier loads a tank near the so-called Alpha Line that separates the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights from Syria, in the town of Majdal Shams (Dec. 11, 2024).

AP/MATIAS DELACROIX



Turkey and Israel at Odds Over Syria's Future

THE FALL of Syrian President Bashar Assad's government has aggravated already tense relations between Turkey and Israel, with their conflicting interests in Syria pushing the relationship toward a possible collision course.

Turkey, which long backed groups opposed to Mr. Assad, has emerged as a key player in Syria and is advocating for a stable and united Syria, in which a

central government maintains authority over the whole country.

It welcomed a breakthrough agreement that Syria's new interim government signed in March with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces to integrate with the Syrian government and army.

Israel, on the other hand, remains deeply suspicious of Syria's interim president, Ahmad al-Sharaa, pointing

to his roots in al-Qaida. It is also wary of Turkey's influence over Damascus and appears to want to see Syria remain fragmented after the country under Mr. Assad was turned into a staging ground for its archenemy, Iran, and Tehran's proxies.

"Syria has become a theater for proxy warfare between Turkey and Israel, which clearly see each other as regional competitors," said Asli

Aydintasbas of the Washington-based Brookings Institute.

“This is a very dangerous dynamic because in all different aspects of Syria’s transition, there is a clash of Turkish and Israeli positions.”

Following Mr. Assad’s fall, Israel seized territory in southern Syria, which Israeli officials said was aimed at keeping hostile groups away from its border. The new Syrian government and the United Nations have said Israel’s incursions violate a 1974 ceasefire agreement between the two countries and have called for Israel to withdraw. Israel has also conducted airstrikes targeting military assets left behind by Mr. Assad’s forces and has expressed plans to maintain a long-term presence in the region.

Analysts say Israel is concerned over the possibility of Turkey expanding its military presence inside Syria. Since 2016, Turkey has launched operations in northern Syria to push back Syrian Kurdish militias linked to the banned Kurdistan Workers’ Party and maintains influence in the north of the country through military bases and alliances with groups that opposed Mr. Assad.

Turkish defense officials have said Turkey and Syria are now cooperating to strengthen the country’s defense and security, and that a military delegation would visit Syria.

Nimrod Goren, president of the Mitvim Institute, an Israeli foreign policy think tank, said that unlike Turkey, which supports a strong, centralized and stable Syria, Israel at the moment appears to prefer Syria fragmented, with the belief that could better bolster Israel’s security.

He said Israel is concerned about Mr. al-Sharaa and his Islamist ties, and fears that his consolidated strength could pose what Israel has called a “jihadist threat” along its northern border.

Israeli officials say they will not tolerate a Syrian military presence south of Damascus and have threatened to invade a Damascus suburb in defense of members of the Druze

minority sect, who live in both Israel and Syria, after short-lived clashes broke out between the new Syrian security forces and Druze armed factions. The distance from Damascus to the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights is about 37 miles.

Turkey and Israel were once close allies, but the relationship has been marked by deep tensions under Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s more than two-decade rule, despite brief periods of reconciliation. Mr. Erdogan is an outspoken critic of Israel’s policies toward the Palestinians, while Israel has been angered by Mr. Erdogan’s support for the Hamas militant group, which Israel considers to be a terrorist group.

During the war in Gaza, Turkey strongly denounced Israel’s military actions, announced it was cutting trade ties with Israel, and joined a genocide case South Africa brought against Israel at the UN International Court of Justice.

Ms. Aydintasbas said Turkish authorities are now increasingly concerned that Israel is “supportive of autonomy demands from Kurds, the Druze and Alawites.”

Mr. Erdogan issued a thinly veiled threat against Israel, saying: “Those who seek to provoke ethnic and religious [divisions] in Syria to exploit instability in the country should know that they will not be able to achieve their goals.”

Factions allied with the new Syrian government—allegedly including some backed by Turkey—launched revenge attacks on members of Mr. Assad’s Alawite minority sect after pro-Assad groups attacked government security forces on Syria’s coast. Monitoring groups said hundreds of civilians were killed.

Mr. Erdogan strongly condemned the violence and suggested the attacks were aimed at “Syria’s territorial integrity and social stability.”

Israel’s deputy foreign minister, Sharren Haskel, said the deadly sectarian violence amounted to “ethnic cleansing” by Islamist groups led by

“a jihadist Islamist terror group that took Damascus by force and was supported by Turkey.”

Israel, Ms. Haskel added, was working to prevent a threat along its border from Syria’s new “jihadist regime.”

Israel’s involvement in Syria is deepening, with the country pledging protection and economic aid to the Druze community in southern Syria at a time of heightened sectarian tensions.

The Druze, a small religious sect, are caught between Syria’s new Islamist-led government in Damascus and Israel, which many Syrians view as a hostile neighbor leveraging the Druze’s plight to justify its intervention in the region. Israel says it sent food aid trucks to the Druze in southern Syria and is allowing some Syrian Druze to cross into the Israeli-controlled part of the Golan Heights to work.

Mr. al-Sharaa was somewhat conciliatory toward Israel in his early statements, saying that he did not seek a conflict. But his language has become stronger. In a speech at a Arab League emergency meeting in Cairo, he said that Israel’s “aggressive expansion is not only a violation of Syrian sovereignty, but a direct threat to security and peace in the entire region.”

The Brookings Institute’s Aydintasbas said the escalating tensions are cause for serious concern.

“Before we used to have Israel and Turkey occasionally engage in spats, but be able to decouple their security relationship from everything else,” Ms. Aydintasbas said. “But right now, they are actively trying to undermine each other. The question is, do these countries know each other’s red lines?”

A report from the Institute for National Security Studies, a think tank led by a former Israeli military intelligence chief, suggested that Israel could benefit from engaging with Turkey, the one regional power with considerable influence over Syria’s leadership, to reduce the risk of military conflict between Israel and Syria. □

How to Be a PEACEMAKER in Your Family

Family conflict is inevitable.
But with God's help, peace can start with you.

BY NESTOR A. TORO

A SLAMMED CABINET door. A loud sigh. Tension so thick it hums under everyday conversation. Forks scraping plates in a room suddenly too quiet. An argument that circles the same topics—again *and again*.

We know such moments all too well.

They can start with a joke that lands wrong. Or a glance that said too much. A promise remembered by one person and forgotten by the other.

Such conflict rarely announces itself. It builds—layer by layer—until things finally boil over. When that happens, it is oh so easy to ask: “Who started it?”

We ask to pinpoint the cause, to assign blame, to justify our frustration. But what if we turned the question around? Instead of who started the conflict, what if we asked, “Who will start peace?”

Family conflicts can be some of the most challenging aspects of life. The stress of daily responsibilities only adds to the tension, pushing everyone to their limits. Children bear the weight of these struggles, sometimes left feeling unsettled or even unsafe in their own homes.

Almost anyone can start a conflict, but few know how to end one.

The culprits are predictable. A 2024 study from the University of

Illinois Urbana-Champaign found that communication struggles, emotional tensions and household responsibilities are among the leading causes of family conflict. Parents and teenagers often clash over chores and technology, while parents of younger children battle bedtime routines and picky eating. A 2020 study in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* found that nearly 27 percent of adults reported estrangement from a family member. Broken communication and unresolved conflicts have torn families apart for generations.

There is a better path—one that comes from the most overlooked



source: the Author of the family Himself. Genesis 1 tells us, “God created man in His own image...male and female created He them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply...” (vs. 27-28).

From the very beginning, God designed the family structure and gave it purpose. As its Creator, He knows how it should function—and He can help you become a peacemaker if you seek His guidance.

The Bible presents timeless principles that can transform you into a true peacemaker. These keys are actionable, practical steps grounded

in Scripture that can rebuild harmony in your home.

Peace must be actively pursued. Psalm 34:14 instructs, “Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and *pursue it*.”

That is why peace is listed as a fruit—not a gift—of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22. Like fruit, it requires time, care and the right conditions to grow. Likewise, true peace flourishes *over time* when we live by the standards of the “God of peace” (1 Thes. 5:23; Rom. 15:33).

But someone has to be willing to take the first step. Matthew 5:9 states, “Blessed are the *peacemakers*: for they

shall be called the children of God.” Notice that it does not say blessed are the *peacekeepers*. While peacekeeping often involves avoiding conflict, peacemaking requires stepping in and actively creating peace where none exists. Think of a peacekeeper as someone who maintains calm by keeping tensions at bay. A peacemaker, by contrast, steps into unrest and works to transform it.

Again, the real question is not who started it. It is: Will you be the one who starts peace?

The following biblical principles will help you become a peacemaker in your family.



“When emotions are running high, it is often best to listen first and speak later.”

Take the Initiative

The first key comes from Romans 12:18: “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all people” (New American Standard Bible).

Waiting for others to mend relationships often leads to deeper rifts. A true peacemaker takes the first step—even if you were not the one who caused the conflict. This may mean reaching out with a kind message, an invitation to talk, or an offer to help with a task. Small gestures can pave the way for reconciliation.

Taking initiative feels risky. It takes humility, courage and a willingness to swallow pride and face discomfort. But someone has to begin the healing process.

Jesus Christ illustrates this in Matthew 5: “If you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering” (vs. 23-24, NASB).

Taking the initiative also involves being willing to forgive. Sometimes, peace cannot begin until we release a grudge.

The story of Jacob and Esau in the Old Testament provides a powerful example. After years of estrangement, Jacob feared Esau’s wrath. Yet when they finally met, Esau ran to meet Jacob, embraced him and wept (Gen. 33:4). Like Esau, we must be ready to forgive—especially when forgiveness could thaw a long-frozen relationship.

So what about you? What step can you take today to rebuild peace in your family? It may feel risky. It might go unnoticed at first. But remember: Peace must be planted before it can grow. Plant the seeds, and with time, God can make them grow.

Practice Restraint

The second key comes from Proverbs 25:15, which states, “By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaks the bone.”

Peacemaking requires more than just choosing the right words. It begins

with the discipline to listen carefully before speaking. Often, restraint is expressed through silence, attentiveness and patience.

Words can spark conflict—or soothe it. As Dale Carnegie wrote in his famous book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, “If you want to gather honey, don’t kick over the beehive.” Peacemakers understand the importance of restraint.

When emotions are running high, it is often best to listen first and speak later. Proverbs 17:28 says, “Even a fool, when he holds his peace, is counted wise: and he that shuts his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.”

If this is difficult for you, here is a tip. Before reacting, pause and ask God for wisdom and self-control. How much grief could we avoid—for ourselves and others—if we simply took a moment to pray first? A brief, heartfelt request, such as, “God, please give me peaceful words,” can make all the difference. This applies to all forms of communication, spoken or written.

Proverbs 15:1 adds another dimension: “A soft answer turns away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.” The way we deliver our words can significantly affect whether we create peace or escalate conflict.

Peacemakers not only avoid harmful words, they use words that build others up.

Ephesians 4:29 reinforces this: “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.”

II Timothy 2:23 warns, “Stay away from foolish and stupid arguments. You know that these arguments grow into bigger arguments” (Easy-to-Read Version).

Further, many family conflicts arise from a desire to be “right.” Yet have you ever walked away from a conversation knowing you were right—but feeling like you lost something more important? Before defending a point, ask yourself: Is this worth the strain on the relationship?

Peace is often found not in winning an argument but in valuing the relationship above personal pride.

Esteem Others Above Yourself

The third biblical key to being a peacemaker is humility. True peace begins with putting others’ needs and perspectives ahead of our own. Philippians 2 teaches this principle: “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (vs. 3).

Consider the needs, perspectives, and feelings of your family members. Ask yourself, “How can I serve them in this moment?”

Often, the simplest way to serve is by hearing them out. Yet peacemakers do not just hear—they listen to understand.

Proverbs 18:13 warns, “He that answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame unto him.” True listening means prioritizing the other person’s need to be fully heard—even when you think you already know what they will say.

Allow them to get it off their chest. This lays the groundwork for peace. Without it, the result is often misunderstanding and division.

Esteeming others above yourself also means reflecting on their positive qualities. Take time to consider what you respect about them. You could prepare for a difficult conversation by writing down and meditating on those traits. This reshapes your perspective and reinforces the goal of peace.

Christ exemplified this humility. Philippians 2:5-8 explains how He “made Himself of no reputation” and humbled Himself—even to death on a cross. He chose service over status. He chose others over Himself. Peacemakers must do the same.

Focus on Common Ground

The fourth biblical key to being a peacemaker is learning to seek unity over perfection. Amos 3:3 asks, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” Agreement is necessary for cooperation, but it does not mean agreeing on everything.

Every family has differences, but these differences do not have to lead to conflict. Instead of magnifying disagreements, focus on building areas of agreement. Even one shared value can serve as a foundation for peace.

Perhaps you and a sibling disagree on politics, but you both enjoy watching basketball together. Maybe your teenager tunes you out during parental instruction, but brightens up during shared hobbies. A strained relationship with a parent may begin to thaw over fond memories or a favorite meal.

Peacemakers work with what is available. Words are like bricks in a strong structure. To build peace, we must use whatever relational materials we already have—our common ground.

Unity begins with small choices such as say-

ing “we” instead of “I,” or offering a smile or word of thanks.

When a disagreement arises, look for anything you can affirm. Say, “You are right about that,” even if you disagree on everything else. That small point of agreement becomes the seed of peace.

By focusing on common ground, you apply Romans 12:16: “Be of the same mind one toward another.” The goal is not absolute agreement—it is mutual respect and relational harmony.

Think of one thing you and a loved one can agree on today—and build from there.

Be the One Who Starts Peace

James 3:18 summarizes all that we have covered: “And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.” True peacemaking is not passive—it is an ongoing, active process that begins with you.

These principles—taking initiative, practicing restraint, esteeming others and focusing on common ground—are like a ring of keys. Each one opens a different door to peace, and wisdom lies in knowing which key to use and when.

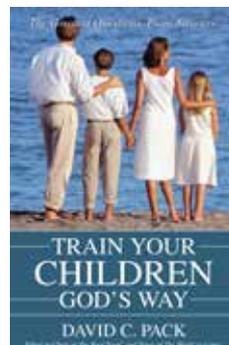
You may not always receive the response you hope for in attempting to defuse situations—but do not let that deter you. When tensions rise and the familiar question returns—Who started it?—ask instead, Who will start peace?

Choose to be that person. Not just once, but consistently, until peacemaking becomes part of who you are.

The results speak for themselves:

stronger relationships, a calmer home and deeper family connections. Trust what God says. Follow His guidance. And experience the peace He wants for your home.

For many more practical tools for happy family relationships, read *You Can Build a Happy Marriage* and *Train Your Children God’s Way*, both by David C. Pack. □



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AMERICA IN THE MIRROR

A Superpower in Search of Itself



We talk about greatness. We remember what we have been. But do we know what we are supposed to become?

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER

“**W**E ARE not the government of the world.”

This statement was uttered by U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio at a press briefing defending Washington’s limited response to a foreign humanitarian crisis. Though made in passing, the remark reflected a broader shift already underway—a reassessment of America’s role on the global stage.

This rethink is not driven by weakness. Despite financial hiccups and political turmoil, the United States remains a global powerhouse. In 2024, it had a GDP of \$29.18 trillion—the highest in the world. It also maintains the most powerful military on Earth, topping the 2024 Global Firepower rankings among 145 countries.

Regardless of who is in office, America’s global role is never far from its leaders’ minds. Each presidential administration tries to steer the nation toward its own idea of greatness—evidence the nation is still searching for what it is meant to be.

During his inaugural address in 2021, former President Joe Biden said: “We look ahead in our uniquely American way—restless, bold, optimistic—and set our sights on the nation we know we can be and must be.”

Four years later, President Donald Trump painted this vision of the U.S. at his inauguration: “The golden age of America begins right now. From this day forward, our country will flourish and be respected again all over the world.”

The question is not whether America can lead, but what kind of leadership it aims to provide. Where is the nation headed? What type of leadership should we offer the world? What standard should guide us?

Current efforts to redefine America's role are sincere—and in many ways necessary. Every president seeks a better way forward. Yet no political realignment can fully resolve the deeper challenge: the nation is still unsure of what it should be.

As a people, we cannot agree on what we should become. Proverbs 29:18 sums up the problem: "Where there is no vision, the people perish..."

America does not lack resources. It does not lack innovation or talent. What it lacks is a unified vision.

Before America can fulfill its potential, it must take an honest look at itself—its values, its direction, its character. It needs a mirror that reveals more than strength or prosperity. It needs one that reflects who we truly are.

The Bible is that mirror. It does not flatter. It does not condemn without

cause. It shows both the heights a nation can reach and the dangers of turning from what is right.

So when we hold that mirror up to America, what do we see? What *should* we see?

God's Mirror for Nations

The New Testament book of James likens God's Word to a mirror that shows individuals their true likeness and character (1:23-24). It reveals where they are doing well and where they are falling behind.

Beyond individuals, the Bible lays out laws, principles, standards and cautionary tales to help whole societies see themselves. The clearest example is ancient Israel.

In I Corinthians 10, the apostle Paul explains that Israel's national journey serves as a lesson for us all: "Now all these things happened unto them [Israel] for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition..." (vs. 11).

Ancient Israel was chosen by God to be a model nation—a living example of what His Way produces when practiced at the national level. If they faith-

fully followed God's laws, they would reflect righteousness to the world.

To guide them, God gave detailed moral, civil, social and economic instructions—promising blessings for obedience and consequences for rebellion.

He laid out the terms in Deuteronomy 4:6: "Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this GREAT NATION is a wise and understanding people."

According to Scripture, a truly great nation is one that has...

■ **Righteous leadership:** Those who fear God, are men of truth and hate covetousness (Ex. 18:21).

■ **Economic integrity:** Fairness in business—honest measures, honest dealings (Lev. 19:35-36).

■ **Equal justice:** Treating rich and poor alike under the law (Deut. 1:17).

■ **Compassion with accountability:** Just treatment for outsiders who also uphold the law (Lev. 19:34; Ex. 12:49).

In addition, God's vision for a great nation is that it would be a *positive moral influence* to the entire world (Isa. 49:6).

God's principles do not change. The same laws that could have elevated ancient Israel apply to any nation today.

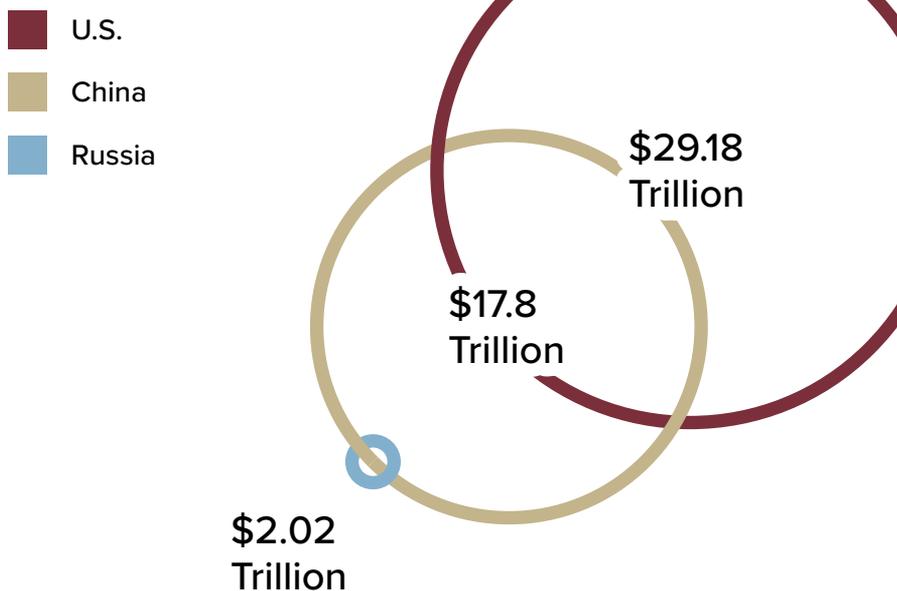
Measuring how well America reflects biblical principles starts by examining its history.

Reflections from the Past

The Bible has always been part of America's story. Even before the first U.S. President, George Washington, placed his hand on a copy to take the oath of office, Scripture shaped many of the ideals the nation claimed to uphold. Many who first came to the New World did so in an attempt to live the Bible more freely.

But ideals alone are not outcomes. And every era of U.S. history shows something different in the mirror.

Sometimes, America's reflection has caught glimpses of biblical principles.



TOP 3 ECONOMIC POWERS (GDP)

USNEWS.COM/GRAPHIC BY THE REAL TRUTH

At other times, the image has been distorted—clouded by pride, self-interest or forgetfulness of God’s ways.

Before and after World War I, the United States tended toward isolationism. It avoided long-term alliances and focused on internal development. After the Great War, the U.S. refused to join the League of Nations, passed strict immigration laws and embraced a “leave us alone” posture.

This somewhat echoes the biblical principle that Israel was to remain separate from other nations to avoid moral compromise: “Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither you go, lest it be for a snare in the midst of you” (Ex. 34:12).

But separation alone is not righteousness. During this same period, the U.S. wrestled with racial injustice of the Jim Crow era, cultural hedonism in the Roaring Twenties, and the economic arrogance that contributed to the stock market crash of 1929.

Judges 21:25 sums up these actions: “Every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

America did not need foreign entanglements to fall into sin—it managed that fine on its own.

World War II forced America onto the global stage. In its wake, the U.S. helped rebuild a broken world. The Marshall Plan alone sent more than \$13 billion to aid Western Europe—about \$175 billion in today’s money.

Other programs soon followed. The Truman Doctrine offered military and economic support to countries resisting communist influence. And the Point Four Program extended technical aid and investment to developing nations in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The U.S. also played a key role in establishing the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank—institutions designed to stabilize global systems and prevent future conflict.

This outpouring of support aligned with Proverbs 3:27, which says to help when it is in your power to do so. Yet

America’s aid was not entirely altruistic. For example, the Marshall Plan opened European markets to American goods, and much of the aid ended up flowing back to U.S. industries.

In the decades that followed, America adopted a new role: global policeman. Even more determined to stop the spread of communism, it used its military, economic and intelligence power to shape events around the world—sometimes openly, sometimes in secret.

In the 1950s, this included CIA-backed coups in Iran and Guatemala, where elected leaders were removed and replaced with regimes more aligned with American interests. Elsewhere, the U.S. backed authoritarian governments that fit its strategic needs—even when those governments were unjust, oppressive or corrupt.

The prophet Isaiah condemned such thinking: “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!...Which justify the wicked for reward...” (5:20-23).

In trying to resist one form of evil, America often aligned with another.

Henry Kissinger, one of the U.S. architects of Cold War policy, put it bluntly: “A country that demands moral perfection in its foreign policy will achieve neither perfection nor security.”

During this time, the world saw America’s strength, but many questioned its morality.

Cultural Power, Moral Drift

Following the Cold War—and especially after the attacks of September 11, 2001—America stepped back into an assertive global role. The War on Terror led to prolonged military campaigns and ambitious attempts to spread democracy in the Middle East.

But time wore down resolve. As casualties mounted and objectives blurred, the national appetite for military intervention dwindled.

In light of this, U.S. influence tended to be softer, but no less strategic.

While American media and ideals had long reached global audiences, recent decades have seen leaders increasingly use this “soft power” as a deliberate extension of foreign policy.

Under Presidents Obama and Biden, cultural diplomacy—through music, education and shared values—was emphasized to restore strained alliances and reassert America’s influence abroad.

But what values were actually being spread?

Freedom, yes—but also unrestrained self-expression. Opportunity, but also materialism. Alongside innovation and creativity came the export of sexual immorality and moral ambiguity.

The prophet Jeremiah asks this of a nation in moral decline: “Are they ashamed of their disgusting actions? Not at all—they don’t even know how to blush!” (Jer. 6:15, New Living Translation).

A striking image. And one that feels uncomfortably familiar today.

Political leaders from both parties have long invoked the idea of America as a “city on a hill”—a nation meant to inspire the world. The phrase itself is drawn from Jesus Christ’s words in Matthew 5:14: “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.”

But what kind of light has America been shining?

The United States has wielded immense cultural influence. But with-

Top left, the Brooklyn Daily Eagle front page from October 24th, 1929. Top right, 33rd U.S. President Harry Truman addresses a joint session of Congress, asking for \$400 million and American military advisors for Greece and Turkey to make the Mediterranean countries bulwarks against the spread of communism (March 12, 1947). Bottom, rioters armed with staves shout slogans during riots in Tehran in August 1953. On August 19, democratically elected Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh was overthrown in a coup orchestrated by the CIA and British intelligence, and the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was reinstalled in power. Massive protests broke out across the nation, leaving almost 300 dead.

TOP LEFT, FINE ART IMAGES/HERITAGE IMAGES VIA GETTY IMAGES; TOP RIGHT, BETTMAN VIA GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM, INTERCONTINENTALE/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

WALL ST. IN PANIC AS STOCKS CRASH

Attempt Made to Kill Italy's Crown Prince

ASSASSIN CAUGHT IN BRUSSELS MOB; PRINCE UNHURT

Royal Suite Was About to Lay Waste on Unknown Soldiers' Tomb.

Princess, Dearly Mourned, Falls Into Fencer's Arms and Kisses Him

Brussels, Oct. 23 (AP)—An attempt to assassinate the crown prince of Italy in Brussels today failed when the prince was rescued by a mob of unknown soldiers.



Crown Prince Umberto.

Hollywood Fire Destroys Films Worth Millions

ATTEMPT MADE ON LIFE

Confidential Studios Are Sought by Flames Fatal to One-Master Pictures Burned Include Many New Talkie Productions

FEAR 52 PERISHED IN LAKE MICHIGAN; FERRY IS MISSING

Wreckage Picked Up In Dunes Craft Went Down With All Aboard.

Mishawaka, Wis., Oct. 23 (AP)—The bodies of 52 persons were found today in the wreckage of a ferry boat that disappeared in Lake Michigan last night.

PIECE OF PLANE LIKE DITEMAN'S IS FOUND AT SEA

Black and Orange Wreckage Indicates During Flier Went to Death.

St. John, N. F., Oct. 23 (AP)—A piece of wreckage from the airplane of the late Charles G. Dite, which was found today in the Atlantic Ocean, was identified as belonging to the plane in which he was killed.

High Duty Group Gave \$700,000 to Coolidge Drive

Grandy Agrees Rates Went Up Due to His Activities as Propagandist.

Washington, Oct. 23 (AP)—The Grand Old Party today announced that it had given \$700,000 to the Coolidge drive.

STOCKS CRASH IN RUSH TO SELL; BILLIONS LOST

Morgan, Mitchell Buying Stocks in Effort to Check Ruin to Unhail.

Wall Street was in a panic today, with no one to guide it and billions of dollars lost in a matter of hours.



FOR MORE LOBBYISTS
KAMP IN COUNTRY

CARNEGIE CHARGE OF PAID ATHLETES

HOOVER'S TRAIN HALTED BY AUTO

WARDER SOUGHT

SOMERS NAMED



“World War II forced America onto the global stage. In its wake, the U.S. helped rebuild a broken world. The Marshall Plan alone sent more than \$13 billion to aid Western Europe—about \$175 billion in today’s money.”

out God's truth shaping that power, the result has been confusion and sin. "American values" have too often spread moral fog rather than clarity.

Recently, U.S. foreign policy has toggled between soft power and a more transactional approach—one that prioritizes economic gain and political leverage over moral principle.

Under President Trump, this mindset has become more explicit. Retired Lt. Gen. Keith Kellogg, Washington's current special envoy to Ukraine and Russia, explained that the administration "approaches diplomacy and engages in a very transactional manner, with economics as the foundation and driving force behind international affairs."

Fiscal stewardship is a biblical value. But so is generosity.

Deuteronomy 15:7-8 states: "If there be among you a poor man of one of your brethren...you shall not harden your heart...But you shall open your hand wide unto him, and shall surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wants."

In recent years, U.S. humanitarian aid has often come with more strings attached—concessions for military access, political alignment or fiscal reimbursement. Foreign assistance has been used to overtly pressure countries at the United Nations. Sanctions have sometimes served economic gain more than moral principle.

Whether it comes dressed as soft diplomacy or disguised as dealmaking, such tactics reflect power—but not principle. And when a nation no longer sees the difference, the Bible's mirror is more needed than ever.

A Fractured Reflection

As we look at America today, what do we see? A country of unmatched wealth and power. A people with noble ideals and global reach. And yet...the reflection is fractured.

As 2024 ended, only 19 percent of Americans believed the country was heading in the right direction, according to Gallup. A 2023 Wall Street

Journal/NORC poll reported that just 38 percent of Americans considered patriotism "very important," a significant decline from 70 percent in 1998. The same study noted that religion and community involvement, once considered foundational, are in sharp decline among younger generations.

Such uncertainty extends globally. Allies question what America stands for. Adversaries look to exploit the contradictions.

And yet, the blessings America has enjoyed are undeniable. No other nation has received the kind of prosperity, stability and influence the United States has enjoyed. This did not happen by accident.

Scripture speaks of nations specially blessed by God—not for their own sake, but to be a blessing to others (Gen. 12:2-3).

The United States has fulfilled that role in many ways: helping rebuild after war, supporting the vulnerable and exporting opportunity and innovation. For more on what the Bible says about America's roots and blessings, read David C. Pack's book *America and Britain in Prophecy* at rcg.org/aabibp.

But such blessings always come with conditions: righteousness and obedience. When God's standards are set aside—when prosperity becomes entitlement and influence becomes self-interest—God is clear about the outcome: "It shall come to pass, if you will not hearken [to God's laws]... curses shall come upon you..." (Deut. 28:15).

A New Testament principle also applies: To whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48).

Is it any wonder the U.S. now finds itself beset by impossible problems?

What God Desires

America's reflection is sobering—but it is not hopeless.

The Bible does more than hold up a mirror to nations. It also reveals the true source of lasting government, justice and peace on Earth. That source is not Washington, Brussels, Beijing

or any human system. It is the coming world-ruling Kingdom of God.

Psalm 33:12 pointed to this long ago: "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance."

No nation today meets that description. The United States has been divinely blessed, but it has not steadfastly obeyed the God of the Bible.

That day lies ahead. To learn more about the coming Kingdom and the Bible proof for it, read our booklet *Which Is the True Gospel?* at rcg.org/witrg.

Even as nations falter, individuals still have a choice. You can begin to live by God's standards now. That is where hope begins.

Paul wrote: "For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20).

If your citizenship is in heaven, then your priorities, loyalty and values come from there as well. That changes everything—from how you see leadership and power, to how you treat others, to what you ultimately hope for in life.

This is what Jesus Christ meant when He said this in Matthew 6:33: "Seek you first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

To seek God's Kingdom first is not to totally withdraw yourself from the world—but to rise above it. It is to reflect godly priorities in a culture that rejects them. It is to begin living now according to the way of life that will soon govern the entire Earth.

Make no mistake: No modern nation will, on its own, live up to God's model. But individuals can strive to reflect it in their lives today.

You can choose clarity in a time of confusion. Righteousness in a time of compromise. Purpose in a time of spiritual drift.

The Bible is your mirror. Let it show you not only where America stands—but what God is doing. And begin now to live as a citizen of the Kingdom that is coming soon. □

5 Principles for Healthy Social Media Use

Applying lessons from the Bible will help you stay grounded and intentional in your social media habits.

BY SAMUEL E. MAIDEN

YOU ARE scrolling through your social media feed at dinner. Highlights, hot takes, memes, family photos—everything is instant. *And overwhelming.* With a few taps, you are deep in conversation with someone halfway across the world...

Social media is not just a way to connect. It is *the* way we connect. According to *datareportal.com*, 63.9 percent of the world's population uses social media—that is over 5 billion people! It has become the new town square—a place where ideas spread fast, influence runs deep and everyone has a platform.

But with great reach comes great responsibility. Sharing an article you did not actually read can spread misin-

formation in seconds. A heated debate in the comments can quickly spiral into personal attacks. Without careful thought, what we post can undermine trust and damage reputations. No wonder so many question whether social media is even worth the trouble.

The Bible does not overlook this part of life. It offers clear principles we can apply to the online world.

Paul's words set the standard: "Whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31).

This means every action—including what we post and how we scroll—should reflect God's standards. Here are five timeless principles to guide how we use social media.

(1) Practice Contentment

As you scroll through your feed, it is natural to see people sharing some of the happiest moments of their lives—a graduation, a job promotion, a long-awaited family vacation, a newborn baby or simply a beautiful sunset.

These posts can uplift others and spread positivity. Celebrating life's blessings can build connection, community and mutual encouragement, especially when they come from family or friends.

However, constantly seeing other people's life accomplishments can also stir feelings of envy or inadequacy. Frequent social media use can subtly lead us to compare our everyday lives, including difficult situations we may be going through, with someone else's best moments. We may even come across posts from influencers or other people we do not know, whose best moments could be either exaggerated or entirely made up for attention.

God commands us to guard our hearts against jealousy and vanity. Galatians 5:26 says, "Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another."

Social media often fuels exactly that—either pride in how we appear or jealousy toward others who seem to have more. It is in these moments that we should pursue contentment.

Paul also wrote, “I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content” (Phil. 4:11). Contentment is something we grow into. It is about learning to rest in the knowledge that our value does not come from what we post, how much we have or how glamorous our lives look online. True worth comes from who we are in God’s eyes.

Instead of falling into the trap of comparison, you should intentionally choose to focus on gratitude.

Maybe a friend just bought a beautiful new house. This can be an opportunity to thank God for the roof over your head and the memories you are making right where you are. Choosing to rejoice with others (Rom. 12:15) and appreciate your own blessings helps reframe the way you experience social media.

So celebrate with others. But guard your heart from comparison by remembering and appreciating your own blessings.

James wrote, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (1:17).

When we remember this, we see social media not as a measuring stick, but as an opportunity to praise God for His goodness in every life—including our own.

(2) Speak with Care

Social media has made it incredibly easy to communicate but also alarmingly easy to be unkind. Behind a screen, people often say things they would never say in person. The digital world tends to blur lines, remove filters and diminish empathy. Bullying now happens 24/7 in comment sections, group chats and anonymous posts.

The stakes are higher than we often realize. The emotional toll of cyberbullying has been linked to anxiety, depression and, tragically, even suicide.

In response to this growing crisis, some governments are beginning to take action. In late 2024, Australia announced plans to ban access to social media for children under the age of 16, citing mounting evidence that these platforms are harming young people’s mental health. Their move reflects a growing global concern over the psychological and emotional strain that social media can place on developing minds.

“Every post, comment and shared meme becomes a reflection not only of who we are, but of the values we represent.”

Whether or not similar policies emerge elsewhere, the message is clear: We must take responsibility for the tone and culture we help create online.

Every post, comment and shared meme becomes a reflection not only of who we are, but of the values we represent. Whether we are joking with friends, weighing in on a news topic or sharing something personal, our words carry weight.

Jesus Christ explained just how serious our communication is to God: “But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned” (Matt. 12:36-37). Other translations render “idle word” in verse 36 as “careless word.”

God expects us to choose our words carefully. Before you post anything, pause and ask: Will this honor Him? Will it build up others or tear them down?

A small act of kindness can make a huge difference. Proverbs 16:24 says,

“Pleasant words are as a honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.” Checking in on a friend or family member with a well-timed direct message, comment or even a simple “like” on one of their posts can remind them that they are cared about.

Be the one who offers gracious words and refuses to participate in cruelty. This is especially important for people we know, but we can also apply this to our interactions with *anyone* online.

Also, most social media platforms allow you to block or mute accounts. Use these and other tools to protect yourself from those who spread negativity.

Choose to make social media a space where love speaks louder than hate, where encouragement outweighs criticism, and where no one feels isolated or unseen.

(3) Think Critically

In a world overflowing with information, discernment is essential. Social media platforms are saturated with news stories, personal opinions, click-bait headlines, viral videos and clever ads all competing for our attention. But not everything that grabs our eye is grounded in truth. In fact, much of what circulates online is misinformation.

Sometimes it is obvious—a blatantly fake news headline or deceptive product ad. Other times, it is subtle: a misleading statistic or a quote taken out of context. Social media thrives on emotional reactions and an undiscerning audience.

Be careful not to be gullible, impulsive or easily influenced. Proverbs 14:15 offers a clear warning: “The simple believes every word; but the prudent man looks well to his going.”

In other words, the naive readily accept whatever they hear without questioning or verifying it, making them more vulnerable to deception and manipulation. Instead, we should strive to resemble the person described in the second half of the verse—a discerning individual who makes wise and thoughtful decisions.

God’s Word instructs, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (I

Thes. 5:21). That means thinking critically, verifying sources and resisting the urge to react or share before knowing the truth.

For example, if you see a viral post claiming a celebrity died or a new law was passed, take a moment to check a credible news site before reposting it. Rely on reputable news outlets when engaging with content on social media. Look up reviews before trusting miracle products. And firmly refuse to spread anything that could mislead others.

Knowing what is true is essential. But so is knowing what is appropriate to share, and what is better left unsaid.

(4) Share with Discernment

One of the greatest dangers in today's online culture is the ease with which people share personal information. Social media platforms encourage openness, transparency and frequent posting. But what some rarely stop to think about is how something shared in a moment could live online indefinitely.

Even if a post is deleted, it may already have been saved or archived. And once it spreads, especially if it goes viral, it is nearly impossible to undo.

Something meant to be lighthearted or heartfelt can be taken out of context, turned into controversy or used against you in the future. For young people especially, this can be overwhelming and deeply discouraging.

Oversharing also poses serious safety concerns. Personal details like your location, daily routines or private struggles can make you a target for online predators or scammers. Even seemingly harmless content can expose you or your loved ones to risk.

This is where wisdom is vital. Ecclesiastes 8:5 tells us that "a wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment." Wisdom allows us to know not only what information to share, but when and how to share it—or whether to share it at all!

Proverbs 10:19 says, "In the multitude of words there wants not sin: but he that refrains his lips is wise." There are times we should say less to avoid getting into trouble.

Being wise teaches us to pause and ask hard questions like: Should I be saying this? Would I be okay with this being seen by strangers, my employer or my family?

Before you hit post, take a moment to consider the consequences. Ask God to give you discernment not just about what is true, but about what is appropriate, safe and edifying. Of course, something you post on a public or work account would involve different considerations than a post on a private account restricted to your friends and family.

In a world where digital decisions can have lasting consequences, godly wisdom is your strongest safeguard.

(5) Stay Balanced

Social media platforms are intentionally designed to be addictive—using algorithms, notifications, endless scrolling and personalized content to capture our attention and hold it for as long as possible.

Without healthy boundaries, what begins as a quick check-in can easily turn into hours of mindless scrolling, pulling us away from the things that matter most.

Proverbs 25:28 paints a striking picture: "He that has no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls." Without self-control, we become emotionally and spiritually vulnerable. A lack of discipline opens the door to distraction and dissatisfaction.

It is also helpful to remember Paul's words in I Corinthians 6:12: "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." Social media is not inherently wrong, but if it begins to dominate our focus, time or priorities, we need to re-evaluate its place in our lives.

Practical steps like setting screen-time limits, turning off notifications, having phone-free zones or hours, and prioritizing face-to-face conversations can make a significant difference. These actions remind us that we need to live purposefully and not be overtaken by distractions.

In a culture that encourages constant connection, choose intentional disconnection. Step away when needed.

That might mean leaving your phone in another room during dinner, taking a weekly "digital detox," or setting aside time for prayer and reading without distraction. If you feel overwhelmed by too much social media, try taking a few minutes to simply stop and think. Psalm 4:4 says, "Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still."

Reclaim your time. Protect your peace. Let self-control shape your online habits so that social media remains a tool, not a trap.

Use Social Media with Purpose

Social media is one of the most powerful tools of our time. It can connect, inspire, educate and entertain. But without direction, it has the power to distract, discourage and mislead.

We will not get everything right all the time. But if your goal is to live by what God commands, even small changes in how you use these platforms can make a lasting impact. You may never see who is encouraged by a quiet act of restraint, protected by your caution, or uplifted by a kind word of yours. But it is all worth it.

The Bible sets a high standard: "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise" (Eph. 5:15). This includes how we engage online. Our digital presence should reflect the same wisdom, care, and purpose as every other part of our lives.

Whether you scroll, post, share or comment, remember this instruction: "Let all your things be done with charity [love—outgoing concern for others]" (I Cor. 16:14). And never forget the words of Jesus Christ: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

In a digital world filled with noise and confusion, those who live by God's Word stand out. Use social media in a manner that reflects His Way—and encourages others to do the same. □



Should You Wear a “Christian” Cross?

Many people wear or display a cross, yet few understand its ancient origins or whether God approves of its use.

A DRAMATIC VOICE emanates from the television: “The cross is revered throughout Christianity as a symbol of faith in Jesus. We are pleased to present this beautifully detailed 24-karat gold cross with matching gold chain. It will bring you great joy while you proudly wear it as a symbol of your faith. Let it inspire you in your Christian walk. Order now and we will rush you your very own cross for three easy payments of \$39.95. Quantities are limited, so don’t delay!”

Stirred to action by the presenter’s words and images of a sparkling golden cross, a viewer quickly grabs his smartphone and places his order online. Like millions of others, he wants to wear this display of his religion. He wants others to know he is “Christian.”

The cross is venerated and admired across the wide spectrum of traditional Christian churches. It is a cornerstone symbol—supposedly representing Jesus Christ and how He died for the sins of humanity.

Worn around the neck, placed in a car, hung from a wall, neatly lined in cemetery rows, placed on top of church steeples, or found along highways either alone or with two slightly smaller crosses on each side, this icon is made of varied materials and found in different shapes, forms and places.

Most display the simple cross—an upright stake with an intersecting crossbeam located about a third of the way down from the top. Some have two crossbeams; others have an oval-shaped circle on top. Still another type, called a crucifix, has an image of “Jesus” affixed to it. The shapes, sizes and configurations are seemingly endless, with “something for everyone.”

While the King James Version of the Bible speaks of the “cross of Christ” (Gal. 6:12), does this mean a Christian should use this symbol as a physical manifestation of his faith?

Since Jesus warned His followers against blindly following the traditions of men (Mark 7:6-7), you must not make assumptions. Do not just assume that God views the cross as a sacred symbol of worship—demand **PROOF!**

Constant Reminder?

Symbols carry significance and meaning. Often, they are used to invoke feelings or thoughts in the mind of the viewer. Some bring remembrance of events, places or people: national flags, war memorials, monuments to famous figures or grave markers.

The image of a cross is no different. Yet few people consider what meaning this symbol has for God.

Many questions flow from this: Does God want you to wear a cross? Would He allow you display it where you live? Does God want to see this instrument of cruelty hanging from Christians’ necks, on the wall of their homes, or in their cars? Does He want to look upon a symbol that reminds Him of when He had to completely turn from His Son? (Read Matthew 27:46, II Corinthians 5:21, Isaiah 53:6 and 59:2.)

If you lost a child, especially your only one, would you wear a constant reminder of how he or she was put to death? Think about this!

Consider further. If Christ were put to death with a .38 Special handgun, would you wear this around your neck? If Jesus were put to death in an electric chair, would you place a miniature one on your dashboard as a sign of faith? What if by lethal injection? Would you have the method of death prominently placed on the wall of your home?

Why venerate—give honor to—an instrument used in Christ’s death? Are you certain God desires this?

Before Christ

The cross was not widely used in mainstream Christianity until the time of the Roman Emperor Constantine—about 270 years *after* Christ established His Church on Pentecost AD 31. None of the apostles or first-century Christians used it or accepted it as a “Christian” symbol.

The famous 11th edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* states: “From its simplicity of form, the cross has been used both as a religious symbol and as an ornament, from the dawn of man’s civilization. Various objects, dating from periods long ante-

rior to the Christian era, have been found, marked with crosses of different designs, in almost every part of the old world. India, Syria, Persia and Egypt have all yielded numberless examples, while numerous instances, dating from the later Stone Age to Christian times, have been found in nearly every part of Europe. The use of the cross as a religious symbol in pre-Christian times, and among non-Christian peoples, may probably be regarded as almost universal, and in very many cases it was connected with some form of nature worship.”

According to *Babylon Mystery Religion* by Ralph Woodrow, “Ages ago in Italy, before the people knew anything of the arts of civilization, they believed in the cross as a religious symbol. It was regarded as a protector and was placed upon tombs.” This symbol is still placed on graves today.

The book continues, “In 46 B.C. [Before Christ], Roman coins show Jupiter holding a long scepter terminating in a cross. The Vestal Virgins of pagan Rome wore the cross suspended from their necklaces, as the nuns of the Roman Catholic church do now.”

According to *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, the shape of the cross “had its origin in ancient Chaldea, and was used as the symbol of the god Tammuz (being in the shape of the mystic Tau, the initial of his name) in that country and in adjacent lands, including Egypt.

“By the middle of the third cent. A.D. the churches had either departed from, or had travestied, certain doctrines of the Christian faith. In order to increase the prestige of the apostate ecclesiastical system, pagans were received into the churches...and were permitted largely to retain their pagan signs and symbols. Hence, the Tau or T, in its most frequent form, with the cross-piece lowered, was adopted to stand for the ‘cross’ of Christ.”

Who was this Tammuz? Anciently, he has been known by many names: Baal, Molech, Osiris. The Bible identifies him as Nimrod: “He was a mighty hunter before the LORD: wherefore it

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is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD” (Gen. 10:9).

Famous Jewish historian Josephus recorded in *Antiquities of the Jews* important evidence of Nimrod’s role in the post-Flood world. Notice: “He also gradually changed the government into tyranny...He [Nimrod] also said he would be revenged on God, if He should have a mind to drown the world again; for that he would build a tower too high for the waters to be able to reach...Now the multitude were very ready to follow the determination of Nimrod, and to esteem it a piece of cowardice to submit to God...”

Ezekiel 8:13-14 records a picture of the women of Israel “weeping for Tammuz.” This Tammuz of the Babylonian mystery religion is none other than Nimrod. The etymology of the word Tammuz bears examination: *tam* means “to make perfect” and *muz* “fire.” In other words, to make perfect through burning in fire!

Ancient Israel fell into worshipping Tammuz. Again, he was also known as Baal or Molech: “And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech; which I commanded them not, neither came it into My mind, that they should do this abomination” (Jer. 32:35).

These practices were so terrible that God says they never entered His mind—they were unimaginable to Him!

If a symbol was first used for a pagan god—one tied to child sacrifices—should you still wear it around your neck?

Also notice what the *Davis Dictionary of the Bible* states about the origin of the cross: “The pre-Christian cross of one form or another was in use as a sacred symbol among the Chaldeans, the Phoenicians, the Egyptians, and many other...nations. The Spaniards in the 16th century found it also among the Indians of Mexico and Peru. But its symbolic teaching was quite different from that which we now associate the cross.”

How was its meaning different? It was used as a symbol of fertility. “Various figures of crosses are found everywhere on Egyptian monuments and tombs, and are considered by many authorities as symbolical either of the phallus [a representation of the male sex organ] or of coition...In Egyptian tombs the *crux ansata* [cross with a circle or handle on top] is found side by side with the phallus” (*A Short History of Sex-Worship*).

Clearly, the cross symbol in its various forms has pagan origins—and meanings—outside of Christianity. Origins that long predate the birth of Jesus Christ and the Church He founded. It was “Christianized” and brought into mainstream Christianity.

What Did It Look Like?

Can we know what the instrument of Jesus Christ’s suffering looked like? What was its shape? There are differing opinions.

Professing Christianity has traditionally taught that Christ died on a two-beamed cross—His feet nailed together, with arms outstretched. The gospel accounts do say that Jesus was nailed to a cross. Yet closer examination is warranted.

The word “cross” is translated from the Greek word *stauros*. *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* states that this word “denotes primarily, ‘an upright pale or stake.’ On such [criminals] were nailed for execution. Both the noun and the verb *stauroo*, ‘to fasten to a stake or pale,’ are originally to be distinguished from the ecclesiastical form of a two beamed cross.”

Interestingly, other scriptures record that Christ was nailed to a “tree” (I Pet. 2:24; Acts 5:30, 10:39, 13:29). The Greek word used in these verses, *xulon*, means “timber, stick, club, tree or other wooden article or substance.”

Anciently, Roman soldiers crucified people using wooden structures of various shapes. Sometimes they used upright stakes or poles. Other times they used wooden crosses by attaching beams either at or just below the top.

The Bible does not specify the exact shape of the *stauros* or *xulon* on which Christ was crucified. But in light of the historical meanings of *stauros* and *xulon*, it was likely on a stake or upright pole, *not* on a two-beamed cross.

Do not, however, put too much emphasis on the shape of the instrument on which Jesus was killed. If God thought it were important for us to know exactly, He would have clearly recorded it, leaving us without doubt.

The shape is not important—but Christ’s sacrifice is!

Wrong Focus

Popular Christianity often has followers focus on a Jesus Christ who is either pictured as a helpless baby in a manger or a long-haired, effeminate weakling hanging dead on a cross.

Yet the Bible reveals how God wants us to view His Son. Inspired by God, the apostle John described Jesus’ post-resurrection appearance: “His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire; and His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice as the sound of many waters. And He had in His right hand seven stars: and out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and His countenance was as the sun shines in [its] strength” (Rev. 1:14-16).

God inspired this description because He wanted us to know how to properly view Jesus Christ.

Instead of focusing on how He may have looked in the past, we should think about Christ’s appearance in terms of how He looks *today*—as a soon-coming KING who will rule all nations!

This is a very different picture from the one invoked by traditional Christianity, which has its emphasis on feelings, emotions and physical things. The Bible calls this approach a false “form of godliness” (II Tim. 3:5). This is especially true of a cross.

People own crosses and other religious items to feel religious. But the

Second Commandment clearly prohibits *any* rendering of Christ’s or the Father’s appearance or any other religious image: “You shall not make unto yourself any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: you shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them” (Ex. 20:4-5).

Crosses are crafted—“graven”—by human hands. They are made from materials of the “earth beneath.” Similarly, depictions or images of Jesus Christ or God the Father (who dwell in heaven above) are also created by human hands. Many people bow down to and worship both, treating them as objects of adoration and reverence.

Any picture, image or statue of Jesus Christ or God is in *clear violation* of the Second Commandment, and this includes all crosses and crucifixes. All such icons become the object of worship, which breaks the First Commandment as well: “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex. 20:3).

Ancient Israel constantly fell into worshipping physical objects, such as the golden calf in Exodus 32. It is no different today.

Physically minded human beings desire physical representations of God, as well as physical symbols to which they can attach meaning. They find it hard (in fact impossible) to worship a God they cannot see. Yet Hebrews 11:1 and 6 states that we must believe God exists even though we cannot see Him.

God is composed of spirit. He does not consist of anything made by human hands, of wood, stone, gold, silver, ivory or otherwise. God seeks those who will worship Him in *spirit* and *truth* (John 4:23-24)—not with physical objects.

See the cross symbol for what it is—pagan! Its meanings and symbolism do not honor God or Jesus Christ. The Bible clearly teaches that God’s people must not practice or tolerate *any* pagan ways, customs, traditions or practices (Deut. 7:1-6; Jer. 10:1-5; Rev. 18:1-4).

The Right Focus

How *should* a person honor Jesus Christ? What kind of worship does He approve?

Allow God’s Word to answer: “For even hereunto were you called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an *example*, that you should follow His steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him [God] that judges righteously” (I Pet. 2:21-23).

Worshipping God in “spirit and truth” means following the example set for us by Jesus Christ. It means patterning your life after Him. Your focus should be on how He lived—in complete submission to the Father—faithfully obeying all of the Commandments, including the Second Commandment.

He said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Also, “If you keep My commandments, you shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love” (John 15:10).

Simply put, love for—worship of—God can only truly be expressed by *active* commandment-keeping. Our faith must be accompanied by actions (Jms. 2:20). Jesus Christ never wore a cross, and neither should His followers. True Christianity is a way of life you LIVE—the exact same way Jesus Christ lived while on Earth—it is not demonstrated by any religious symbols and objects.

While you can be “justified by His blood” (Rom. 5:9), forgiven of past sins by His death, the next verse clarifies that you are “saved by His *life*” (vs. 10).

Rather than focusing primarily on Christ’s death, which is the central purpose for displaying the cross, you should emulate His life! If you will allow it, He will live that very same commandment-keeping life in you.

For a thorough examination of how you can keep the Commandments as Jesus did, read our free book *The Ten Commandments – “Nailed to the Cross” or Required for Salvation?* at rcg.org/syottc. □



AP ILLUSTRATION/ANNIE NG

SEEKING CLARITY in the Workplace

Modern job expectations are murkier than ever. With proven business habits—backed by God’s Word—you can rise above the confusion.

BY GARRICK R. OXLEY

WHEN NIKELLE Inman started a new job coaching first-generation college students, she looked forward to meeting with them one-on-one—helping them overcome obstacles and find the tools to succeed.

Instead, she and her fellow success coaches at a North Carolina community college spent the year buried in paperwork, reviewing student applications. They never met with a single student.

“Admissions work kind of took over what we were supposed to do,” Ms. Inman said. “I felt disengaged with the position, more so because I just didn’t feel valued.”

It is disorienting when a job turns out to be nothing like what was advertised or changes into something unexpected. A recent Gallup survey found that less than half of U.S. workers strongly agree that they know what is expected of them—a sharp drop from pre-pandemic levels.

Confusion at work has become common. But it does not have to be your norm.

When roles are vague or priorities unclear, clarity comes from combining smart workplace habits with timeless truths. The Bible offers more than spiritual guidance—it affirms the value of diligent, purposeful work and outlines practical steps for success. In fact, it is the ultimate guidebook for navigating confusion on the job.

God wants everyone to be confident and effective in every part of their lives—including in the workplace. The Fourth Commandment, which tells people to keep the Sabbath, does not just say to rest one day out of seven. It begins with this: “Six days *shall you labor*, and do all your work” (Ex. 20:9). God does not want you to be confused or uncertain for the majority of the week!

“In all labor there is profit,” Solomon said in Proverbs 14:23. Applying God’s mind to your job will allow you to profit and succeed despite any challenges you face.

Here are practical Bible-backed strategies for eliminating confusion when your job becomes ambiguous.

Source of Clarity

Managers and employees have been grappling with disruptive changes since COVID-19 first upended public life five years ago. By 2024, Gallup reported a sharp rise in remote and hybrid work compared to 2019. About a quarter of employees worked entirely from home, and more than half split their time between home and office.

This mishmash of remote and in-person workers, and many transitioning back to the office after being away, has been a recipe for turmoil.

More recently, layoffs at tech companies, in the government and in other sectors have left organizations with fewer people to handle the load, and expectations are not always adjusted to the new realities.

“With all the rounds of layoffs, people’s scope and responsibilities are shifting constantly,” said Jeremy Guttenplan, an executive leadership trainer and

coach based in New York. “You think about the ones left behind and the work is just getting piled on them.”

The result? A complicated, chaotic work environment. But there is hope.

Psalms 119 says, “Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (vs. 105). The Bible provides clarity in all areas of life. It illuminates which way we should go.

Paul adds to this, “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace” (I Cor. 14:33). Modern society brings confusion. God brings peace. And peace begins with knowing what is expected of you.

Establish Expectations Early

Clear planning is not just a good strategy—it is a biblical principle. Proverbs 24:27 says, “Prepare your work without, and make it fit for yourself in the field; and afterwards build your house.”

This highlights the importance of doing foundational preparation before jumping into larger tasks—an essential habit in any job or project.

Jesus Christ also emphasized the importance of planning: “For which of you, intending to build a tower, sits not down first, and counts the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?” (Luke 14:28). Planning is not optional—it is critical to avoiding failure and unmet expectations.

Rushing into work without setting clear goals often leads to disappointment, while diligence and foresight bring abundance.

Proverbs 21 says, “The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one that is hasty only to want.” (vs. 5). Diligent actions begin with diligent thinking.

How can you apply this? Spell out or make sure you understand what a new role or project entails—along with any relevant deadlines or performance markers—from the beginning, so everyone agrees on what is realistic and wanted. Capturing this information in a shared document can help prevent future misunderstandings.

When a successful real estate developer asked Amber Krasinski to film

and produce 85 TikTok videos in three hours, she thought hard about it. The job might be good exposure for her communications agency, IvyHill Strategies, but Ms. Krasinski knew it would be impossible to complete in so little time. She turned it down.

Ms. Krasinski regularly gives her clients progress updates and tries to make a practice of asking clarifying questions before taking on new projects.

“Any time I have a conversation with a prospective client, I have that in the back of my mind,” she said. “Avoiding that people-pleasing side that says, ‘You can figure it out, you can do it.’ You do not want to let anybody down, but you also need to set yourself up for success.”

Without clear direction, employees often start projects they cannot finish—frustrating both them and their teams. Strive to set expectations early and plan ahead. This can make all the difference in charting a clear path at work.

Seek Frequent Feedback

Having consistent, open dialogue with those who have perspective and insight protects individuals—and teams—from making mistakes. Proverbs 15:22 says, “Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counselors they are established.” We need outside input to stay on track.

Proverbs 20:5 compares wise counsel to deep water—drawing it out takes effort and understanding. Sometimes you have to go the extra mile to get someone’s attention or get on their calendar, but the effort is worth it.

No one wants to spend all day in meetings. But more frequent check-ins with a manager or supervisor may help staff members who are unsure if they are prioritizing their time appropriately or do not know what they are supposed to be doing.

Organizations are exploring different ways of building connections between employees and providing more opportunities for feedback.

This can result in better understanding of workplace expectations. Brian Smith, founder and managing partner of IA Business Advisors, said

his company hosts gratitude sessions for 30 minutes each week.

The first 20 minutes are led by a coach who advises attendees on issues such as how to effectively manage time or deal with challenging customers. Highlighting specific problems and strategies can help workers understand what is needed from them. At the end of the session, participants have an opportunity to share what they are grateful for.

While most workplaces may not feature gratitude sessions, it is easy to see that the increased communication paid off. Look for where you can participate in workplace gatherings or start dialogue where there is none. Open communication fights ambiguity.

The biblical principle of getting counsel does not just apply to those in your workplace. If you are struggling at work, you can talk openly with a friend or family member after hours. Their fresh perspective could make all the difference.

This approach aligns with Proverbs 27:17: “Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another” (English Standard Version). Constructive dialogue strengthens productivity and morale.

Wise Communication

Workers do not have to wait for a supervisor to seek feedback or clarify expectations. You can suggest a quick check-in at any point, if you are unsure how to prioritize long-term goals or short-term deadlines.

“Managing upwards is going to make your life easier,” said Dale Whelehan, founder of 4 Day World, a think tank that explores new models of work. “Do not assume that management has all the answers. They are probably just as lost.”

However, in hierarchical organizations where questioning management may be viewed negatively, it is important to be delicate, he said.

That is why it is important to think through what you say and how you say it. Colossians 4:6 says, “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought

to answer every man.” Even if you feel like you are at your wit’s end, adding some grace and kindness is essential. If this is hard for you, ask God for help.

Strive to cultivate a winning personality that makes others enjoy working with you. Proverbs 11:30 sums up this approach: “He that wins souls is wise.”

To initiate a feedback discussion, you can ask to meet with a manager about a current project.

Mr. Whelehan outlined how to approach the conversation if the meeting gets scheduled. Start by sharing what you understand your assignment to be. Then request the manager’s confirmation or clarification by saying something such as, “I just want to make sure that there is alignment here,” he advised.

Ask about anything else you need to clarify and close out the conversation by saying, “From what I understand from this conversation, my role is this...Have I understood that correctly?”

Then, follow up with an email restating what you agreed to, Mr. Whelehan said.

Too often, employees remain silent, unsure whether to speak up. But effective communication can be key to transforming unclear roles into well-defined ones.

James 1:5 encourages those who lack direction to ask for it: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (New American Standard Bible). Seeking clarity is not weakness—it is wise.

Reaching Workplace Success

In today’s workplace, success is not just about skill. It is about navigating uncertainty with God’s help. When things feel chaotic, pause. Revisit your priorities. Then focus on the most important task. Ecclesiastes 9:10 says, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.”

Even as you navigate challenging situations, hold on to a strong work ethic. This will set you apart from oth-

ers who may be paralyzed by all the uncertainty.

“If something doesn’t feel right, don’t just accept it,” Ms. Inman said. “Whatever that avenue is, if it’s staying and trying to make it better or leaving, just don’t give up on what you know is right.”

Let “what you know is right” be shaped by God’s Word—not just instinct.

Colossians 3:23 offers timeless guidance: “Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men.” We should work as though we are serving God, regardless of where we are employed or who we work with.

Ephesians 6:5-9 builds on this. It provides instructions for both “servants” and “masters”—in today’s terms, employees and employers. Servants are told to “be obedient,” and “with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men,” while masters are instructed to “do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven.”

These verses reveal a mutual accountability rooted in respect, fairness and diligence—a model for ideal professional relationships.

Even if a manager or co-worker may be difficult to work with, the takeaway is clear: What you do at work matters to God. He wants you to set a righteous example. You should take your job seriously and show a godly work ethic at all times.

Jesus said, “My Father works hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17). In chapter 9, He added: “I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day” (vs. 4).

Christ was the perfect example of godly work ethic. Apply His mindset, and you will not only gain clarity at work—you will earn favor with both God and man (Luke 2:52). You will have confidence and clarity in your job, regardless of the challenges that arise.

To learn more about lasting success—in the workplace and in life in general—read our Editor-in-Chief David C. Pack’s booklet *The Laws to Success* at rcg.org/tlts. □

AI Is Turbocharging Organized Crime, EU Police Agency Warns

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) – The European Union’s law enforcement agency cautioned that artificial intelligence is turbocharging organized crime that is eroding the foundations of societies across the 27-nation bloc as it becomes intertwined with state-sponsored destabilization campaigns.

The grim warning came at the launch of the latest edition of a report on organized crime published every four years by Europol that is compiled using data from police across the EU and will help shape law enforcement policy in the bloc in coming years.

“Cybercrime is evolving into a digital arms race targeting governments, businesses and individuals. AI-driven

attacks are becoming more precise and devastating,” said Europol’s Executive Director Catherine De Bolle.

“Some attacks show a combination of motives of profit and destabilization, as they are increasingly state-aligned and ideologically motivated,” she added.

The report, the EU Serious and Organized Crime Threat Assessment 2025, said offenses ranging from drug trafficking to people smuggling, money laundering, cyber attacks and online scams undermine society and the rule of law “by generating illicit proceeds, spreading violence, and normalizing corruption.”

The volume of child sexual abuse material available online has

increased significantly because of AI, which makes it more difficult to analyze imagery and identify offenders, the report said.

“By creating highly realistic synthetic media, criminals are able to deceive victims, impersonate individuals and discredit or blackmail targets. The addition of AI-powered voice cloning and live video deepfakes amplifies the threat, enabling new forms of fraud, extortion, and identity theft,” it added.

States seeking geopolitical advantage are also using criminals as contractors, the report said, citing cyberattacks against critical infrastructure and public institutions “originating from Russia and countries in its sphere of influence.”

“Hybrid and traditional cybercrime actors will increasingly be intertwined, with state-sponsored actors masking themselves as cybercriminals to conceal their origin and real disruption motives,” it said.

Polish Interior Ministry Undersecretary of State Maciej Duszczyk cited a March cyberattack on a hospital as the latest example in his country.

“Unfortunately this hospital has to stop its activity for the hours because it was lost to a serious cyber-attack,” boosted by AI, he said.

AI and other technologies “are a catalyst for crime, and drive criminal operations’ efficiency by amplifying their speed, reach, and sophistication,” the report said.

As the European Commission prepares to launch a new internal security policy, Ms. De Bolle said that nations in Europe need to tackle the threats urgently.

“We must embed security into everything we do,” said European Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration Magnus Brunner. He added that the EU aims to provide enough funds in coming years to double Europol’s staff. □



The exterior view of the European police agency Europol headquarters in The Hague, Netherlands (Dec. 2, 2016).

AP/MIKE CORDER

Global Displacement to Rise by 6.7 Million People by End of Next Year

GENEVA (Reuters) – Some 6.7 million additional people are expected to be newly displaced around the world by the end of next year, the Danish Refugee Council said, just as aid cuts from key donors like the United States took effect.

The UN refugee agency said last year that the number of forcibly displaced people around the globe stood at over 117 million people and warned that number could rise.

“These are not cold statistics. These are families forced to flee their homes, carrying next to nothing, and searching for water, food, and shelter,” said Charlotte Slente, secretary general of the Danish Refugee Council in a statement.

Twenty-seven countries account for nearly a third of all global displacements. The projection is based on an AI-driven model that predicts displacement trends by analyzing over 100 indicators including factors such as security, politics and economics in those countries.

It forecasts that nearly a third of new displacements will be from Sudan, which is already the world’s worst refugee crisis after two years of war. Another 1.4 million people are expected to be forcibly displaced from Myanmar, the report said.

Washington is cutting billions of dollars in foreign aid programs globally as part of a major spending

overhaul by the world’s biggest aid donor.

The Danish Refugee Council is one of the aid groups hit and has had more than 20 contract terminations.

Cuts from Washington and other key donors are already impacting refugees.

The UN refugee agency said that funding shortages had shuttered programs to protect adolescent girls from child marriage in South Sudan and a safe house for displaced women in danger of being killed in Ethiopia.

“Millions are facing starvation and displacement, and just as they need us most, wealthy nations are slashing aid. It’s a betrayal of the most vulnerable,” said Ms. Slente. □



Rohingya refugee children walk along at the Kutupalang refugee camp in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh (June 26, 2024).

REUTERS/MOHAMMAD PONIR HOSSAIN

Majority of the World's Population Breathes Dirty Air

BENGALURU, India (AP) – Most of the world has dirty air, with just 17 percent of cities globally meeting air pollution guidelines, a report found.

Switzerland-based air quality monitoring database IQAir analyzed data from 40,000 air quality monitoring stations in 138 countries and found that Chad, Congo, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India had the dirtiest air. India had six of the nine most polluted cities with the industrial town of Byrnihat in northeastern India the worst.

Experts said the real amount of air pollution might be far greater as many parts of the world lack the monitoring needed for more accurate data. In Africa, for example, there is only one monitoring station for every 3.7 million people.

More air quality monitors are being set up to counter the issue, the report said. This year, report authors were able to incorporate data from 8,954 new locations and around a thousand new monitors as a result of efforts to better monitor air pollution.

But data monitoring for air pollution was dealt a blow when the U.S. State Department announced it would no longer make public its data from its embassies and consulates around the world.

Breathing in polluted air over a long period of time can cause respiratory illness, Alzheimer's disease and cancer, said Fatimah Ahamad, chief scientist and air pollution expert at Malaysia-based Sunway Centre for Planetary Health. The World Health Organization estimates that air pollution kills around 7 million people each year.

Dr. Ahamad said much more needs to be done to cut air pollution levels.

The WHO had earlier found that 99 percent of the world's population lives in places that do not meet recommended air quality levels.

"If you have bad water, no water, you can tell people to wait for half an hour a day, the water will come. But if you have bad air, you cannot tell people to pause breathing," she said.

Several cities like Beijing, Seoul, South Korea, and Rybnik in Poland

have successfully improved their air quality through stricter regulations on pollution from vehicles, power plants and industry. They have also promoted cleaner energy and invested in public transportation.

Another notable effort to curb severe air pollution was the Association of Southeast Asian Nations agreement on transboundary haze pollution. Even though it has had limited success so far, ten countries in the region pledged to work together to monitor and curb pollution from large forest fires, a common occurrence in the region during dry seasons. □



A sweeper cleans as smog envelops the area and reduces visibility in Lahore, Pakistan (Jan. 11, 2024).

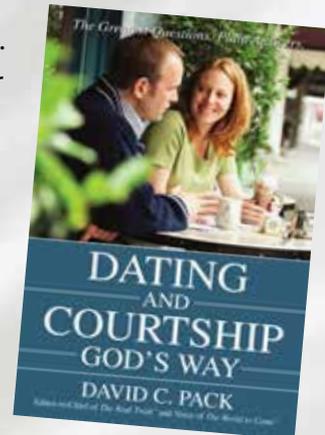
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