Health, growth, completion

Vision

New Apostolic Church USA
District News
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Dear brothers and sisters,

At last, Spring is arriving!

Even though the pandemic begins to subside, we know that its effects will still linger. Therefore, let us find the continued assurance of God's omnipresence in our lives within this short excerpt from the life of Daniel. It is found in Apocrypha in the interesting book of **Bel and the dragon** (a great mystery book to read to your children or grandchildren; only one chapter!), where we find in verses 32-39 additional information about Daniel in the lion's den.

Daniel had solved two mysteries to the displeasure of some, so they turned against the king, who yielded to their pressure and allowed them to take Daniel to the lion's den. And now comes the noteworthy part:

Now there was in Jewry (Israel) a prophet, called Habbacuc, who had made pottage, and had broken bread in a bowl, and was going into the field, for to bring it to the reapers. But the angel of the Lord said unto Habbacuc, "Go, carry the dinner that thou hast into Babylon unto Daniel, who is in the lions' den." And Habbacuc said, "Lord, I never saw Babylon; neither do I know where the den is." Then the angel of the Lord took him by the crown, and bare him by the hair of his head, and through the vehemency (intense force) of his spirit set him in Babylon over the den.

And Habbacuc cried, saying, "O Daniel, Daniel, take the dinner which God hath sent thee." And Daniel said, ***"Thou hast remembered me, O God: neither hast thou forsaken them that seek thee and love thee."*** *So Daniel arose, and did eat: and the angel of the Lord set Habbacuc in his own place again immediately.*

So we see that Daniel was "quarantined", alone, and in danger. The story does not mention that he prayed, but we know of his prayer life from before; his faith in God was proven. Imagine, God provided him food in an incredibly miraculous way by "transporting" a prophet from a distant land. Thereafter, even the king had to exclaim: *Great art Lord God of Daniel, and there is none other beside Thee!*

The God of Daniel is our God and Father. As He did with Daniel, we can be assured that the Lord remembers us. He has also provided for us during the time of our quarantine in a unique manner and will continue to provide for those who trust Him. He has all means at His disposal, yet we must accept the provision that He provides, even though it may not always be what we expected.

As the pandemic diminishes and our churches can open, as soon as we safely can, let us also come home to our congregations and together exclaim: *Great are You, God, our Father, there is none other beside You!*

With loving greetings,

On Jesus' way to Jerusalem, prior to His Passion and death, He is approached by ten men with leprosy. Due to the condition of their skin, they were considered unfit to live in populated areas, and, therefore, were placed in permanent seclusion from the community.

> *Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"*
>
> *So when He saw them, He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan.*
>
> *So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."*
>
> **Luke 17:11-19**

DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

In ancient times, suffering from leprosy involved greater challenges than simply those implicit in the disease.

The early Israelites believed that illnesses, including leprosy, were punishment for sins. In biblical times, leprosy referred to a series of skin diseases, beyond our modern-day strain. Each of these diseases would render unclean the person who suffered from it. In Leviticus 13, we can find the laws concerning leprosy – whoever was diagnosed with it by the priest would be immediately placed in quarantine for the duration of the disease, and forced to live outside the community. They could not go to the marketplace, and were forbidden to take part in worship. If anyone approached them, by law, they had to *cover their mouths* and cry out, "Unclean, unclean!"

Thus, those afflicted with leprosy suffered more than just the physical effects of a dermatological condition; they were outcasts in all senses of the word.

These circumstances are something we are somewhat familiar with today. A year after the global spread of the pandemic, we continue to face a myriad of challenges that result from it. In addition to isolation, and the widespread use of facemasks, those diagnosed with COVID-19 must stay at home, distancing themselves from their own relatives. They are forbidden to go in public places, and must communicate from afar.

Life as we know it continues to be upside down, and, like those with leprosy, there is so much out of our control.

AND THEY LIFTED UP THEIR VOICES...

Knowing their place – and acknowledging the power of the One who was passing near them – the lepers called out to Jesus from a distance, in a desperate effort to be liberated from their circumstances. In their longing to be restored, they *lifted up their voices* and implored Jesus: *Master, have mercy on us!* (v. 13). This term, "Master" (from the Greek *epistata*), was used to designate someone who had total authority. This implies that the lepers had previous knowledge of Jesus, and that they recognized His great power and sovereignty. They did not necessarily have faith in a Christian sense, but confidence in Him as a miracle-worker, and were reaching out to Him, seeking aid. We could understand that they had a distance to cross both physically (because of their exile from other people), as well as spiritually (in recognizing who Jesus really was).

When Jesus sees them, He commands them to go and show themselves to the priests, who will determine, according to the Mosaic Law, whether they have been healed.

Where are the nine?

WHERE ARE YOU?

AND HE WAS A SAMARITAN...

Samaritans were viewed with distrust and hostility by Jews in and around Jerusalem, which made the one leper's conduct even more remarkable. He was not allowed to associate with Jews, but because of his condition, all distinction of race and caste was removed. Likewise, in the sight of Jesus, all distinctions are erased. *The gospel is for all.* Also, in the Parable of the Good Samaritan found in Luke, Jesus' mention of the foreigner (the Samaritan) can be seen as a reference to the universality of the gospel. Not only would Jews experience salvation through Christ, but people of all nations and all times. It is also intriguing to consider Luke's repeated theme of the Samaritan, whose behavior continues to be better than that of the Jews themselves. In his gospel of inclusiveness, faith comes from unexpected sources (women, tax collectors, and Samaritans), and the only leper to express thanksgiving and praise was the Samaritan.

The lepers immediately make evident their confidence in Jesus' power by following His instruction, even though nothing had changed and they are still afflicted with the disease when they depart from Him. All ten believed or trusted enough to begin a journey that could have ended in disappointment. Only as they were going on their way, were they *made clean*.

Jesus responded to their cries for mercy, resulting in their physical healing. Yet, the text tells us that *one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and…glorified God* (v. 15). Recognizing that he was healed, he responded by turning back to praise God. He not only recognized what Jesus had done, but he also recognized Him as God. The physical and spiritual distance that existed between Jesus and this leper, a Samaritan, disappeared. Upon returning to the Lord, he fell at His feet in thanksgiving and worship.

When faced with a life-changing situation – like the coronavirus pandemic – it is natural for us to seek God and the help that only He can give. The Lord always listens to those who cry out to Him wholeheartedly, and in His grace, provides help according to His will.

When the Lord responds, what is our reaction; disappointment because He did not immediately change the circumstance? Or, do we still trust in His plan? Do we continue, still afflicted, with the assurance that God will provide?

Furthermore, can we perceive that, even though the circumstance has not changed, He is working, and is cleansing us by bringing us to a new understanding, which we see is a far greater healing than what we first asked for? In this time, we begin to discover the true depth of our personal relationship with Jesus. Did we begin to extract deeper meaning from the divine word that is webcast to our home? Perhaps, our prayer life has changed as we remember those we have not seen in a long while. Has our longing to have fellowship with Christ and with one another in His communion become more and more intense? Could this be the "healing" that He intended in these days? And then, with this realization, do we, like the Samaritan, return and fall at His feet when we receive what He has decided?

BUT WHERE ARE THE NINE?

Ten lepers lament and cry out to Jesus. Ten are cleansed. Yet, only one truly "sees" that he has been cleansed, and returns to give Jesus praise. The point here is not that there is anything wrong with lamentation. In fact, it is a turning to God in and of itself. In addition, it's worthwhile to note that the other nine did as they had been instructed; they went to show themselves to the priests. They were not disobedient and they believed.

However, as we typically see in Psalms, human dialogue with God should not end with lament. The fact that the nine do not come back to Jesus is confirmation that they do not realize what has actually happened in their encounter with Him. What happens to the nine is not of little concern, as Jesus does wonder where they are. The question, *But where are the nine?* points to His ongoing care. We could even see it as a parallel to what God asks of Adam in Genesis 3:9 after he has been tempted to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – *Where are you?* The problem with the nine lies not in the gift they have been given, in disbelief, or in any lack of divine interest, but rather in their lack of response – nothing more is heard from the nine.

The verses do not deny that the other nine also see that they are healed, but it is one of the subtleties of the story that their act of seeing remains superficial. Only the Samaritan sees and fully understands what has really happened; *he has encountered God!* This "seeing" surpasses external vision. It is only one individual who comprehends fully what has transpired, while the nine others have seemingly passed through the most dramatic moment of their lives, but have understood nothing, and continued in the same world from which they could have been set free.

As with the nine, it could be easy for us to fall into the trap of allowing earthly concerns and afflictions to take control of us and divert our attention from God and His offer of deliverance. This is why the Lord graciously moves us to meditate and ask ourselves, “Where am I? In which direction am I heading?” When we recognize that He is working, we finally see and come to the realization, “I have encountered Jesus, and must respond to and worship Him!”

AND ONE... RETURNED

The significance of the Samaritan’s turn is emphasized by the goal of his journey. Prior to turning back, the leper was on his way to the priests. It was the priests who could pronounce him clean, thus, readmitting him to social interaction and temple worship. After physical healing, the journey to the priests was the way to social and ritual health. Yet, the Samaritan does not continue on this path. Instead, he turns around and heads for Jesus. He recognized the presence of something greater: *God in the person of Jesus.*

For the Samaritan, his life had changed. Together with the nine others who were healed, he shared in the liberation from their previous circumstances (suffering from leprosy). For him, however, their deliverance meant recognizing that he was given a new life (*Christ makes free!*), to which he is called to respond from now on. He had encountered God through Jesus, and this would become the determining factor of his life.

The Samaritan had a fresh awareness of his new relationship with God, and his response to this realization was to urgently turn back to Jesus, in worship and praise. Martin Luther is said to have defined worship as the “tenth leper turning back.”

For us, what is the encounter to which the Lord has called us to respond? With His sacrifice on the cross, Jesus made us free from our past life (the oppression of sin), and called us to develop a new nature and grow in our relationship with Him. Part of living in this new nature is having faith that we can trust Him no matter what conditions we find ourselves in, and place Him at the forefront of our lives. It is this faith that the Lord refers to in His question, *When I come, will I find faith on earth?* (Luke 18:8). He speaks of the kind of faith that never doubts that God hears our supplication and the goodness of His response.

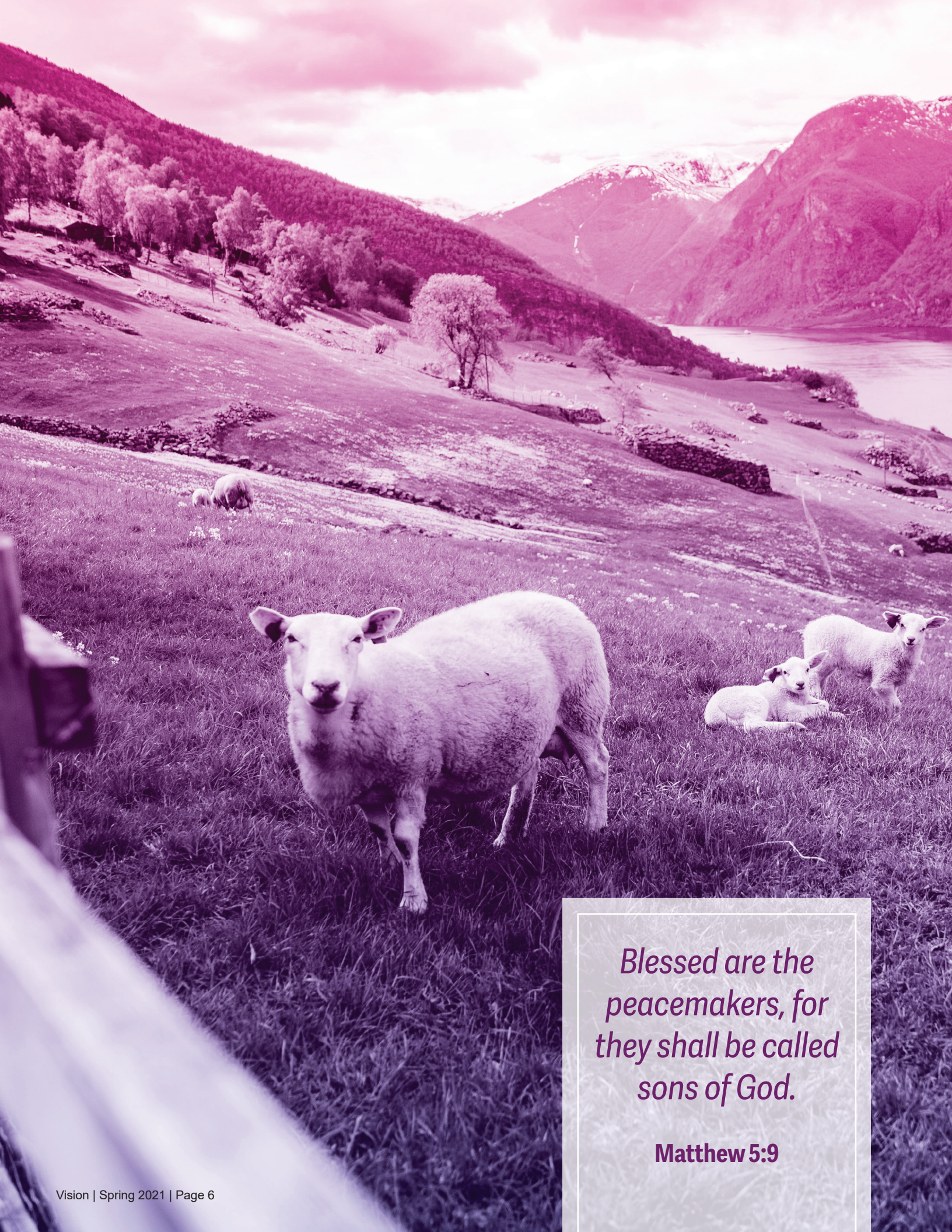
By understanding that our new life in Christ is the determining factor of our lives, what else could we do except turn back and cling to the Lord and our relationship with Him?

One place we can always cry out to God, receive His grace, and be transformed is in the community of believers, the church. It is where we gather to experience Him, offer our thanksgiving and praise to Him, and where, together, we receive nourishment and sustenance for our faith.

What will you do?

Will you return to Him?

- LRK / IAG



Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Matthew 5:9

Philippians 2:3-4 ESV

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

The New Apostolic Church USA began a **90-Day Peacemaking Challenge** in March that will continue through the month of May. During this time, our small groups are delving into what it means to be a peacemaker, and how we can approach conflict the way God has taught us through Scripture. Ministers are also receiving essays twice a month on peacemaking in the church via our Minister Companion website. In addition, in this publication of the VISION, we'll use a story from the Bible to illustrate a few points on how to stop conflict before it starts.

RESOLVING EVERYDAY CONFLICT

How to stop relational conflict before it starts

Taken in part from *The Peacemaking Church*, by Curtis Heffelfingeer

Let's start by reading Genesis 13:

Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the South. Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. And he went on his journey from the South as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place of the altar which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the Lord.

Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents. Now the land was not able to support them, that they might dwell together, for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together. And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. The Canaanites and the Perizzites then dwelt in the land.

So Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left."

And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar. Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom. But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord.

And the Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered. Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you." Then Abram moved his tent, and went and dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and built an altar there to the Lord.

The bulk of chapter 13 recounts a dispute between Abram's and Lot's herdsmen, which Abram handles directly and with an approach that we can describe as *magnanimous*. In doing so, he resolves the conflict before it affects his relationship with Lot. Let's explore what we can learn from this enlightening story of resolving conflict.

Center your life around God: Chapter 13 begins and ends with Abram building an altar to the Lord. Wherever he pitched his tent, he built an altar. This God-focused lifestyle allows Abram to approach conflict with grace and a genuinely magnanimous spirit. *Magnanimous* is defined as "generous or forgiving, especially towards a rival or less powerful person." This is not a natural virtue. Our human nature normally wants nothing to do with characteristics like humility, meekness, forgiveness, or forbearance. Instead, we have to rely on our relationship with God, on His Spirit working in us, to display these virtues, especially in conflict.

Take the initiative: The conflict begins with the herdsmen, yet Abram takes the first step. So often conflict escalates because out of fear, pride, or selfishness, no one will take the initiative. That first step requires humility and fosters magnanimity.

Seek to avoid arguments: Abram's words reveal his heart, *"Please let there be no strife between you and me...for we are brethren."* He values his relationship with Lot above the conflict. Do you value your relationships more than being right? Than getting the upper-hand? A generous and forgiving attitude is necessary to avoid conflict.

Give up your advantage: Abram was Lot's uncle, the leader of the clan, and wealthier; by normal standards he had every right to take the advantage in the situation. Lot owed everything to Abram for bringing him up from Ur (Genesis 11:31). However, that is not the position Abram took; instead he approachs Lot with brotherly affection as an equal. The Bible often appeals to us to treat each other with brotherly love because through Christ we are brothers and sisters:

Romans 12:10 - *Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.*

1 Thessalonians 4:9 - *But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.*

2 Peter 1:5-7 - *But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.*

"Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left." On this occasion, Abram played no status card, and took no advantage, instead humbly guarding the peace with brotherly love by letting Lot choose first. He sought Lot's interests over his own.

Accept the outcome with courage and trust God to provide: While Abram gives Lot the advantage, Lot shows no signs of deferment. In response to Abram's magnanimous offer, *Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere... like the garden of the Lord... Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan.* Lot lifts his eyes to choose the best land, and the text does not even recount any words of gratitude; he chooses the Jordan plain and then *journeyed east*. Abram showed courage of faith, knowing that no matter what Lot chose, God would provide for him.

They separated, but their relationship was intact, due in large part to Abram's magnanimous approach to the conflict. At this point in the story, God comes to Abram and tells him to *lift up his eyes*. While Lot looked to the things of the earth, Abram who fixed his eyes on God, was rewarded with a renewal of his covenant with God. *Abram lost nothing by his generosity.* His offer to Lot was possible because he was confident that God would continue to provide for and be faithful to him.

It might seem impossible for us to act as Abram did when we encounter conflict with those around us, in our family, our congregation, with neighbors. However, through the love of God that we have been given through the Holy Spirit, and the grace and forgiveness that we have been offered by Jesus Christ, we can in turn, treat others with the same love, grace, and forgiveness.

James 3:13, 17-18

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom... the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

- KAH

And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth...

In other accounts of God's covenant with Abraham, He alludes to the *stars in the sky*, or the *sand on the shore*, as images of the innumerable descendants of Abraham. We can understand that these descendants are not only the Jewish people, but rather that Jews, Christians, and Muslims are all children of Abraham. While each faith is unique in their religious beliefs, customs, and practices, Abraham is the common ancestor, or "father of faith" that unites them all in belief of the same God.

LIVING IN PEACE

Christian living in a polarized society

A central theme of the gospel is the Great Commandment, which is summarized in Matthew 22:36-40:

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

Already in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus provided the New Testament perspective on this teaching.

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:43-48).

The Lord makes it clear that there are no acceptable excuses for not loving one's neighbor. Although the teaching is quite clear, the danger exists that one might seek an out by playing with the words. For example, how do you define 'enemy?' Is one's enemy only the person who stands against them in adversarial situations, such as on a battlefield or in a courtroom?

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines 'enemy' as *one that is antagonistic to another*. The meaning of 'antagonize' is *to incur or provoke the hostility of.* Simply stated, my enemy can be the person who annoys me, the person I disagree with.

On this basis, one might feel that they are surrounded by enemies in their everyday life.

This feeling is heightened by the power of social media. 2020 was an exceptional year – with an exceptional amount of stressors pressing on all of us both individually and in society as a whole. The current political turmoil has produced strong feelings in the minds and hearts of many. As Christians who, through the baptismal vow, have made a commitment to grow into a new life in Christ, it is critical that we evaluate where we stand relative to fulfilling the Great Commandment.

Have political issues become a primary focus of our attention and thoughts? We are all allowed to have whatever opinion we wish relative to issues, including politics. However, what is our priority as Christians – current day issues or our relationship with Christ? Jesus Himself said that *this world will pass away…but My word will never pass away.*

The Lord does not expect that we will seek *common* ground when we have a disagreement. He expects that we will seek *higher* ground. The reason we love our neighbor is that we love Christ, not because our neighbor is always so lovable. Jesus Christ is 'the higher ground.' We need to keep in mind that every one of us depends on His grace. Human definitions of right and wrong, good and bad, must be subordinated to His law, the law of love.

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If the new life in Christ is developing in us, we can come together in Him, by focusing on Him and the gospel.

In Romans 14, Paul provides a wonderful teaching of how, in a practical sense, we can and should seek the higher ground in Christ. It is beneficial to read the entire chapter (only 23 verses). Verses 12 – 15 can help one to grasp the essence of the message:

So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

The Law of Love

I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.

Paul makes it clear that we should not allow differences, even something as trivial as tastes in food, to cause us to judge others or speak ill of them. The vow we have made obligates us to give account to God for our actions, to neither judge others nor cause them to stumble. As Christians, we must always keep in mind that God is the only One who can properly evaluate (i.e. judge) someone's thoughts, words and actions. In lieu of judgement, He has chosen to free us from the limitations of our human perspectives. As the new life in Christ grows within us, we recognize the need to seek, and the way in which we can, find the higher ground in Jesus Christ. Romans 12:18 (NLT) summarizes it nicely:

Do all that you can to <u>live in peace</u> with everyone.

Written by Apostle John Fendt

Worshipping Christ
in the age of spectacle

This time that we live in has often been referred to as “the age of spectacle,” which seems very fitting given that our world offers us a feast of new multimedia on a consistent basis. Popular entertainment is now everywhere, and it never stops. Like no century before us, we are submerged into media. This digital, eye and image-focused reality poses significant challenges for parents, church leaders, pastors, youth leaders - anyone facing the inundation of media competing for the attention of the people that we love and are trying to serve. So how do we lead those who are easily distracted and influenced by the spectacle deeper into faith?

Let’s start by first defining the word “spectacle.” A spectacle is something that has been captured and published to hold our collective gaze for some particular purpose. It’s something that captures human attention - an instant when our eyes and brains fixate on an image, video, or event that has been projected at us. Examples include a brilliant photograph, an eye-catching billboard, a new music video, a viral sports clip, or a binge-worthy season on Netflix. This might all seem like harmless fun, until we realize this: **every spectacle wants something from us** - our attention, our affections, our outrage, our money. Most of all, they want our time. Every picture, every video, every viral tweet asks us for something in return, and competes for our limited gaze.

How does God respond to this world of spectacles, and how then should we respond as believers? It would be easy for us to retreat into a position that is anti-spectacle, to try our best to live a spectacle-free existence. And yet, that’s exactly the opposite of how God confronts our digital world. Instead, **into this eye and image-focused world came the *greatest* spectacle ever recorded in history - the cross of Jesus Christ.** Christ crucified is the hinge of history where all time collides. From this moment on, God intended that all human gaze would center itself on this climactic moment.

In his account of the cross, Luke shows us that Christ’s crucifixion was a physical spectacle for the crowds to see (Luke 23:48). This is reinforced in the third verse of Joseph Hart’s hymn titled, His Passion: “Nailed naked to the accursed wood, exposed to earth and heaven above, a spectacle of wounds and blood, a prodigy of injured love.” The cross is not merely a physical spectacle for the eye, however. After all, only the people who were gathered at the cross saw Christ crucified. **Its greater glory is in serving as a spectacle for the ear.**

Already in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul makes the content of the apostles' preaching clear when he says, *…but we preach Christ crucified* (1 Corinthians 1:23). **Today, too, we are privileged to hear the preaching of the cross.** Through the Holy Spirit, we're reminded of Christ's overwhelming love for us shown through His selfless sacrifice on the cross for our sins. Do we still value these "wonderful words of life?"

The importance of the ear is further highlighted in Hebrews 2:1: *Therefore, we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away from it.* The many spectacles of the eye that we're inundated with every day can cause us to lose interest in Christ. Over time, our attention neglects Christ, and we begin to drift away from Him. We would be wise to look at what God said to those who were present on the Mount of Transfiguration: *This is my beloved Son…* ***Hear Him*** (Mark 9:7). This is a call to serious listening, to giving ourselves wholly to the task of focusing our attention to Jesus.

The main concern, then, is over the battle that exists between the many worldly spectacles for our eyes and the eternal, life-giving spectacle for our ears. As believers, how should we respond?

- First, we must **be honest with our own susceptibilities to the world's spectacles.** No one is exempt from being susceptible. Proverbs 27:20 says that *the eyes of man are never satisfied.* Our own eyes are one of our greatest enemies. We need to lead our children, our church, our students, and our worship from this starting point of personal honesty and awareness. Screens will never satisfy us. We can only be fully satisfied in Jesus Christ.

- Second, we need to **apply the concept of fasting to the buffet of digital media**. Do a digital detox for a day, a week, or a month. This is how we say to the world, "The endless cascade of digital spectacles are not my God, nor are they the source of my happiness and fulfillment. My true joy comes from God's acceptance of me and from my union with Christ!"

- The third point is geared toward church leaders. Leaders, keep leading the ears of those you lead into unseen glories. Keep preaching the gospel. Many churches have also been tempted here and there to appeal to the visual industry. **Our goal as leaders should be to persuade hearts, through ears, to treasure unseen realities and glories.**

In all of this, we proceed in faith, knowing that digital minimalism will never save us. Tossing our TV's in the garbage will not save us. Smashing our gaming systems will not save us. A digital detox will not save us. All of these drastic actions might help, but our ultimate hope rests in Jesus Christ alone. **We can't afford to let the beauty of the cross get lost among the many spectacles of the digital world.** As the greatest spectacle in history, the cross of Christ is worthy of our humble, undistracted focus and attention.

May our gaze remain fixed upon Jesus. - LRK / MNJ

To everything There is a season

Imagine your day. How does it start? How does it end? Perhaps you pray, read, or exercise. Perhaps you cook a meal, watch TV, or spend time with family. Most likely, whether intentional or not, you have some routines that help create a rhythm for you. Even outside of the home, rhythms are all around us and can reveal themselves daily, monthly, or yearly (most know the importance of April 15th). Even within the divine service experience, the liturgy and flow of the service generates a regular cadence. Rhythms create consistency and reliability; they shape our expectations of how we interact with the world, each other, and even ourselves. This was particularly emphasized last year when the pandemic struck and disrupted our normal rhythms, resulting in inconsistent experiences and expectations, as systems and norms grew less reliable.

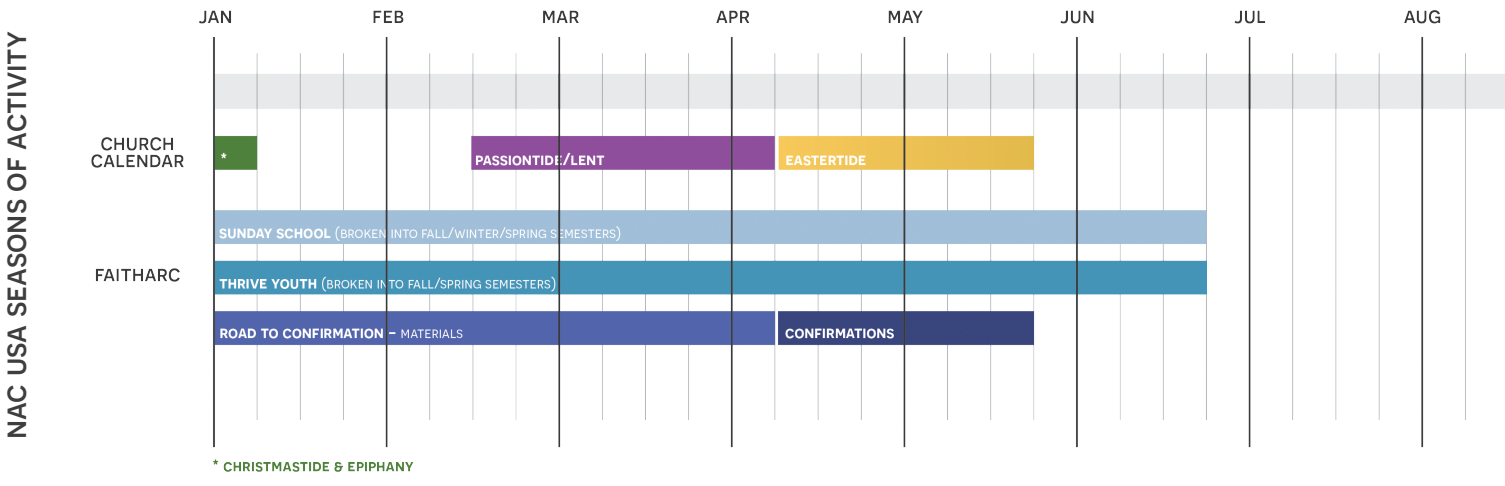
We also see rhythms in the Bible. Some, God created, such as the seasons in the Creation, and some, He prescribed, such as the Sabbath and feasts of Leviticus 23. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, prescribed in Leviticus 23:4-8, is the Passover celebration that Jesus was celebrating with His disciples when He instituted Holy Communion. Just like in Biblical times, seasons also help us create certain rhythms that aid in focusing our time and attention.

In recent years, the Church, through divine services, VISION Newsletter articles, and articles on the international church's news website, nac.today – has drawn more attention to the Christian calendar, sometimes referred to as the liturgical calendar. While the Christian calendar is not specifically outlined in the Bible, it was developed in the 16th century to emphasize the most important events in Scripture. This calendar, which many denominations recognize and observe, is marked by specific days of celebration and commemoration, such as Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. These holy days are often the culmination of seasons, such as Advent, Lent, and Eastertide. Liturgical rhythms and seasons exist to promote anticipation, reflection, and preparation.

In Ecclesiastes 3:1, we can read that everything has a season and every season a purpose.

> ***To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven...***

As the Church continues to highlight liturgical seasons based on the Christian calendar, the New Apostolic Church USA will start to align certain administrative and ministerial functions to a more targeted seasonal approach over the next year.



Recently, some areas of the Church have already started to align their processes to a seasonal approach, for instance, how youth and children's teaching material schedule is modeled after an academic year.

Another administrative function that will have a seasonal approach going forward involves our volunteers that work with children and youth. This will combine an existing process (safety protocols, including background checks for those that work directly with minors) with a new process of Assignments for those specific roles (for more on Assignments, please see the Winter 2020 VISION Newsletter).

Again, rhythms help create consistency and reliability. By creating seasonal rhythms for certain administrative functions within the church, those involved (whether a teacher, parent, rector, or district rector) are able to have a more clearly defined understanding of what can be expected and when. Additionally, by having a more concentrated effort during specific seasons, our administrative resources and time can be focused in a more efficient manner in executing these functions. For example, background checks for volunteers working with children and youth can be performed during a targeted two-month period of the year rather than sporadically throughout the year. Overall, everyone and everything tends to work better when an established rhythm is known, and expectations are clearly defined.

Additional VISION Newsletter articles will be featured in the future as rhythmic seasons are introduced for various administrative and ministerial processes. - **TDL**

to heal
to laugh,
to weep
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n, turn, turn)
re is a season
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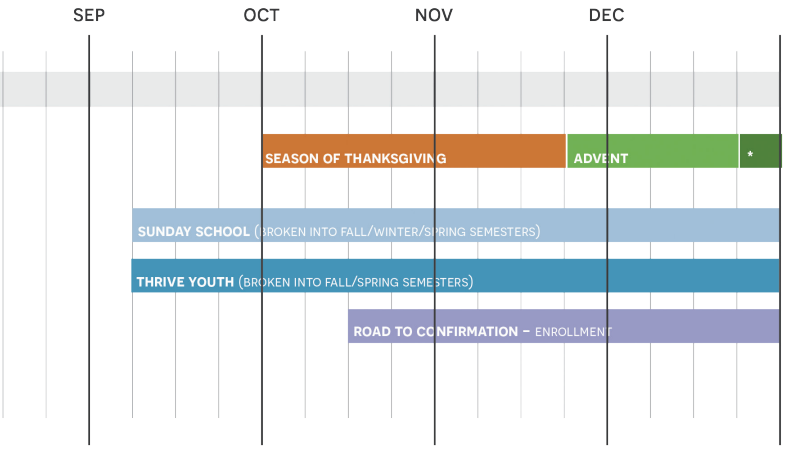
nd a time to every
urpose, under heaven
A time to build up,
A time to break down
A time to dance,
A time to mourn
A time to cast away stones,
A time to gather stones together
To everything
(turn, turn, turn)
There is a season
(turn, turn, turn)
And a time to every
purpose, under heaven
A time of love,
A time of hate
A time of war,
A time of peace

Turn! Turn! Turn!
The Byrds, 1965



To everything
(turn, turn, turn)
There is a season
(turn, turn, turn)
And a time to every
purpose, under heaven
A time to gain,
A time to lose
A time to rend,
A time to sew
A time for love,
A time for hate
A time for peace,

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