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END  
TIMES



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# WATCH!

It seemed the time to do an issue on the end times. After all, dispensational theology and a pre-tribulation rapture are deep in the DNA of the Charis Fellowship.



**Recent current events have been bewildering. Biblical lifestyles, once the moral standard of our culture, are flagrantly ignored, even mocked. Disease and destruction are rampant, causing life as we knew it, especially within the last year, to be a fleeting memory. The future seems tenuous. I watch the news and whisper, “Come, Lord Jesus!”**

It seemed the time to do an issue on the end times. After all, dispensational theology and a pre-tribulation rapture are deep in the DNA of the Charis Fellowship.

My mother, who began to follow Christ at age 12 at the country church near her home, once said she didn’t learn that Jesus was coming again until she was a student at Ashland College in the 1930s. She recalled that those in the Brethren movement (now Charis Fellowship) believed that the clock was at the 11th hour. Jesus could come any time!

It was the middle of the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression. Yet it was before World War II, the horrors of the Holocaust, the rise of Communism, the Vietnam War, or any number of other seemingly catastrophic events that have shaped our lives.

Certainly, situations in the world couldn’t get worse. Jesus wouldn’t let that happen. Or would He?

Standing by a babbling brook at Caesarea Philippi several years ago, I listened to Dr. Randy Smith teach about the ancient culture in that region. It sounded strangely like today’s society, except perhaps with a sadistic twist. The things people did in those days in an attempt to appease the gods or find pleasure

were unspeakable. No wonder the Christians were probably whispering, “Come, Lord Jesus!” They thought he was going to return any day.

If my mother’s generation and people more than 2,000 years ago thought we were at the 11th hour before Jesus returned, we must be at 11:59:59.

Or not.

Scripture teaches that no one knows the day or the hour. He could come before I finish writing this piece. (If you are reading it, He didn’t.) Or He could wait another 90, 190, 1,900 years or longer.

“Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’” (Mark 13:35-37 NIV).

I trust this issue of *GraceConnect* magazine will help as you watch for our Lord’s return.

This is one of two issues of the magazine you will receive this year, Lord willing. Watch for a combined Summer-Fall issue in mid-summer on the theme of hope.

As you plan your giving this month, consider a gift to *GraceConnect*. Our mission is to nurture great commission teamwork between the people and churches of the Charis Fellowship by building bridges of communication. You’ll find stories that encourage that teamwork in the pages of this magazine, online at [graceconnect.us](http://graceconnect.us), and in the *GraceConnect eNews*. Your vital financial support of this ministry allows us to continue to pursue our mission. Simply go online at [graceconnect.us](http://graceconnect.us) and click on the blue “Donate Now” button.

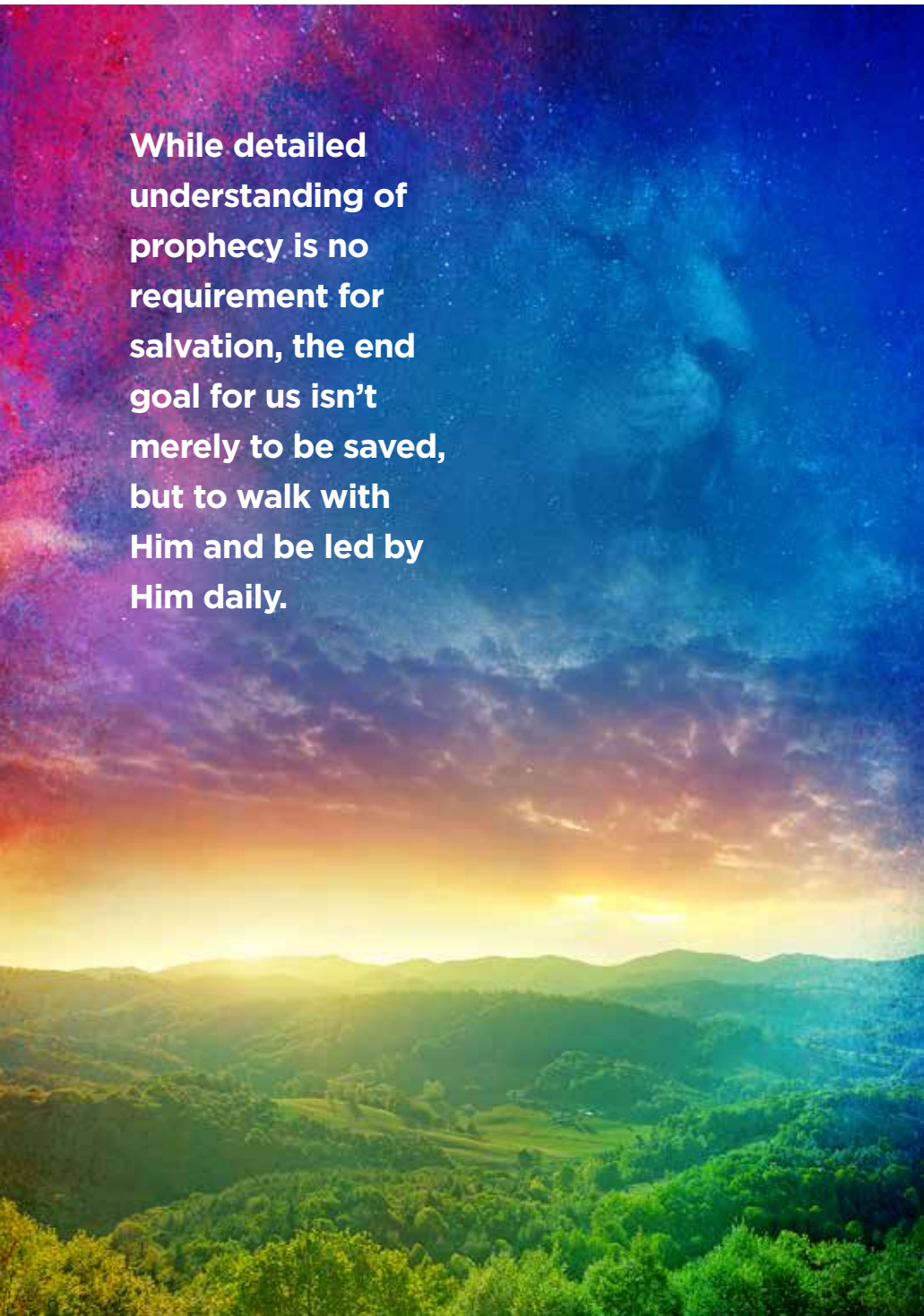


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# IS BIBLICAL PROPHECY IMPORTANT?

by Dr. Randy Smith



While detailed understanding of prophecy is no requirement for salvation, the end goal for us isn't merely to be saved, but to walk with Him and be led by Him daily.

Not long ago, I “masked up” and met a fellow pastor at a coffee shop to help him choose a subject for his upcoming preaching series. Because of this “series of unfortunate events” that popularly became known as 2020, I casually suggested preaching from a prophetic book.

“I am really struggling to keep our congregation engaged in serious study,” the pastor admitted, “and the *last* thing I want to do is start into any passage that will sound speculative, or could be easily sensationalized by the news, or become congregationally divisive.”

He flatly asked me, “Why should I include prophetic passages in the preaching diet of our church when even *mature* Christians don’t agree on what they all mean?”

It was a thoughtful question, and it deserved a serious answer.

After all, any who have tried to teach through prophetic books will admit the study to “rightly divide the text” can be quite intense, and it doesn’t easily lend itself to offering a myriad of practical instructions that equip today’s struggling families to practice their faith or reach out with the Gospel.

The notion of impracticality probably wouldn’t be surprising if the prophets themselves heard the objection! Those men and their message have always been a point of contention. Long after God revealed to Moses the nature and work of both priests and Levites, He raised up the office of “seer” or “prophet.” While priests were carefully schooled in practices of atonement sacrifices and were generally

## PROPHECY MAKES CLEAR THAT HE ALONE WILL DRAW THINGS TO A CULMINATION IN HIS TIME.



well-respected in the ancient Jewish community, prophets came from diverse backgrounds, and were not as widely (or easily) accepted. They didn't conform to a singular training method, though Elijah and Elisha did minister in some sort of "school of the prophets."

The work of the prophet was to lend voice (and sometimes written word) to "God's view of events" and allow people to pick out the underlying and permanent spiritual meanings that were too often veiled. It wasn't always easy to understand the point of each prophecy, and many demonstrate multiple fulfillments, particularly when they related to a type of Messiah, and also to to His work.

**W**ith all that possible ambiguity, why would we deem prophetic study as important for a believer's growth and discipleship? Let me suggest several reasons:

**First, prophecy is important because it is an extensive part of God's revealed truth.** Dr. James Gray, the third president of Moody Bible Institute, once noted, "Taking it in bulk, more than one-half of the Bible is predictive, so no further reason is necessary as to why Christians should study prophecy."

Assuming God knew what we needed better than we do, we would be wise to be wary of anyone who casually dismisses parts of the Bible as "less relevant" to a proper understanding of our Heavenly Father and our mission. While detailed understanding of prophecy is no requirement for

salvation, the end goal for us isn't merely to be saved, but to walk with Him and be led by Him daily. By calling us to know His Word, and by including predictive prophecy in His Word, God signaled His expectation that His people will pay attention to prophetic messages, and avoid being misled by false prophets and error.

Perhaps that is why the Apostle Paul sternly warned the Thessalonians about those teaching false versions of end-time prophecy and used the words, "Let no one deceive you." Paul was not alone. Jesus warned in Matthew 24 of some who will deceive many—including God's chosen people, if they aren't well versed and discerning of the holy text when the time arrives.

**Second, prophetic portions offer important answers to questions about the spiritual world.** People who are led by Jesus want to know what happens to them when they die, and what will happen to the world in the coming days. Is there a resurrection of the dead and when will it occur? How and when is God's judgment? These questions are more than fleeting curiosity. They help settle us as we mature in our faith.

**Third, prophecy reminds us that patience is a virtue and waiting on God is a necessary discipline for every believer.** James (James 5:7-9) reminded us that we must "be patient" until the coming of the Lord, like the farmer who scans a dry field and awaits coming rains. "Instant" is not a normal descriptor for God's work. He tends to work through extended processes over significant periods. Knowledge of the basics of His revealed

plan can build enduring confidence in His control of every event leading to the end of the story, but we will be forced to learn to wait on Him.


**Fourth, prophetic portions help us keep perspective over life's hardship and pain.** Rehearsing prophetic timelines can reduce punishing frustration in tough times. We can watch the rise of a Hitler, Stalin, or Bin Laden and become deeply dismayed unless we draw on the revelation of our Savior's promised return and days ahead when He will set the books straight. Such prophecies help us construct a stable foundation offering courage during time of trial as we trust that God's hand is directing events with purpose. Prophecy makes clear that He alone will draw things to a culmination in His time. In the darkest moment, we can recall that one day the King of Kings will be revealed to all as the Victor. When we are certain of the outcome and understand some of the purpose of troubles, perhaps we can endure pain.

**Fifth, studying prophecy should spur me toward a more distinct (holy) walk.** The Apostle Peter called for believers to "prepare their minds for action, keep sober in spirit," as he reminded: "The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer." (1 Peter 4:7).


Consider how engaging passages on the return of Jesus, and an anticipated face-to-face meeting with Him at the Bema Seat of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 3 and 2 Cor. 5) can impact our daily choices. Like people who "put on the breaks" when they see a police car beside the high-



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## UNRESOLVED CASES FROM EARTH WITH THEIR UNSETTLED VICTIMS FIND ULTIMATE SOLACE IN THE FACT THAT THE JUDGE HAS OVERLOOKED NOTHING.

way, students of prophecy are reminded of coming events and a time when we will give account of our actions to Jesus, and that should cause us to make better choices.

### **Sixth, prophecy can prepare us so we are not overwhelmed by evil.**

When darkness rolls in like a storm, it is hard to remain positive and feel our efforts are not being over-run by forces far more powerful than our own. The description given by Paul in 2 Timothy 3 of “people of the last days” speaks powerfully about the world believers will find themselves engulfed within. Listen to the description (my paraphrase):

*It will be a society filled with people who who think highly of those who shamelessly brag, appear openly haughty and don't bind their tongue before uttering things fully insulting to God and that which He called sacred. Loud voices will promote lost respect for authority and feel entitled to whatever they choose. They won't abstain from flagrant violation of Biblical morality; won't cherish the boundaries that God placed on life and won't feel the need to live up to promises and contracts if they change their mind. They will seem unable to govern their behaviors, and will have lost sensitivity to those hurt by their trampling of what went before them. They will laugh at, celebrate and entertain themselves with evil but won't prize good. They will want change even if it is reckless and openly believe they are worth much even if they have accomplished little. Paul's list ends with this: they will quote verses and use the Bible in their speech – but not within the context and purpose for which they were revealed.*

We can wring our hands and wag our fingers at such a lost world, but that was not the driving force behind this prophetic warning. The warnings were to allow the church to know the signs of the end, and to enable shepherds (and through them all believers) to get prepared to navigate this kind of world. It was to keep believers from being overwhelmed by evil and increasingly press them to remain courageous in spite of surroundings. In short, believers were warned so they could be prepared. Standing in shock and disbelief, the church would lose valuable time mounting a response to changed conditions. Yet, God gave us a graphic depiction beforehand.

**Seventh, prophecy doesn't just expose events of the future; it exposes God's character.** How exciting it is to know more about our Creator! How powerful the picture of the “Lion of the tribe of Judah” as set forth in the pages of the Bible's final book! Of all that we can know of our God, perhaps these three characteristics are best reflected in the prophetic words:

**Prophets laid bare the unparalleled power of God.** No scene can better depict the might of the Creator than reading about the “Great White Throne” judgment near the very end of the Bible. There is no place to flee God's judgment, and no one powerful enough to contend with Him.

In that same way, **prophecy profoundly exposed the justice of God.** The final scenes of human history unfold to declare God has the absolute right to have all things subjected

to Him. In His Word, He never minimizes sin, nor hides its devastating effects. Unresolved cases from earth with their unsettled victims find ultimate solace in the fact that the judge has overlooked *nothing*. Every unconvicted criminal and rapist will stand trial, and every victim wounded so deeply in this life will find peace in the presence of the One Who sees all, remembers all, and holds all to account.

It is also true **the prophecies hold out a message of the love of God for His creation.** Sitting on a hillside overlooking Nineveh, Jonah argued with God about the forgiveness He offered the repentant gentiles, but the prophet got a front row seat to see God's joy in offering grace. Jonah saw God's love drive God's proclamation. Prophecy, then, like every other part of God's revealed Word doesn't just lead us to know events and timelines, they lead us to know God in ways we might not see Him if those portions were neglected.

**P**rophecy is an essential part of our spiritual diet, so God included it in the book. He called us to know and trust Him. He beckons us to recognize the times and seasons and be ready to meet Him soon. The time between pronouncements of coming judgment and that day of adjudication is “grace time.” That probably best describes our moment in history right now.

*Dr. Randy Smith is the founder of Great Commission Bible Institute and served as teaching pastor at Grace Church, Sebring, Fla. He is also the founder of Christian Travel Study Programs and frequently leads study tours of Israel, Italy, Greece, and other Mediterranean countries.*



# REVELATION:

## AN INTERPRETATION

by Dan Thornton

Have you found your life to be in Christ?

Then you know that focusing on Christ is the first step to healing.

All suffering becomes bearable when seen alongside the love, power, and glory of Jesus Christ.

### SUFFERING SERVANTS, MEET YOUR ONCE-SUFFERING SAVIOR

#### *Revelation 1*

Are you a servant of Jesus? If not, stop reading now. Are you suffering as a servant for the Lord? Then the message of Revelation is definitely for you. Keep reading.

God gave this drama to Jesus Christ, who gave it to His angel, who showed it to me, John, so I could describe it for the servants of Jesus, servants who are suffering. Long-suffering brings doubt; persecution gives multiplied opportunities to turn away from Jesus, and the solution to doubt and the painful temptation is this drama. You will see herein that martyrdom ends in glory, justice will have its day, and you can trust Jesus through death into resurrection.

Have you found your life to be in Christ? Then you know that focusing on Christ is the first step to healing. All suffering becomes bearable when seen alongside the love, power, and glory of Jesus Christ. So, prepare to see Jesus in a new light; the firstborn from the dead (yes, he was martyred), who freed us by His blood (yes, there can be a purpose in unjust punishment).

I, John, understand your suffering and longsuffering. Remember, it was my service for the Savior that landed me here on Patmos, isolated, lonely, feeling abandoned. What does a servant need most? To serve, remaining useful and valuable to his lord. And what an assignment God gave me! I saw Jesus in his glory. To see Him made me as



# MYSTERY AND SORROW ENDED WHEN I WAS TOLD THAT THE TRIUMPHANT LION OF JUDAH WAS WORTHY TO OPEN THE SCROLL.



nothing, lifeless, until ... until I was reminded that this overwhelming Living Lord was at one time dead. Our Glory, after loving us to the death, is now alive forever and ever!

## MARCHING ORDERS

### *Revelation 2-3*

Suffering servants! Atten...hut! Quickly and dutifully arrange your ripped and bloody clothing, ready to receive new orders. And look around – hear the orders for yourselves and others. Like Elijah of old, take solace in knowing you are not alone.

There is cause for encouragement. Some of you are working hard, opposing wicked men, persevering in hardship, enduring slander, remaining true, keeping God's word, and enduring patiently. Yet, Jesus also has words of criticism. Some of you are carrying on without your first love. Some have tolerated false teachers, have lost your real life, or are wretched and pitiful. What are you to do? Repent. Overcome. Hold on. Be earnest. Then, oh the glory! Remain faithful and obedient to the very end, to death if need be, and you will eat from the tree of life, receiving a crown of life, authority over the nations, and a position sharing Jesus' throne. The promises are for you.

The letters from Jesus to his churches are complete.

## SWEEP OF HISTORY

### *Revelation 4-6*

But there's more? The messages to each of you seemed complete. Rebuke,

correction, instruction, and promise – what more is needed? God wants you to be overcome by the majestic significance of your suffering and the eternal glory your obedience will bring. Consider this – your sacrifice and your faithfulness will be passed down to others, whose sufferings will be even more painful and more glorious, until the unfathomable victory at the end. So, don't give up.

I was taken to heaven, surrounded by the glories of God, His attendants praising, His audience worshipping; with colors and lightning, music and thunder filling the senses.

Then, wonder! All attention focused on a magnificent seven-sealed scroll, held by God himself. Mystery and sorrow ended when I was told that the triumphant Lion of Judah was worthy to open the scroll. Surprisingly, instead of a Lion, there appeared a Lamb, looking like its throat had been slit. Why was He worthy to do what no one else in the universe could do? He was worthy for the very fact that He had been slain. Remember, suffering ones, that you follow a Savior who has received all honor and glory and is fit to be judge of all mankind – because He suffered and died. The greatest Victor of all is proud to appear as a slain Lamb.

He did open the seals and what tragedy he initiated! Conquest, violence, out-of-control inflation, and death marched out over the earth until one out of four people were killed. It is just as Jesus said. Wars will escalate, famine will multiply, and persecution

and martyrdom will get worse, all before the end.

Then, how strange, the growing number of martyrs, whose spirits were finding refuge under God's throne asked the question you ask every time someone else in your church is killed for his faith, "When? How long until judgment comes? Isn't God going to do something about this? When will there be justice?"

The answer? "Not yet ... but soon!"

And soon it was! As if in reply, the next seal-opening shook the heavens and the earth supernaturally, bringing such devastation that all people left on earth were terrified. More importantly, they all knew the judgment of God had begun. Maybe this is when all living believers were taken to heaven in what is called the Rapture. Maybe the chaos led to totally different political structures. Maybe this is when the Antichrist started his beastly treaty with Israel – but I'm getting ahead. To the world, it was obvious God showed up and was angry.

## FINAL HEROES AND JUDGMENT

### *Revelation 7-10*

Even in judgment, there is grace, and in tribulation there are heroes. Next, I was introduced to the heroes, because they matter the most. The villains can wait. I learned that the point of tribulation is not judgment alone, but redemption amid judgment. What was the great flood without Noah, or Sodom's brimstone without Lot? I saw the glory of God in the 144,000 sealed

BEAR WITH ME – WHAT I NEXT SAW BECAME VERY DARK. THE NUMBER OF NEW PLAYERS WAS OVERWHELMING, ENTERING ONE AT A TIME YET INTERACTING, AND BUILDING IN COMPLEXITY AND EVIL.

and the great multitude slain. The former were sealed by God to give them victory, avoiding death. The latter was introduced with a snapshot from the final act, in heaven, standing victorious because they shared “in the blood of the Lamb.” They will die, holding their faith dear, becoming like Jesus in His resurrection. Oh, to be like them! And some of you will.

After hero introductions, judgment began in earnest, prompted by the imprecatory prayers of God’s people, saved for that day. Whereas the seal judgments were bad, they were tragedies we always face, just worse. The next judgments, introduced by trumpet blasts, were different – much worse. The first four were ecological disasters, destroying one-third of life on planet Earth. The fifth trumpet judgment was a horrible locust/demon mix that had one purpose – to torment people. It lasted five months. The sixth trumpet brought pure evil – 200 million mounted military troops producing plagues of fire, smoke, and sulfur, which killed one-third of mankind. This wasn’t just the “tough times” we face now; this was the unmitigated judgment of God!

There was a purpose to these trumpet plagues: they were calls to repentance, appeals to turn to God away from demons and idols. As you know, there must be communication to achieve repentance. When Moses brought God’s plagues on Egypt, Moses gave a warning and a call to repent before each plague. In the Tribulation mankind “still did not repent.” Someone had been pleading with them. They said “No.”

I was relieved next to see beauty, not tragedy. A mighty angel descended to earth. He was strong, radiant, and loud. He announced, “No more delay.” He said that in the next days the oft-proclaimed prophecy would be fulfilled. He announced it as a positive thing, but I knew. What could be better-marked, in both the teachings of Daniel and Jesus, than “the abomination that causes desolation,” the time so evil that the only proper response is for believers to flee to the mountains? Apparently, I was about to witness the mid-point of Daniel’s seven-year covenant.

## EVIL PIVOTS

### *Revelation 11-13*

Bear with me – what I next saw became very dark. The number of new players was overwhelming, entering one at a time yet interacting, and building in complexity and evil. For each one, some background was given to bring clarity to my spinning mind.

I was glad to see the temple rebuilt, but Gentile presence was still prevalent.

“Two witnesses” were killed, but after a few days, they rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. They had been operating for 3½ years, punctuating their witness with supernatural plagues – apparently the plagues seen in the first four trumpet judgments. Indeed, these two had been the nemesis of those who opposed God for those three-plus years, calling for repentance. When you are opposed, remember their example, and their victory.

Satan himself sought to destroy the true Israel, the followers of Jesus. Nothing new it was, remembering his attempts through Herod to destroy infant Jesus, and God’s protection. The intensity was greater, however, because Satan had led a civil war in heaven, resulting in him being kicked down to earth with all his angels. Knowing his days were limited, Satan devoted his full efforts the next 3½ years to kill the saints.

There was a Beast who blasphemed God, setting himself up as God. This Beast had been empowered by Satan, receiving authority, doing great miracles. A second Beast was a master deceiver, convincing everyone to worship the first Beast, to the point of receiving a mark as a sign of worship, without which no one could buy or sell. Those 3½ years were hell on earth for all who were promised heaven.

## RESCUE

### *Revelation 14-19*

Then, finally! After 3½ years of Jewish believers being excluded from society, unable to buy food, on guard against attack, Jesus showed up! The Lamb came to Jerusalem and the 144,000 stood bravely with him. I easily filled in details from Jesus’ teachings – Jesus descending from the sky in the same manner that he left Jerusalem those many years ago, sending his angels to gather the faithful to him. But note: their faithfulness was marked by remaining sexually pure, and only speaking the truth. Never compromise on those!



## FINALLY, JESUS WENT BACK TO HEAVEN TO BRING DOWN HIS BRIDE, THE CHURCH, TO WITNESS JUSTICE IN ACTION.



The Lamb, Jesus, acted like a lion: winning total victory in only a few days, maybe weeks. He attacked the persecutors with terrible plagues. Their bodies were covered with painful sores. The sea, the rivers, and even the springs of water turned to blood. People were scorched by extreme heat from the sun. Then everything became dark.

In desperation, the nations of the world gave their authority to the Beast, who ordered all their military forces to attack the Lord, gathering at the valley before Megiddo. Did they really think they could defeat Him? A worldwide earthquake plus 100-pound hailstones stopped them in their tracks, leaving them only able to mutter curses against God. Then the Beast's devious purpose became obvious. He used the authority ceded by the other kings to attack and destroy the one power on earth greater than himself, Babylon! At the pause in battle, the kings watched the unimaginable. In the space of one hour, Babylon was destroyed. The world's control center for commerce, finance, and trade was reduced to rising smoke. God used the Beast himself to destroy the entire world economic system.

Finally, Jesus went back to heaven to bring down His bride, the church, to witness justice in action. With the world watching breathlessly, He captured the two beasts, consigning them to hell, and He summarily killed the arrayed armies of the world, already overwhelmed by hopelessness.

### PROMISED KINGDOM

#### *Revelation 20*

Little did I see of the glorious coming kingdom. Maybe there was no need to repeat the grand visions of the prophets. Maybe God knew something different would help you as you face persecution and loss for His sake. I saw Satan bound and thrown into the Abyss. I was told his incarceration would be for 1,000 years. I saw all the souls of the martyrs from the tribulation; they came back to life and were rewarded for their faithfulness with positions of power and responsibility, which I was told would be for 1,000 years, enough time to rebuild a destroyed earth into a paradise.

How fickle people can be! Satan was released, after 1,000 years, and deceived the nations to rebel against God's people, again, only to be devoured by fire from heaven. Then Satan, finally, was thrown into the lake of fire, beginning what would be eternal torment. But not only him. All who had died were resurrected, receiving God's judgment, then were consigned to the lake of fire. Only those whose names were found in the book of life avoided second death.

### NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH

#### *Revelation 21-22*

With unspeakable joy, I share with you the end of Jesus' revelation to me for you. Behold, everything was made new; heaven, earth, and a new Jerusalem coming straight out of heaven, featuring one-on-one connection with God himself.

Don't give up, my friends and fellow servants, because God said, "He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son." And those torturing you now? They will be far away in the lake of burning sulfur, never able to torment you again. And those who have only half-heartedly named the name of Jesus, dragging you down with discouragement? "Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."

And what of your deep longings to serve Jesus more completely, more effectively, with total freedom? "No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and His servants will serve him. And they will reign for ever and ever." Don't miss that – "the throne of the Lamb!" Eternity will be a place where wounded people serve God in glory – and the one who was wounded the most, our Lord Jesus Christ, the slain Lamb, will receive the most glory and will serve the most joyfully; offering water, giving light, and wiping tears.

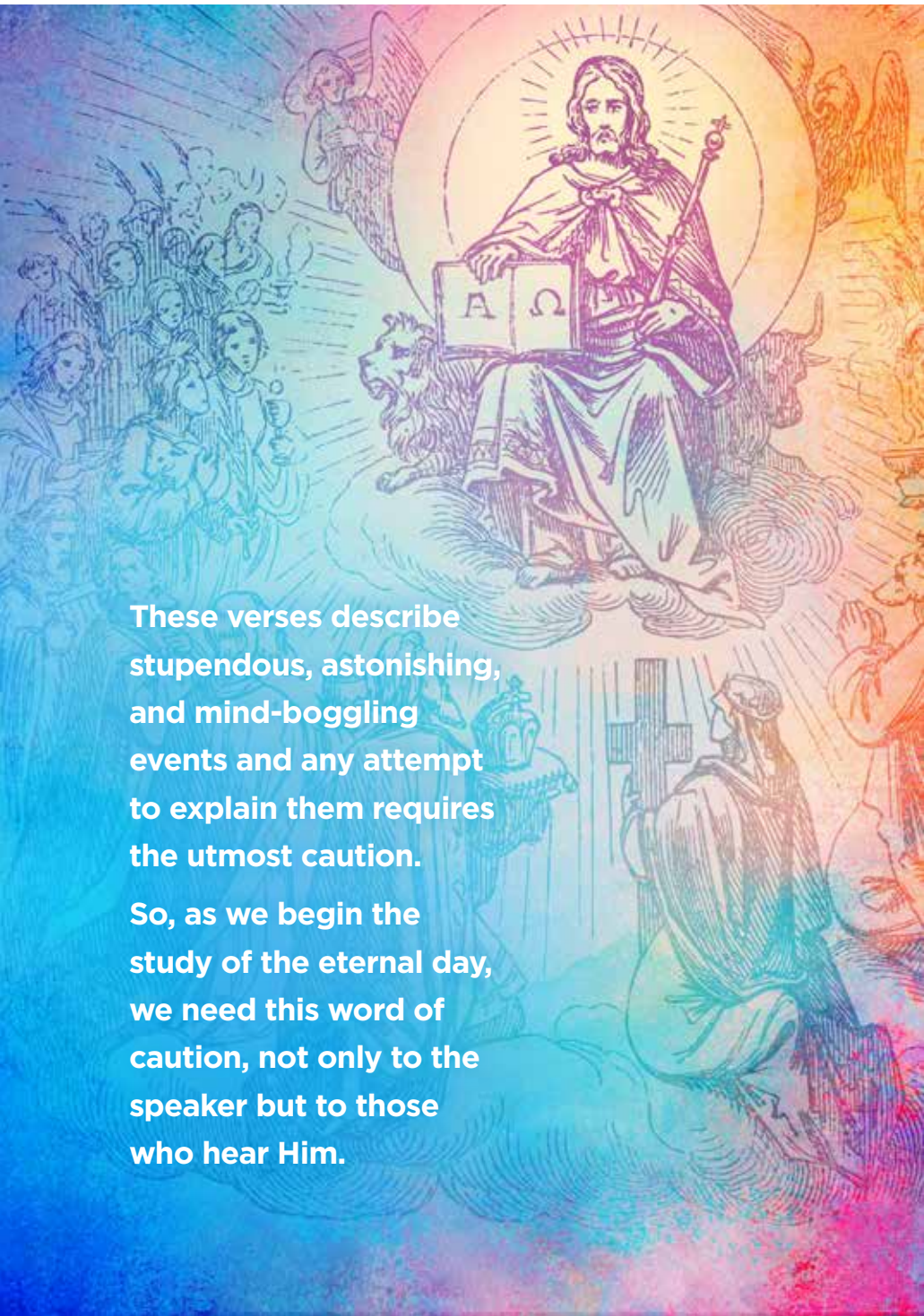
### CONCLUSION

So, stay the course. The time is near. Let your vile and evil tormentors do their worst; you keep doing what is right and holy. Be confident and jubilant! Jesus is coming; rescuing and rewarding. And soon!

*Dan Thornton is executive pastor at Maranatha Brethren Church, Hagerstown, Md.*

# THE ETERNAL STATE

by Herman A. Hoyt



These verses describe stupendous, astonishing, and mind-boggling events and any attempt to explain them requires the utmost caution.

So, as we begin the study of the eternal day, we need this word of caution, not only to the speaker but to those who hear Him.

I want to consider just a few aspects of the eternal state. I say a few because I have outlined about 20 different chapters to deal with this part of Christian truth, and this is just one of six studies.

Look first at Revelation 20:11, “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.”

Now, in chapter 21:1, 5, “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also, there was no more sea... Then He who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’ And He said to me, ‘Write, for these words are true and faithful.’”

These verses describe stupendous, astonishing, and mind-boggling events and any attempt to explain them requires the utmost caution. So, as we begin the study of the eternal day, we need this word of caution, not only to the speaker but to those who hear Him. In 1 Corinthians 2:9, you read: “But as it is written, ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’”

This is the speaker saying that he is absolutely dependent upon God for information concerning the future, and those who hear him are also dependent upon God for the impact upon their minds. There is no light arising out of the entire circle of human resources concerning the future. The sense of sight sees nothing. The sense of hearing receives nothing. The human mentality produces nothing. Nothing but darkness confronts a human being who seeks information concerning



# THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO KNOW THE THINGS OF GOD AND THAT'S TO BE BORN OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD.



the future if his resource is from the human and natural level.

Human speculation has exhausted every possible source for constructing a doctrine concerning the future. And this doctrine includes the eternal state of the damned as well as the blessed felicity of the redeemed.

The great pagan religions of mankind, the great pagan philosophies, the great cult religions that exist today have all sought to drag from the future its secrets and that from a purely natural source. And they leave the seeker, who is searching after knowledge concerning the future, in uncertainty and darkness.

As a result, gross inconsistencies appear in the development of these systems of doctrine. These inconsistencies fly in the face of human intelligence. They undercut moral integrity and they ignore spiritual intuition. And what is far worse, they deliberately contradict biblical revelation.

The fruitage then is a mass of mental darkness, intellectual confusion, and moral dereliction. Certainty of the future then depends wholly on supernatural revelation. God alone can reveal what lies beyond. Here are six essentials as a background for beginning this study.

## **First, God alone knows the future and is able to reveal its secrets.**

This is true because God conceived a plan for the universe even before creation, and there will be no changes or alterations in this plan. There will be no emergencies or thwarting of this plan. He works all things after the counsel of His own will.

In Psalm 33:6 the psalmist declares that God created the entire universe. "By the

word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth." That means He spoke the world into existence. (cf. Genesis 1:3.)

Look at verse 11 of this same Psalm, "The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations." That means when God made a plan, He made just one. It is absolutely comprehensive, it will never be changed, and He works to fulfill that plan to its completion.

That explains how God can utter prophecy. He made a plan. He knows everything in that plan. He is in the process of fulfilling that plan and, therefore, He can prophesy exactly what is going to happen because He promotes that plan to its conclusion.

The writer of Hebrews made a special point about one aspect of God's plan in chapter 6:17, "Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath."

The word immutability means unchangeable, and the word counsel is equivalent to plan. So, God made His purpose very clear in an unchanging plan. Because He knows and plans the future He is able to reveal its secrets as he did to Nebuchadnezzar through Daniel when he was called before the King to interpret a great image and its significance.

Note several verses from Daniel 2. First, verse 18, "that they (Daniel and his three friends) might seek mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret so that Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon." Next, verse 22, "He [that is, God] reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him."

Finally, verse 28, "But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed, were these:" and then Daniel begins to unfold them. Daniel had a strong conviction to stay his heart as he responded to the ruthless King Nebuchadnezzar.

## **Second, God not only is the one who knows the future, but He places divine limitations on the information that has been revealed.**

Not all secret things are revealed to the sons of man. God chooses what shall be revealed to man.

In his final address to the children of Israel, Moses said, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29). The doctrine of the future enables men to live as they ought to live in this present life. God reveals some things to men, all that they need. Other things He does not reveal.

## **Third, the preservation of this revelation concerning the future has been made in the Bible and can be found nowhere else.**

In 1 Corinthians 2:9-12, the Apostle Paul wrote, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so, no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not

A PROCLAIMER AND TEACHER OF THE WORD OF GOD MUST FIRST UNDERSTAND THAT HE IS MERELY A MOUTHPIECE FOR GOD; HE IS NOT AN ORIGINATOR OF TRUTH.

the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

Paul later says, “Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other” (4:6). That’s a way of saying that the individual should never deviate from the written Word of God, for in doing so, you go beyond the realm of truth. Let us, therefore, hold rigidly to the statements of Scripture.

**In the fourth place, the information in the Bible is accessible only to those who are empowered by the Holy Spirit.**

“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (2:14).

And since these Corinthian Christians were priding themselves on being educated and intellectually capable, Paul insists that mental acumen does not qualify a person to receive and understand the things of God. And it makes no difference how much education he has had,

it’s still on the human and natural level. And he is operating in the realm of the psyche, the soul, which is conscious of what the world is like, what he sees, and hears, and smells, and tastes, and feels, and so on, and he doesn’t get outside of that particular realm.

There’s only one way to know the things of God and that’s to be born of the Spirit of God. He alone can enable one to understand the things of the Spirit of God.

Now, Daniel did not hesitate to make this clear to Nebuchadnezzar when he revealed and interpreted his dream. He said in Daniel 2:30, “But as for me, this secret has not been revealed to me

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# THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO KNOW THE THINGS OF GOD AND THAT'S TO BE BORN OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD.



because I have more wisdom than anyone living.” He disclaimed immediately that it was educational preparation that would enable one to understand this.

Only as the Spirit of God lays open His truth, are we able to receive and understand the truth. Note again 1 Cor. 2:12, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.”

**Fifth, a proclaimer and teacher of the Word of God on the eternal state must understand certain truths.** He must first understand that he is merely a mouthpiece for God; he is not an originator of truth.

The prophets of God were borne along by the spirit of God and were the mouthpieces of God. (cf. 2 Peter 1:20.) A teacher of spiritual truth is a mouthpiece for God. That is, God doesn't reveal to him directly a message of truth. He gets that message of truth out of the Bible which is already completed. But he, in turn, becomes the mouthpiece of that to the people who come under his teaching.

He must also understand that he is limited to that area of truth which God has made known to him. It was Amos the prophet who said, “Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets (Amos 3:7).

Again, the teacher needs to recognize that he must confine himself to the meaning of Scripture. It's so easy to read the English text and come up with an explanation or to go to Webster's dictionary and imagine that you've got the explanation for what's in the Scripture. The human mind moves so quickly from the assertion to the implication. One may easily be declaring the implication as though it were the assertion.

One more: the teacher should be setting forth the mysteries of God which He was pleased to reveal. These secrets now revealed are intended to bless the saints, not only to bring enlightenment to them but also hope and encouragement for the days ahead. Mystery simply means secret. We speak the wisdom of God in a secret, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world. For what purpose? For investing us with His glory, all of the moral attributes of God in us and in manifestation.

## **Sixth and finally, here are seven important facets of these truths that need explanation.**

- 1 It requires diligent and prolonged research to explore the Bible's abundant information on the subject of the Eternal. This will mean careful comparison of Scripture with Scripture to unveil the hidden truths.
- 2 Not every question will be answered, but there is sufficient information concerning the future to equip the believer for personal life and service to others.
- 3 Not all truth is revealed at any one time in Scripture. Simpler truths came first, to which is added fuller truth later until the complete truth is finally revealed. This does not mean that later truth nullifies what has gone before. It does mean that new facets enlarge on earlier truth. To get the full picture it is necessary, therefore, to consider all the truth together.
- 4 Every bit of prophecy concerning the future arose out of a situation that existed with God's people at the time it was given. And specific information about the future burns more brightly in times of darkness and persecution

than at any other time. And that is seen in the final book of the Bible.

- 5 The apex of information concerning the eternal state is to be found here just as the Church is entering the wilderness of persecution. So, God provides the final burst of splendor for their encouragement.
- 6 Any deviation from revealed truth is condemned. From Revelation 22: “For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (vv. 18-19).
- 7 Now the final point: a final appeal is made to trust Christ that the benefits of life and heaven may be theirs. Verse 17, “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.”

“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’” And John responds, “Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (v.20)

*This is an abridged sermon that Herman A. Hoyt delivered in the 1990s at the Grace Brethren Church, Lexington, Ohio. Gene Witzky was pastor of the church at the time and shared recordings of this and five other sermons with GraceConnect. Hoyt served as president of Grace College and Seminary from 1962-1976. Transcripts of the succeeding sermons will be posted on [graceconnect.us](http://graceconnect.us) over the next few months.*

*Scripture references are from the New King James Version.*

# MOTIVATING MOMENTUM

by Randi Walle



*Top: The Bogue children, left to right, front, Micah, Eli, Sara (Josiah's wife), Naomi; back, Josiah, Gabe, Isaac*

*Bottom left: Heidi Bogue, left, has been Jeff's ministry partner for more than 27 years.*

*Bottom right: Jeff is a frequent speaker at Momentum Youth Conference.*



Last year, Momentum Ministry Partners (formerly CE National) named Jeff Bogue as president following the retirement of their long-time executive, Ed Lewis. Jeff is the senior pastor of Grace Church of Greater Akron in Northeast Ohio and has volunteered with the organization for years.

"We are basically all doing the same thing and God just put me in the middle of it," Jeff said. He plans to focus the ministries in the direction of leadership development.

Momentum Ministry Partners is a national ministry of the Charis Fellowship. It includes several programs that come alongside the local church to offer training and experiences: Momentum EDU (formerly The National Institute), Momentum Urban Centers (formerly Urban Hope), Momentum Travel Teams (formerly Operation Barnabas), and Momentum Youth Conference. Coinciding with Jeff becoming president is the rebrand of these ministries and a refocus of their shared mission.

Jeff is not new to Momentum Ministry Partners. He has served as the staff and conference pastor at Momentum Youth Conference for the past 20 years. During this time, he has spoken at the conference frequently. As the conference pastor, he often follows main speakers by helping students respond spiritually to what they heard, and he usually delivers the last message at the conference.

He says his most memorable message was from 2017 when he challenged students to consider a life in fulltime Christian service. He did not sugarcoat what was ahead for those who answered the call, noting that a lot of ministry went without acknowledgment or gratitude.

"Nobody is going to clap for you," he told the students. He requested there be no background music and that the lights in the auditorium be left on. He didn't want the call playing into the teens' emotions, heightened by song lyrics and mood lighting, but rather he asked them to make an honest declaration, no matter who was watching.

"The responses came pouring forward," he remembered. That night in the auditorium of Indiana Wesleyan University, hundreds of students pledged their futures to following Christ into fulltime vocational ministry.

God used that night as a catalyst for Jeff's willingness to step into the lead role at Momentum Ministry Partners. He has always been passionate about leadership development, and when the board approached him about the position, he knew he would want to take the ministry strongly in that direction.

“I AM THANKFUL THAT JEFF BOGUE AGREED TO LEAD THE ORGANIZATION I LOVE. HE IS NOT ONLY A VISIONARY; HE ALSO WANTS TO RAISE UP YOUNG ADULTS TO GO INTO MINISTRY.”

“Ed Lewis and TK (Timothy Kurtaneck, former Operation Barnabas director) laid an incredibly powerful foundation for ministry and passion for Christ. We are building off of that,” Jeff said.

“I am thankful that Jeff Bogue agreed to lead the organization I love,” Ed added. “Jeff has been a great friend for almost 30 years. He loves the Lord deeply, which is key. He is not only a visionary; he also wants to raise up young adults to go into ministry. While he will change many things, I know he will keep Jesus at the center of it all!”

Jeff accepted Christ as his personal Savior when he was a junior at Grace College. He remembers being in the middle of a field during the summer, while wrestling with the hypocrisy of his life.

“Later, I was in Beta dorm doing devotions when I felt the Lord speak to me,” he recalled. He responded that he would go wherever God wanted him to go, even though he wasn’t studying for ministry and had no plans to become a pastor.

After college he connected with Bob Combs, then pastor at Grace Church in Norton, Ohio, who hired him as the church’s youth pastor. During this time, Ed Lewis also took Jeff under his wing and mentored him. Jeff participated in a program called Youth Net where he traveled to different youth ministries around the country to learn their best practices. Ed encouraged Jeff to go through a four-year training called Sonlife that he says gave him a strong ministry philosophy and structure.

After seven years as youth pastor, Jeff was asked to re-start the failing Grace Brethren Church on Ghent Road in nearby Akron (now the Bath Campus). The Norton church sent 100 people with him, as the churches merged administratively, but retained their separate campuses. When Bob retired several years later, Jeff became the senior pastor and has been in that role for 15 years. He has a long-term vision for 30 new churches within 30 years. Currently, Grace Church has six campuses in Ohio, two in Georgia, and one in South Carolina. In addition to preaching at the Bath campus, Jeff’s main responsibilities are overseeing all nine campuses and their ministry development.

Ministering alongside Jeff is his wife of 27½ years, Heidi. She grew up in Brazil as the daughter of missionaries Norm and Cleo Johnson.

“Heidi brings all the fun into our lives,” Jeff said, “and without her I would be so boring.”

The couple loves to work on projects together and are currently restoring a 1961 Airstream camper. They have six kids: Josiah

(22) is married to Sara and studying to be a pastor at Grace Seminary, Isaac (20) is studying to be a pastor at Grace College Akron, Micah (18) is studying business at University of Akron, Gabe (11th grade), Naomi (10th grade), and Eli (8th grade).

As president of Momentum Ministry Partners, Jeff is setting vision, direction, and a refined ministry philosophy with a goal of leadership development. He plans to emphasize the partnership with Grace College and Grace Church. He wants Momentum Ministry Partners to be the “third leg of the stool” where students are “discipled, connected with, steered toward fulltime ministry, and ultimately trained and released into their calling.” One way he has done this is by moving the main offices to Akron, where there are several Grace Church campuses and a branch of Grace College.

Eric Miller, director of ministry operations at Momentum Ministry Partners, is a testament to the impact of the ministry on the next generation.

“I am a product of everything CE National has ever done,” he said. Growing up, Eric’s faith was solidified and deepened through youth conference, travel teams, and the training center. When he served as a youth pastor in Maryland, he took advantage of every training and mission opportunity offered through the organization.

“I want to see my story become the norm within our Fellowship again,” he added. “I know that’s Jeff’s heartbeat and desire as well; that students would come through our ministry programs and truly meet Jesus, fall in love with Him, serve His church, and point lost people to Him in whatever their local church and community context might be.”

What makes Momentum Youth Conference unique is the way it prepares students and creates a pathway for them to follow that calling.

“We are one of the only places around that still does that,” Jeff said. “We still value someone doing vocational ministry or giving their life to ministry in that way. And that is a big legacy from Ed Lewis.” That night in 2017 is something the Momentum staff discusses regularly. “Seeing those students come forward,” Eric said, “It was like God saying, ‘Back up is coming!’”

Jeff has cast a vision for the organization to raise up 2,500 full-time workers in the next 25 years. His heart for the local church and his passion for leadership development will steer Momentum Ministry Partners into a new era of ministry.

*Randi Walle is the coordinator of the GraceConnect eNews. She lives in Columbus, Ohio.*



# PROPELLING MINISTRY



*Top: The Bowell family, left to right, front Austin, Sharmion (holding the dog, Hudson), Ryan, Madeline; back, Cameron, Aidan*

*Bottom: Ryan and Sharmion Bowell celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary this past year. She also serves the Charis Fellowship as operations manager in the Fellowship office.*

Ryan Bowell was always intrigued by the business model of the Grace Brethren Investment Foundation (GBIF). As comptroller and later, chief financial officer, for sister organization Encompass World Partners, he had the opportunity to see first-hand the benefits of the ministry. Encompass had utilized the investment accounts and even had a line of credit with GBIF.

“I knew they were serving the Fellowship in a different way,” he recalls. “I was drawn to that.”

When the Encompass offices moved to Atlanta, and Ryan and his wife, Sharmion, didn’t feel led to follow, he sought out an opportunity with the GBIF. He felt the church extension fund that serves the Charis Fellowship would be a good place to use his business skills combined with 15 years in another Fellowship ministry.

Starting at GBIF as director of credit services in 2013, he began to oversee the loan functions of the organization. Admittedly, he didn’t have a commercial banking background, but he quickly learned procedures and asked questions of others who were more experienced. In the process, he worked with nearly one hundred churches and other ministries within the Charis Fellowship to help them obtain financing or manage their existing loan. As with many small organizations, he also found himself wearing other hats – overseeing the marketing of the organization and helping with technology questions.

When President and CEO Ken Seyfert announced his pending retirement in 2019, it seemed natural that Ryan would seek the position.

“GBIF has been operating more like an investment loan fund and not a foundation,” Ryan observes. “I had some ideas that GBIF could potentially implement some new services. The CEO role is the natural place to roll some of those things out.”

“Ryan has demonstrated a dedication to serving the Lord for more than two decades,” says Seyfert, who hired Bowell eight years ago. “At GBIF, he is a hard worker with a burden to do what is right,” he adds. “Ryan is focused on helping facilitate God’s work to move forward. As CEO, he will use his gifts and experience to benefit the Charis Fellowship and bring glory to God!”

“HIS TIME AT GBIF AND ENCOMPASS BEFORE THAT, HAS UNIQUELY POSITIONED HIM WITH AN IN-DEPTH UNDERSTANDING OF GBIF AND THE BROADER FELLOWSHIP.”

“Ryan has a deep passion for and commitment to both the ministry of GBIF as well as the Charis Fellowship and its various ministries,” adds Rick Stair, chair of the board of directors of the Foundation. “His time at GBIF and Encompass before that, has uniquely positioned him with an in-depth understanding of GBIF and the broader Fellowship. Being a Grace Schools graduate gives him another important insight into the inner workings of our Fellowship as we develop the next generation of leaders.

“At our Board meeting last Fall, Ryan presented the directors with a compelling strategic vision for GBIF as we look to the future,” Rick continued. “On behalf of the Board of Directors, we couldn’t be more pleased with his selection as our next CEO and look forward to working with him to serve the Fellowship and implement his strategic vision.”

**R**yan’s vision is not only to continue the investing loan fund but to add services and resources that could help the Fellowship’s congregations and ministries. “It could be as simple as providing churches with stewardship resources,” he notes.

He’s not promising any quick movement into a ministry area but wants to see if there is an appetite for such information in the Fellowship. “Could we be viewed as a resource for stewardship within our Fellowship?” he wonders.

“I think that creating an atmosphere of stewardship could be a real value for our investors and for our churches and pastors.”

He also hopes that the Foundation can support other efforts, like generosity initiatives that raise funds for leadership development and church planting, offer charitable gift annuities, or provide other estate and trust administration services.

Before Ryan could begin to implement his vision for the organization, COVID struck.

“Literally, the day it was announced I was going to become president, there was a shift, a tectonic shift, of the way the model works,” he recalls. “It’s not business as usual,” he adds. “We had to lower our interest rate.”

He stresses there is no reason to panic. “We were in a good position heading into COVID, and we’re in a very strong position where we are right now,” he emphasizes, crediting the

astute work of Seyfert, his predecessor. “But it’s not business as usual,” he reiterates. “We have had to really sharpen the pencil and look at things in a new light.”

He says that they are in a new world. “The way we did things in the past may not work going forward,” he admits, questioning that if a church is not meeting in their own facility, will they want to add on to the building?

“I’m hearing good things from across the Fellowship, and I think eventually things may come back, but the way churches view buildings in the future might look different than before COVID.

“GBIF exists to propel ministry in the Charis Fellowship,” he stresses. “Our investment loan fund and what we do with our earnings has propelled ministry up to this point,” he adds. “When we give a loan to a church that helps them fulfill the vision God had given them, that’s propelling ministry.”



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# A LIFE OF FAITHFUL WITNESS



*Top: Duke Heller and his wife, Wanda, who died in 2019.*



Duke Heller is a long-time member of Grace Polaris Church, a Charis Fellowship congregation in Westerville, Ohio (Mike Yoder, lead pastor). He has dedicated much of his life to sharing the Gospel and teaching other believers how to do the same.

He first came to know the Lord as his personal Savior at church under the teaching of Jim Custer, now senior pastor emeritus. In the Spring of 1972, Duke was out for a jog and passed by what was then Grace Brethren Church in Worthington, Ohio. When he saw that the parking lot was packed, he decided he and his family should visit the church to see what it was like.

The first time Duke visited the church he was struck by what then Senior Pastor Jim Custer said. “I remember Pastor Jim saying, ‘if you have a teenage daughter and she were to be killed in an automobile accident, do you know 100 percent for sure where she would go?’ and I couldn’t answer that question.”

Duke had believed he was a Christian his whole life, but he couldn’t remember ever making the decision to follow Christ. “Pastor Jim went on to say, ‘If you can’t answer that for your daughter, there’s a good chance you can’t answer it for yourself’ and I knew he was right,” Duke said.

Duke had never attended a church that offered a salvation invitation like that. Pastor Jim called forward those who wanted to commit their lives to Christ, and Duke responded. He talked with Associate Pastor Frank Gardner who explained Duke needed to repent of his sin and ask Jesus to be the Lord of his life. From that moment on, not only was Duke committed to Christ, but he was committed to telling others about him.

God had begun working in Duke’s life to prepare him for that encounter two months prior. One of his patients asked him if he was a Christian and when he made that decision. Duke responded that he’d been a Christian all his life and told the man all the areas he volunteered his time.

“I didn’t ask what you did,” the man responded, “I asked if you could point to the exact moment you accepted Christ in your life.” The question plagued Duke for several weeks. “That man put me in a box...and I don’t



## THE QUESTION PLAGUED DUKE FOR SEVERAL WEEKS. “THAT MAN PUT ME IN A BOX... AND I DON’T LIKE TO BE PUT IN A BOX.”

like to be put in a box. I had to find out the answer to what he really was asking me.”

Duke has built an entire ministry on asking people that same question. He has shared the Gospel with thousands, asking them to pinpoint the moment they accepted Christ in their hearts. When asked what advice he would give to others about sharing the Gospel, he said: “You ask everybody – doesn’t make any difference who it is – when somebody says, ‘I’m a Christian,’ you ask them, ‘Can you point to the exact time when you accepted Christ?’ and if they can’t, you share the Gospel with them.”

Duke and his wife Wanda left Grace Polaris Church in 2010 to help Grace Fellowship (Keith Minier, lead pastor) start a campus in nearby Upper Arlington. The senior pastor at the time was Dave Bogue and together they ran Finish Line Ministry. Dave and Duke would travel to churches around the country and teach believers how to share Christ with others. After five years of training elders and starting men’s groups, Duke and Wanda returned to Grace Polaris Church.

**D**uke is a retired dentist who specialized in implant dentistry. He was a pioneer in the industry and was elected as president of the 4,500 member implant group. During his nearly 40-year career, he trained and taught 2,500 dentists, traveling throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia.

In the early 90s, Duke recognized the stress dentists were facing with a high rate of suicide, heart attack, and divorce. One of his own dentistry partners committed suicide. Duke started a yearly dentist retreat at Seneca Lake in eastern Ohio as a way to offer support and hope. Duke heard testimonies from three dentists that had planned to commit suicide but changed their mind after finding Jesus at the retreat. Duke has worked with pastors Jim Custer and Rick Nuzum on the retreat and it has opened up to all men, not just dentists.

Duke has a great passion for telling others about Jesus. He has written a book about how to share your faith titled *How to Start a Kingdom Conversation*, and he has a ministry called May I Share where he offers training and resources to believers. He has a personal goal to share his

faith with one person each day, although COVID-19 had made that more challenging than it used to be. Duke loves to strike up conversations with people in parking lots, checkout lines, and park benches. “I like to take every opportunity to share Jesus,” he said.

One way Duke would do this was by taking people out to breakfast or lunch. Not only would he minister to the person he was dining with, but he would always make a point to minister to their server as well. “We are about to bless the food; can we pray for you?” he would ask at the beginning of their meal. While paying the bill, he would follow up with the server and ask if they knew the exact moment they accepted Christ, and if the answer was no, he would share the Gospel with them.

**S**ome of the benefactors of Duke’s restaurant discipleship are young men enrolled in the residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation program at Refuge Ministries. He enjoys one-on-one connections with the young men and looks for ways to help them succeed in their program and find faith in Christ. He also helps lead a Bible study once a week for 30 men who are currently studying the book of James.

Another ministry Duke is actively involved in is Letters from Dad. The ministry is based on the book by Greg Vaughn and teaches men the importance of writing letters of blessing to their wives, children, and grandchildren. Duke has presented this concept at more than 30 churches. He writes letters to his kids and grandkids each year telling them how much he appreciates them.

“God’s got me so busy,” he said. Duke still attends Grace Polaris Church, where he served as an elder for more than 30 years, but his wife of 60 years passed away two years ago. He is thankful he is able to pour his free time into ministering to others.

*This story first appeared in the GraceConnect eNews. To subscribe to the free newsletter that tells of God’s work in the Charis Fellowship, see [graceconnect.us/subscribe](https://graceconnect.us/subscribe). Duke’s book, *How to Start a Kingdom Conversation*, is available at [bmhbbooks.com/shop/how-to-start-a-kingdom-conversation](https://bmhbbooks.com/shop/how-to-start-a-kingdom-conversation), or wherever you like to purchase books. To learn more about his ministry, *May I Share*, visit [mayishare.com](https://mayishare.com).*

# access 2021

## LIVING WORDS

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# HONOR BUS GIVE VETERANS A MEMORABLE WEEKEND

“HONOR BUS IS A UNIQUE WAY TO LET VETERANS IN ASHLAND KNOW WE CARE.”

**E**laine Hess, member and CE Ministry Coordinator at Southview Grace Brethren Church in Ashland, Ohio (Mark Abel, senior pastor), has been taking U.S. military veterans to visit the Washington D.C. war memorials for several years through Honor Bus.

Elaine taught U.S. History to eighth grade students for 34 years prior to retiring. As part of her curriculum, she led trips to D.C. often with her classes, totaling over 125 in her lifetime. When she retired, she was contacted by charter bus owner, Don Way, about helping organize similar trips for veterans in the Ashland area. She eagerly jumped on board as this was a way to combine her love of history and interest in D.C. with her heart for veterans!

With the help and support of several local businesses, Honor Bus is able to provide veterans a trip to D.C. at no cost. Students and family members volunteer to serve as guardians to assist the veterans. An organization in Ashland, The Coalition, fundraises to help cover the cost of the trip. She is grateful for all their support, and especially their partnership with the local charter bus company that transports them. She requests prayer for the business during the pandemic, because without their services, Honor Bus wouldn't be able to happen.

**W**hile on the bus, the veterans participate in a “Mail Call” where they receive letters written by students, family members, and church attendees thanking them for their service. The attendees are gifted an Honor Bus jacket, a donation from a sponsor. At the memorials, the veterans are honored with a pinning ceremony. After the

event, Southview Grace Brethren Church hosts a dinner for the veterans and their families to share stories, photos, and thank them for their service.

Honor Bus serves five counties: Richland, Holmes, Wayne, Ashland, and Huron and has taken 10 trips to the Capitol over the past eight years. These trips are similar to Honor Flight where veterans can attend for free and visit the various memorials. However, instead of being a one-day trip, Honor Bus is an entire weekend.

**I**n November 2020, Elaine led a trip of 14 veterans, totaling 30 people with the volunteer guardians. The trip started early on a Friday morning and made the drive to D.C. with a stop at the Flight 93 Memorial on the way. Once in D.C., they checked into their hotel, ate dinner, and toured a few of the memorials. Elaine likes to visit the memorials in both the day and night for a different experience.

On Saturday, the group visited all of the war memorials, along with the several scenic places along the National Mall and a museum tour. After dinner, the veterans had the option of visiting a few more memorials for a night tour. Normally, the Honor Bus tour visits Arlington National Cemetery to lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. However, Arlington was closed to their group this year due to COVID-19. Elaine was praying for a special opportunity to replace that experience when she saw a couple of park rangers on the White House grounds. She



*Elaine Hess, right, has coordinated Honor Bus trips for veterans in North Central Ohio.*

approached them and explained their situation. One of the rangers, who said he frequently volunteers with Honor Flight, made arrangements for their group to participate in the Fall Garden Tour on the White House Lawn.

Elaine loves how this ministry is able to touch lives of people who might not otherwise visit their church. Her continued prayer is to be able to continue to show the love of Jesus to veterans in their community. Elaine said, “Honor Bus is a unique way to let veterans in Ashland know we care.”

*This story originally appeared in the GraceConnect eNews. To subscribe to the free newsletter, which tells of God's work in the Charis Fellowship, go online to [graceconnect.us/subscribe](https://graceconnect.us/subscribe).*



# CAR CARE MINISTRY BLESSES COMMUNITY



**They want to bless widows,  
widowers, and people who  
have fallen on hard times.**

**A**t the beginning of 2020, Grace Community Church in Goshen, Ind. (Jim Brown, lead pastor), launched a car care ministry. Their dream was to use their facilities and skills to bless others.

When the church acquired The Lodge, their retreat center in Syracuse, Ind., they began praying and dreaming of what to do with the space. The church had several mechanics in the congregation and each summer they hosted a free oil change event. They had the idea to use one of the buildings for a car care ministry and began planning. The congregation prayed for the ministry and several members stepped forward to help.

Care and Connections Pastor Mike Silliman said, "It was very clear that God was opening the door for this to take place." One member of the church financially donated toward a car lift. Garage owner Brent Hochstetler offered to lead the ministry. Another member who owns a tool company outfitted the ministry with all the tools needed.

The car care ministry is open one Saturday a month to all community members, not just church attendees. They want to bless widows, widowers, and people who have fallen on hard times. Participants fill out an application and the scheduler, a former mechanic, does a phone diagnosis and sets an appointment.

All of the labor is free and provided by volunteers from the church. Participants are asked to pay for the necessary parts. Mike said, "It's a way the men and women of our church who like to work on cars can use their gifts and abilities to serve the community."

*This story first appeared in the GraceConnect eNews, the free e-newsletter that shares what God is doing in the Charis Fellowship. To subscribe, go to [graceconnect.us/subscribe](https://graceconnect.us/subscribe).*