

MARCH-APRIL 2021

THE

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REAL TRUTH™

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING



10 YEARS LATER

Is Another Arab Spring Coming?

THE
REAL TRUTH[™]
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A R T I C L E S

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How America Forgot Its Place in the World

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FRONT COVER: An illustration of key leaders who faced resistance in the Arab Spring revolution with Tunisia's flag in the background. Pictured clockwise are Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Syrian President Bashar Assad.

ILLUSTRATION: SARAH O. VIDAL

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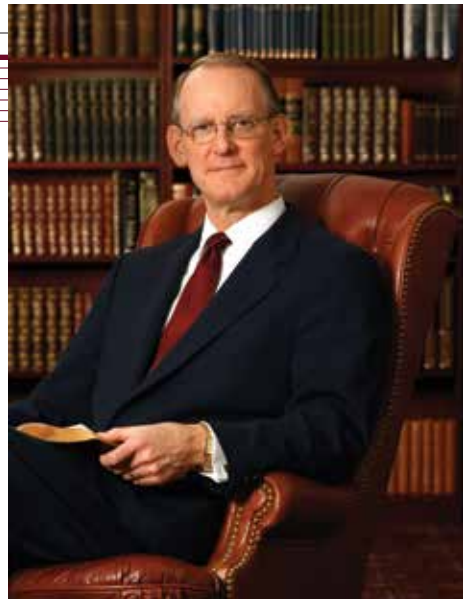
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PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



Raise Your Children God's Way

IN THE BOOK of Proverbs, God commands parents to “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (22:6).

Take a moment to consider the world around you. Reflect on all the different kinds of influences—with seemingly more every day—to which a child is exposed. Rearing children in today’s violent and confusing world is perhaps the most trying, difficult thing that adults could do.

How can parents—one alone or two working together—rear balanced, moral children? What should children be taught? How should they be instructed? And can you be sure that what you teach your children will stay with them for life?

God’s Word addresses these and many other questions—and the answers are not what you expect!

If you want to raise your children to lead successful, abundant lives, God’s Master Instruction Book will guide you. The Bible is filled with correct teachings and spiritual principles that always yield positive results for those who faithfully practice them. But you must deeply desire to learn God’s way of childrearing, and then diligently apply it without compromise—and for many years!

Be prepared to throw away the intellectual nonsense taught by people who have “credentials,” but who reject God’s authority over this and all other matters in life. You must also be prepared to put God’s Way into practice as you learn it.

This involves much more than you may realize. But there *is* hope. Truths in this Personal begin to show the way. You *can* succeed—and you should proceed *as though you will!*

Future Leaders

Before entering any major endeavor, prudent people want to know what is at stake. They want to know what it *means* if they succeed or what it *means* if they fail in their effort. In other words, what are the consequences—either way?

Consider! Invariably, the most successful people, the most effective role models for others, the wisest parents, the best husbands and wives, and the greatest leaders were all exposed to *great teachers* who taught them in their formative years.

Not everyone can be a leader now, in this life, but everyone should be striving to qualify for future leadership—in fact, future rulership. Without strong leadership from you as parents—which is centered in your ability

to be effective teachers—your children have little chance to be anything but *followers*.

When properly understood, your children are actually also in training from an early age to become future members of the coming, world-ruling Kingdom, or Family of God—soon to arrive on Earth as a supergovernment led by the Father and Jesus Christ, ruling with all the saints of past ages over all cities throughout the nations of the world.

Christ has been carefully preparing His team of co-rulers for 6,000 years, beginning with what was offered to Adam. If God has called you, you already know that you are in training for this rulership. But so are your children—NOW! (To learn more about God's Kingdom and your part in it, read *What Is the Kingdom of God?* at rcg.org/witkog.)

The Four Important Rules of Childrearing

Contrary to common belief, people are *not* born with the knowledge of how to be good parents.

Due to all the stresses of today's fast-paced life, many parents turn to movies, television and other electronic applications to help keep their children occupied. In an effort to have some quiet time, and to avoid the hard work of training their children, parents essentially hand their children over to the worst possible "babysitters" and "nannies"—Hollywood screenwriters, television and video game producers, YouTubers, etc. These people become the children's most dedicated mentors!

Authorities in society do teach certain good things concerning the rearing of children. But this means that they are teaching a mixture of good and evil. This is the lesson of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden, which God told Adam to reject. Only God's Way is pure, with no hidden "downside."

It takes hard work to be a parent! It is a full-time job that requires substantial, ongoing effort. You may have never thought of correct childrearing as a biblical teaching, but it *is*. Properly

rearing a child—made in the image and form of God, destined to be born into His Family—requires spiritual understanding from God. In fact, because of all that is at stake in the outcome of just one child, of course God would have to give detailed instruction.

No parent *naturally* knows everything about how to rear a child the correct way. God must *teach* this knowledge—like any other doctrine revealed in the Bible. Each parent must become a student of God's Word on this vitally important subject.

Some people *are* naturally better at parenting and working with children than others. Yet *all* parents must be taught by God. *All* parents need to study His instruction on childrearing. Strive to merge the good things that you may have already been blessed to know with what God's Word reveals.

Notice the New Testament instruction in Ephesians 6: "Children, OBEY your parents in the Lord, for this is right. HONOR your father and mother: (which is the first commandment with promise)" (vs. 1-2).

Children must be *taught* to respect their parents—this does not come naturally. If followed, this commandment—and the application of all childrearing principles—will yield blessings, as Ephesians 6 continues: "That it may be well with you, and you may live long on the earth" (vs. 3).

This Bible chapter next addresses parents: "And, you FATHERS, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the *nurture* [education, training, instruction] and *admonition* [mild rebuke, warning, correction, discipline] of the Lord" (vs. 4).

Help your children to honor you. Make it easy for them. No child will grow up to respect a nagging parent who berates him at every opportunity. Would you?

You must be determined and equally committed to continually teach your children all the vital lessons and important principles of life. It has been said that the single greatest gift you can give your child is to be a wise and understanding parent, one able to teach in almost every circumstance.

Now for what I call the FOUR GREAT RULES of childrearing:

(1) Teach!

(2) Teach!

(3) Teach!

(4) Teach your children absolutely everything they need to know!

Think of their little minds as clay. You can literally mold them into whatever you choose—good or bad. The greatest gift you can give to your child is to train him in God's Way. Recall from earlier: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6).

After your 18 to 20 years of good stewardship, your children will produce positive fruit!

Preparing Your Children for Success

God has permitted you to have children as a gift of stewardship. True Christians, those called out of the world and led by the Holy Spirit, know that children could one day experience the same. At the end of your stewardship, God will take back your children. When the time comes to offer them salvation, and for them to receive His Spirit, following repentance and conversion, your record will have largely been written. The efforts of your stewardship—your childrearing *today*—will have made God's job *tomorrow* either harder or easier.

Grasp this. You hold far more authority in this process than you know!

Jesus explained that the Christian walk is difficult. Here is what He told His disciples to expect: "Enter you in at the *strait* [difficult] gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because *strait* [again, hard] is the gate, and *narrow* is the way, which leads unto life, and *few* there be that find it" (Matt. 7:13-14).

God has high standards. It is the Christian parent's task to sow a bountiful crop—it is God's plan to reap it in those children.

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Everything You Need to Know About:

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HOW AMERICA FORGOT ITS PLACE IN THE WORLD



Why do Americans seem to instinctively *know* they live in a singular nation—and desire to share their brand with the entire globe?

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER

THE STUDY OF America's place in the world could start with a quote from John F. Kennedy or Richard Nixon. It could start by dissecting Ronald Reagan's farewell presidential address or Barack Obama's university commencement speech in Boston. But there is a better place to begin—with Perry Miller, a mid-century scholar of history and literature...

After dropping out of a Chicago university, Miller traveled the world

until he made his way to Africa. It was there, unloading barrels of American oil, that he claims to have had an epiphany, the National Endowment for the Humanities wrote.

While thinking of great civilizations that had come and gone over the centuries, Miller later recounted in a typical scholarly way: "It was given to me, equally disconsolate on the edge of a jungle of central Africa, to have thrust upon me the mission of expounding what I took to be the innermost propulsion of the United States."

Put simply, Miller dedicated himself to uncovering and defining what

America really means. What importance will the nation have in history? What should its role be in the world?

During Miller's studies, he unearthed a 1630 sermon by Puritan leader John Winthrop called "A Model of Christian Charity." This forever changed both Miller's career and the United States itself.

Winthrop's words were what Miller pinpointed as the special beginning of American history. It was in this sermon that the fledgling United States was likened to a "city upon a hill."

That now-famous phrase was adapted from Scripture. Matthew 5:14-15:

“You are the light of the world. *A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.* Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it gives light unto all that are in the house.”

Winthrop expounded on this idea in his sermon: “The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and by-word throughout this world.”

Miller’s crowning achievement was to bring “A Model of Christian Charity” to the public and demonstrate its importance in U.S. history. The National Endowment for the Humanities said Miller “turned it into the key text of American origins.”

Note those words, KEY TEXT of American origins.

Miller wrote that Winthrop “preached to the emigrants during the voyage that the eyes of the world would be upon them, that they would be as a city set upon a hill for all to observe.”

National Endowment for the Humanities stated: “If this sermon were the origin of America, then America, from the first, had a role to play in putting the world right. That aspect of Winthrop’s sermon would reappear frequently in the political speeches of President Reagan and many others in the years to come.”

Beyond Reagan, all of the presidents mentioned earlier used Winthrop’s words to further their political causes. Yet they were not alone: Lyndon Johnson, Jimmy Carter, George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton all likened the U.S. to “a city upon a hill.”

Note this. These presidents came from backgrounds across the political spectrum. Yet they all turned to Winthrop—and in turn the Bible—to help define the nation they led.

Miller and American politicians claim Winthrop penned the key text of the nation’s origins. Yet that book is resolutely the Bible itself. In fact, most of Winthrop’s sermon came from God’s Word.

Here is the awesome, true story of America’s origins—completely lost to the centuries.

Ancient Connection

Toward the end of “True Christian Charity,” Winthrop paraphrased another Bible verse. He stated that if the Puritans did justly, loved mercy and remained humble: “We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies; when He shall make us a praise and glory that men shall say of succeeding plantations, ‘may the Lord make it like that of New England.’”

With this last phrase, Winthrop was paraphrasing Genesis 48:20, which states: “The nation Israel will invoke blessings by you, saying, ‘May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh’” (Christian Standard Bible).

In ancient Israel, the tribe of Joseph was broken into brother tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. These were bigger than the nation’s other 11 tribes—and enjoyed an abundance found nowhere else.

Winthrop desired a similar proverb to be written about New England. That the world would see God blessing that colony and want to be like New England.

Referencing a scripture about Ephraim and Manasseh carries more weight than Winthrop would ever know.

Consider further America’s biblical roots—found on its currency (“In God We Trust”), in the Pledge of Allegiance (“under God”), and sprinkled throughout laws (for example, bankruptcy regulations borrow from the seventh year of release found in Deuteronomy 15). It is also evidenced by the countless churches throughout the nation. An amazing 87 percent of households in the nation own a Bible, Lifeway research found in 2017.

Like Winthrop, America’s Founding Fathers saw powerful parallels between ancient Israel and the fledgling United States.

Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams proposed a seal for the new nation of the United States. It was to be an image of the ancient Israelites crossing the Red Sea

with pharaoh chasing them and Moses standing on the other side. It would have included the motto, “Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God.” (Congress later settled on the eagle seal still in use today.)

Similarly, the Liberty Bell also bears an inscription from Moses’ book of Leviticus: “Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof” (25:10).

Have you ever asked yourself why there are so many references and connections to ancient Israel in American history and iconography?

Joseph Connection

In 1789, while being sworn in as the first president of the U.S., George Washington randomly opened the Bible to Genesis 49 and placed his hand there. As he pondered the future of the newborn nation and the importance of his position, he had no idea that, underneath his hand, America’s prosperous future had already been laid out.

Real Truth Editor-in-chief David C. Pack discusses this universally ignored chapter in the Bible in his book *America and Britain in Prophecy*.

“Genesis 49 contains the patriarch Israel’s latter-day prophecies for the descendants of each of his sons...God inspired this description to be recorded because He also intended that the final homelands of *these* peoples be known.”

Verse 1 of the chapter opens, “Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days.”

“Last days” shows these verses do not apply to ancient Israel. Rather, they are written for the descendants of Israel many centuries later.

The prophecy in Genesis describes the future of each tribe of Israel, represented by each of Jacob’s 12 sons. The most obvious example is that the Jews are the modern-day descendants of Judah.

“Jacob’s prophecy foretells Judah will be a ‘lion’s whelp,’” Mr. Pack continued. “A whelp is another name for a young lion cub. Jacob prophesied that Judah would be a very young nation

in the latter-day period of time. This describes the modern Israeli nation, which was ‘born’ in 1948 and is still a ‘young nation’ by today’s standards.”

The Bible shows that the descendants of Jacob’s son Joseph would also be clearly noticeable, as they were given a distinctly higher number and quality of blessings.

Mr. Pack writes: “As the primary subject of this book, ‘Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: the archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob...’ (Gen. 49:22-24).

“In this scripture, Joseph—the father of Ephraim and Manasseh—is likened to a fruitful bough or branch, most likely an olive branch. Joseph is also described as being shot by archers.

“Later, Joseph’s descendants are further described: ‘His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth: and they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh’ (Deut. 33:17).

“With these descriptions divided between both sons, Manasseh’s primary emblem was that of an olive branch, and his secondary emblem a cache of arrows. Also attached to Manasseh’s ensign was the number 13, since he was the thirteenth tribe.”

Interestingly, the official seal of the U.S. features an eagle carrying an olive branch and a cache of arrows, as well as 13 stars. This is another interesting link between America and the symbols described in the Bible for Manasseh.

Another key to identifying these nations is in Genesis 48, in which Joseph’s two sons were given separate blessings.

Verse 19 states that Manasseh “also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations.”

Scour the record of history. There are only two brother nations with a

common heritage where one was a massive empire (a “multitude” or “company of nations”) and the other became a single, great nation. These are the United Kingdom with all of its commonwealth countries and the United States.

These blessings came to all of these nations as the result of a promise God gave to Ephraim and Manasseh’s great-grandfather Abraham. Because of this great patriarch’s uncompromising obedience, God assured him “in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore” (Gen. 22:17). That promise was passed down through Abraham’s line, and today’s residents of the U.S., UK and commonwealth nations are the unwitting recipients of this special blessing.

One of the most astonishing points in world history is English and American peoples forgetting their history. Winthrop had no idea about this when he wanted New England to be like Ephraim and Manasseh, Washington had no idea when he placed his hand on Genesis 49 and the other Founding Fathers had no idea when they proposed a seal that included Israel crossing the Red Sea. Even more, all our modern presidents had no idea about America’s connection to the Bible when they called the U.S. “a city upon a hill.”

True Destiny

Back to Miller’s central question: What should America’s place be in the world? Again, the Bible makes clear what God intends for the peoples of the U.S. Amazingly, it is not too far from what they know in their gut to be the case.

In Deuteronomy 4, after outlining the Law of God, Moses said the following to ancient Israel. The words apply to the United States, Britain and all other modern descendants of Israel.

Start in verse 1: “Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, *that you may live*, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers gives you.”

The land God gave included the Promised Land, but even more so the

lands where Israelitish peoples live today. If they keep God’s Law, they will prosper and be blessed far beyond what they enjoy today. But there is another reason He wants Israel to follow His commands: so it can be a city-upon-a-hill example to the world.

Continue reading in verses 6-7: “Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding *in the sight of the nations*, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who has God so near unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon Him for?”

As with forgetting its ancient identity, America has also forgotten the source of its blessings. Notice what He warned in Deuteronomy 8: “Beware that you forget not the LORD your God, *in not keeping His commandments, and His judgments, and His statutes...* Lest when you have eaten and are full, and have built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God...” (vs. 11-14).

This was ancient Israel’s downfall. It forgot God was the clear source of its blessings. The same is true of the U.S. today. As a nation, we think our power and ingenuity has built this great land.

Verse 17 summarizes this thinking: “You say in your heart, My power and the might of my hand has gotten me this wealth.”

The God of the Bible longs to continue blessing America—and to increase that bounty beyond imagination. Winthrop tried to apply God’s Word the best he knew. Presidents try to do something similar, yet with political ideologies mixed in. And average citizens know the U.S. is special but think it is because of the Constitution or some intrinsic American values.

To truly prosper, the United States must remember its true identity, turn to God, and finally become the “city upon a hill” example it was destined to be. □

“WHAT IS TRUTH?”

Finding Facts amid Fiction

Fake news. Political bias. Relative truth.
The media landscape is more confusing than ever.

“**W**HAT IS TRUTH?” Pontius Pilate asked this question to Jesus Christ hours before His crucifixion. The gospel of John records that the Roman governor, who ruled Judea from AD 26 to 37, walked away immediately after he stated this.

Pilate’s hasty exit meant either he did not want to hear the answer or that he did not think there was one.

Sounds like today, doesn’t it? Having gone through two contentious presidential elections in 2016 and 2020, many are skeptical of news authenticity altogether.

A report from the “Edelman 2021 Trust Barometer” stated that public confidence in mainstream media is at an all-time low. More than half of Americans now believe that “Journalists and reporters are purposely trying to mislead people by saying things they know are false or gross exaggerations.”

Nearly 60 percent believe “most news organizations are more concerned with supporting an ideology or political position than with informing the public.” The CEO of Edelman, the company that produced the report, said this “is the era of information bankruptcy.”

The term “fake news” is *still* bandied about constantly—both by the left

■ A man reads a newspaper as he waits in line to vote at the Hazel Parker Playground on Election Day in Charleston, South Carolina (Nov. 3, 2020).

PHOTO: MICHAEL CIAGLO/GETTY IMAGES

and right sides of the political spectrum—to point out perceived or actual media bias. Genuine news watchers must navigate a mess of obstacles to get the whole story.

Reputable, long-standing newspapers and magazines have been caught reporting partially or wholly false information. Objectively, a news reader can know these organizations work hard to fact check and vet their articles. But seeing them oblivious to their biases and twisting facts to support their own agendas—seemingly more and more—makes it difficult to know who and what to believe.

“At a time when Americans are relying heavily on the media for information about the coronavirus pandemic, the presidential election and other momentous events, the public remains largely distrustful of the mass media,” Gallup reported. “Four in 10 U.S. adults say they have ‘a great deal’ (9%) or ‘a fair amount’ (31%) of trust and confidence in the media to report the news ‘fully, accurately, and fairly,’ while six in 10 have ‘not very much’ trust (27%) or ‘none at all’ (33%).”

The report concluded: “Americans’ confidence in the media to report the news fairly, accurately and fully has been persistently low for over a decade and shows no signs of improving... The political polarization that grips the country is reflected in partisans’ views of the media, which are now the most divergent in Gallup’s history.”

Avoiding fake news can seem cut-and-dried. Yet this becomes difficult when outlets present what appears to be conflicting information. Consider the following headlines encountered through a simple Google search:

■ “Americans’ trust in COVID-19 information is waning, poll finds”

■ “Trust in quality news outlets strong during coronavirus pandemic”

Confusing, right?

The discrepancy between these two headlines could be for a variety of reasons. Yet many news organizations tend to zero in on the latest isolated statistic that proves their point—often sidestepping contrary studies. This means readers get a skewed version of the truth.

Cherry-picking facts is just one symptom of the post-truth world in which we live. There is also sloppy reporting, demonizing contrary viewpoints, and outright fake news stories.

Pilate’s question is more relevant today than ever: “What is truth?”

What Is Fake?

Take another look at fake news, this time in its purest sense: articles that are completely fabricated. These are posted to websites that appear legitimate and saturate Google, Twitter and Facebook.

Such stories are always dramatic and often heinous. A *BBC* article described a number of conspiracy theories that sprang up surrounding a coronavirus vaccine prior to its release. These included: it alters a person’s DNA, it involves the use of lung tissue from aborted fetuses, it is a cover for implanting trackable microchips. Even though this last claim lacked evidence, “a YouGov poll of 1,640 people suggested 28% of Americans believed [Microsoft co-founder Bill] Gates wanted to use vaccines to implant microchips in people,” *BBC* reported.

The rise of fake news has led to varying approaches by social media networks to address the problem. Efforts to suppress conspiracies have been interpreted by some as political bias. There is a difficult balance between allowing certain stories to remain posted, which can look like tacit acceptance, versus a more active approach to removing this content, which leads to accusations of suppressing free speech.

Many buy into false stories completely. One fake-news author, when told by a *60 Minutes* host during an interview that his stories were false, replied, “They’re definitely not fake.”

“They’re not lies at all. 100-percent true.”

The interviewer asked, “Do you believe that, or do you say that because it’s important for marketing your website?”

He answered: “Oh, I believe it. I don’t say anything that I don’t believe.”

While fake news is often ridiculous, it has a lot of traction in society. Reputable news agencies even mistakenly post fake stories to the web, only to be forced to issue retractions later—or simply change their stories online without anyone knowing.

The reason fake news or half-fake news is not going anywhere is that it usually gets clicked, shared and retweeted more often than your average story—and much faster too. Also, in the internet age, the ability to “scoop” a story is more difficult than ever. To beat other outlets to the punch, news agencies will sometimes post a sentence on social media about the “news” or even just the headline. No further context is given.

News releases strive for emotional impact over factual content, and thus are often inflammatory or controversial. Yet when looking deeper into the content “above the fold”—the term used to describe the eye-catching material placed in the upper half of a newspaper—factual information is often lacking.

But not all news is *completely* false.

Another common tactic, and what *The Observer* considers “the biggest problem the media currently faces,” is to select certain statements or information and take them out of context to fit a narrative.

Usually these narratives involve commonly heard, dramatic themes that elicit emotional responses. In a post-truth world, when feelings matter more than facts, this is a powerful tool.

An example is when one of America’s top 10 newspapers reported that Russia cyber-hacked an electricity grid in Vermont. While it was based on an event that did happen, any involvement by the Russians was disproved, including by the power facility in question. Yet some continued to report and believe the story.

The Observer reported that this is “an example of *extremely* sloppy reporting that appeared to support... much of the mainstream media’s narrative about Russia.”

A problem for news watchers is that there is good reporting out there. Yet interlaced in some of the best reporting is also bias—everywhere. Even newspapers that claim to be unbiased or purveyors of truth employ many of the same methods of fake news writers: omitting the full story, painting the other side in a negative light, refusing to admit their own deficiencies, and only using examples that make their side look right and the other wrong.

Political bias is nothing new—it has long been a facet of the news. But outlets used to be upfront about their political and moral beliefs. In fact, “In the nineteenth century, most newspapers were explicitly linked to a particular political party and the economic interests of the publisher,” the Hoover Institution, a public policy think tank based in Stanford University in California, reported.

Traditionally, newspapers overtly ascribed to a politician or party. Yet competition between newspapers of equal standing and credentials ensured both viewpoints were represented.

Today, we have moved back to this old model of bias in reporting, with one major difference: few want to admit it.

The Hoover Institution noted another change to the industry that began in the 1960s. At that time, most journalists began attending universities where they were almost exclusively spoon-fed progressive political ideology. From this birthed the idea that journalists were there to shape public thinking and push agendas rather than simply report the facts.

As a result, there is decreasing value placed on presenting news with clearly stated bias. In other words, news media will not admit their biases and instead try to pass themselves off as neutral, objective and politically centered.

The Hoover Institution stated: “The end result is the mainstream media today: for-profit businesses that think of themselves as morally and intellectually superior not just to other businesses, but to the organs of government and the mass of gullible voters who put politicians in office.”

While this plain-spoken language makes a valid point, most journalists are not malicious. They sincerely feel what they believe is right and want to help others to see it their way too—often in an attempt to fix problems in the world. Both liberal and conservative writers fall into this trap.

The problem is that debate never ends up being noble or courteous. Instead, it caricaturizes and villainizes the other side. This “stab in the back,” “how could anyone believe them” kind of reporting can seem like fun and games—were it not for the consequences that have befallen society because of it.

Polarized People

The cut-throat partisanship that fills news media drives a wedge among the people it is supposed to inform.

According to “the National Election Study, a long-running survey that tracks Americans’ political opinions and behavior...until a few decades ago, people’s feelings about their party and the opposing party were not too different,” *The New York Times* reported. “But starting in the 1980s, Americans began to report increasingly negative opinions of their opposing party.”

“Since then, that polarization has grown even stronger. The reasons for that are unclear. ‘I suspect that part of it has to do with the rise of constant 24-hour news,’ [Sean Westwood, a Dartmouth professor,] said.”

Dr. Westwood also found that “in the modern era we view party identity as something akin to gender, ethnicity or race—the core traits that we use to describe ourselves to others.” He said this extends to the point of selecting relationships with people who are in the same political party.

In 2019, Pew Research Center conducted a poll of Democrat and Republican party members and found that “the level of division and animosity—including negative sentiments among partisans toward the members of the opposing party—has only deepened,” compared to their previous survey in 2016.

Please see TRUTH, page 26

HOW TO SPOT FAKE NEWS



CONSIDER THE SOURCE

Visit the site’s “about us” page to investigate its mission and its contact information.



READ BEYOND

Headlines can be outrageous in an effort to get clicks. Consider the whole story.



CHECK THE AUTHOR

Do a quick search on authors. Are they credible? Do they actually exist?



CHECK THE DATE

Posting old news stories doesn’t mean they’re relevant to current events.



IS IT A JOKE?

If the story seems outlandish, it might be satire. Research the site and author to be sure.



SUPPORTING SOURCES?

Click on links. Determine if the information given actually supports the story.



CHECK YOUR BIASES

Consider if your own beliefs could affect your judgment.



ASK THE EXPERTS

Look up the source on a media bias/fact check site.

'BUY NOW, PAY LATER'

What You Should Know



Americans have increasingly bought into financing options while shopping during the pandemic, yet it has led many into surprising debt.

WHEN LEONDR A Garrett wanted to stock up on three new pairs of shoes early last year, the North Carolina resident split a \$161 online purchase into four installments through a “buy now, pay later” service, in what seemed like a convenient deal.

Now, she admits she should have read the small print about missed payments.

When the buy now, pay later (BNPL) provider tried to withdraw a payment from Ms. Garrett’s bank account a few months later, she did not have enough funds to cover it. Soon after, the 42-year-old was charged \$40 in penalties and her credit score dropped 10 points to 650, a reading generally classified as “fair.”

“It’s important for consumers to always read the fine print and

we don’t always do it,” said Ms. Garrett, a community organizer from Charlotte.

So-called buy now, pay later services—offered by providers such as Affirm Holdings Inc, Klarna, Afterpay Ltd and PayPal Holding Inc’s “Pay In 4”—have blossomed across retail websites during the coronavirus pandemic as people have turned more to shopping online.

Yet the ease with which many shoppers can make purchases is worrying some regulators around the world, who fear consumers may be spending more than they can afford.

Nearly 40 percent of U.S. consumers who used BNPL have missed more than one payment, and 72 percent of those saw their credit score decline, according to a study by Credit Karma, which offers customers credit score checking for free.

The study, conducted for *Reuters*, surveyed 1,038 adult consumers in the

United States to gauge interest in buy now, pay later and found 42 percent of respondents had used the service before.

“The percentage of consumers missing payments is remarkable and not as low as you would expect,” said Gannesh Bharadhwaj, general manager for credit cards at Credit Karma.

“When you make something so convenient, people may not be really thinking, ‘Do I have the budget? Can I afford this payment?’ You get more of that impulse-shopping behavior that leads to realizing they may not be able to make the payment.”

A lower credit score signals to lenders that a consumer may be higher risk and makes it harder for the consumer to borrow, whether to secure a mortgage or a new credit card. It can even make it more difficult for a consumer to set up utility accounts or find housing, as landlords will generally conduct credit score checks before renting out apartments.



Management consultants Oliver Wyman estimate BNPL firms facilitated between \$20 billion-\$25 billion in transactions in the United States last year, although analyst estimates on the size of the BNPL industry vary because it is relatively new and some of the companies are private. Individually, they described explosive growth last year as their services became more prevalent.

Australia-based Afterpay said it saw active U.S. customers more than double to 6.5 million in the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2020, and its sales more than tripled in the July-September quarter from a year earlier.

Over half of Afterpay's customers in the United States are millennials, aged 25 to 40 years-old, it said.

BNPL models vary, with some companies earning most profits by collecting fees from merchants at the point of sale, and others charging interest and late fees to consumers. They say their services help merchants to boost sales and consumers to buy things they need, and cause less

financial damage than credit cards because of restrictions they impose.

Nonetheless, regulators in Britain and Australia are reviewing or tightening rules around the industry. BNPL service providers, classified as fintech companies, should be subject to stricter rules more like banks, some regulators say.

It is unclear how buy now, pay later fits into U.S. regulations because the companies that offer these services do not have bank charters, some do not charge interest and laws vary by state.

San Francisco-based Affirm saw its revenue rise 93 percent, to \$509.5 million, in the fiscal year that ended in June. It allows shoppers to split purchases in terms ranging from six weeks to four years, with interest rates of 0 to 30 percent.

Affirm shows customers how much a loan will cost in dollar terms and does not charge late fees or compound interest. Although missed payments can affect credit scores, Affirm says it has been working with borrowers who fell on hard times during the pandemic.

"We approve borrowers only for what they can comfortably afford to repay," said Silvija Martincevic, Affirm's chief commercial officer. "The reason our technology is significant is that we use machine learning to make underwriting decisions."

At Australia's Afterpay, customers are barred from using its services after they miss a payment.

The company says 95 percent of its transactions globally are paid back on time and late fees contribute less than 14 percent of the company's total income.

PayPal's "Pay in 4" service, launched widely across the United States in November, allows customers to split purchases ranging from \$30 to \$600 in four interest-free payments. Late fees may apply for missed payments, depending on the user's state of residency, according to its website.

Pay in 4 in the United States does not report trades or late fees to the credit bureaus, said Greg Lisiewski, PayPal's global vice president of Global Pay Later.

"We are working with the industry and the consumer credit bureaus to develop the appropriate framework," he said.

Sweden-based Klarna saw fast growth over the past year, especially purchases in the \$100-\$200 range, said its U.S. head, David Sykes.

Most of Klarna's loans are small, of short duration and interest-free, which is safer for customers than credit cards, he said. Customers can delay one payment without a penalty. Late fees vary by state in line with regulation, up to a maximum of \$21 and the company is rolling out a 25 percent cap.

"No one is getting buried in debt with Klarna," Mr. Sykes said. "We aren't making multi-year loans on a car or a house."

Smaller loans with shorter durations do have benefits, but they are not risk-free, experts said. Customers may be taking on more debt than they can handle, even if it comes in bite-sized portions.

Tamika Rivera, a 35-year old insurance agent from Springfield, Massachusetts, uses multiple buy now, pay later services, and has missed payments. In one case, she did not have enough money to cover a \$43 sweater purchase, which resulted in a \$35 overdraft fee from her bank.

"These services are convenient but there are some negative things that can happen," Ms. Rivera said.

Alan McIntyre, head of Accenture's global banking practice, says the credit impact of the buy now, pay later trend remains to be seen.

"The optimistic take is that millennials don't want to get into debt and they want to build a budget better—this is deferred debit and you are not tempted to roll it over," he said.

"The pessimistic view is that around 40 percent of people using it are doing so because they couldn't get access to traditional credit—either because they've maxed out their credit limit or because of a poor or non-existent credit history—and some of these loans might not season well."

Money Management

The financial traps of BNPL programs are just one among many setbacks Americans have had to grapple with as the pandemic brought the largest global recession in history. More than 2 in 5 (42 percent) U.S. citizens said their household financial situation has gotten worse, according to a survey by NerdWallet. The majority of those who said their finances had become worse said it was because their household income decreased. Other reasons included an unexpected large expense, increased household expenses, or a lost job and unemployment benefits ran out. These circumstances have led to surging debt levels during 2020.

According to the Federal Reserve, the amount Americans owe in credit card debt reached an all-time high of \$1 trillion in 2020. Adding all other forms of revolving debt, including mortgage, auto and student loans, the average citizen owes more than \$90,400.

CNBC reported: “During the coronavirus crisis, more than half, or 51%, of adults with credit card debt—roughly 51 million people—added to their balances, according to a report by CreditCards.com.”

To add to the burgeoning debt levels, roughly three-in-five Americans admitted that they had run out of savings last year, or that their savings will run out by the end of this year, according to the NerdWallet survey.

For many, the downturn was a call to change how they handle their expenses to reduce debt. According to the survey, “more than 3 in 5 Americans said they were spending less on shopping (63%), restaurant food (62%) and transportation (62%)” during the pandemic. “For those who aren’t experiencing a drop in income along with lower spending, they may have extra money in their budget to allocate toward financial goals.”

Several people are striving to find ways to balance their financial situation and reduce spending. That is where the buy now, pay later program can become particularly deceptive—you can make the purchases you want

at a lower cost up front, seemingly “reducing” your spending. However, these small payments add up and, if not careful, you can commit to more than you can afford.

The following tips from our booklet *Taking Charge of Your Finances* will help you manage your spending and get out of debt:

■ Create a budget and stick to maintaining it. A budget helps one plan, specifying how a family’s or individual’s income should be spent over a designated period. When creating a budget, all income must be calculated, followed by expenditures.

■ Before making a purchase, you must ask: (1) Is this something that I want? (2) Is this something that I need? (3) Can I do without it? (4) Does the budget allow for this purchase?

■ If you do not have the money to buy something—do not buy it!

■ Lower your standard of living and avoid unnecessary spending. If you ask three people, one making \$25,000, one making \$50,000 and another making \$100,000, about the status of their financial situation, all three will likely answer that they are barely making enough to “get by.” This attitude is prevalent—most are never satisfied with what they have.

■ Stop the cycle of borrowing to pay for expenses.

■ Remember, a wise family should learn to live *with* credit—never *by* credit!

■ Check the balance of your accounts frequently. If you encounter charges that you were not expecting, call your credit card company or bank and ask about them.

■ Do not carry multiple credit cards. If you have had problems with overspending, it will take some time to develop self-control. In the meantime, do not allow yourself the temptation to have many credit cards in your purse or wallet—thus allowing yourself some “cushion” to spend what you do not have! Carry one credit card for emergency purposes only.

■ Pay at least \$15-20 more than your minimum monthly payment.

Most often, the minimum payment only affects the monthly interest, and does not include much, if any, principal.

■ Before making a large purchase, think about it for a number of days. You may even want to schedule a savings plan, which will allow you to save portions of the purchase price over a period of time. This would then allow additional time to think about it, helping ensure that you are making a wise purchase. Remember, it is always better to “sleep on” a decision than to jump in impulsively and later regret your action.

■ Consolidate multiple credit card bills onto one credit card with a low interest rate. Pay off bills with higher interest rates first.

■ If your interest payments are higher than you can pay, try renegotiating your interest rate with your creditors.

■ Teach your children to budget and save money. If properly instilled now, these principles will stick with them throughout adulthood. Imagine the benefits of learning, at a young age, rules and laws that have been *proven* to work!

Taking Charge of Your Finances contains many more practical and helpful points about finances, including from a source most do not associate with the topic.

“Some mistakenly assume that God believes money is evil, and that Christians should be poor,” the booklet states. “They directly associate having riches to the lustful, sinful lifestyles of the wealthy, taking on the belief that ‘humble Christians’ must live in squalor and poverty to demonstrate ‘true’ Christianity.”

“But this thinking is simply not true!”

“John 10:10 and III John 1:2 stated that God wants us to live an abundantly healthy life. Unless one’s finances are in proper order and well managed, this is impossible.”

Read the entirety of the booklet at rcg.org/tcoyf. You cannot afford to dismiss it as a resource toward finding true economic success. □

FINDING EASTER IN THE BIBLE?

BY F. JACO VILJOEN

EASTER traditions are deeply engrained in cultures across the globe.

Adherents feel a sense of relief when Lent, a 40-day period during which worshippers try to emulate Christ's suffering by fasting and abstaining from certain pleasures, is finally over—and Easter Sunday has arrived.

Many children in America and other Western nations awaken to elaborate “egg hunts” staged by their parents. The acts of painting intricate, colorful designs on eggs and enjoying chocolate rabbits, marshmallow peeps and other themed sugary treats help make this time of year especially memorable.

Alongside these and other activities, parents seek to impress upon their family the significance of the day. Their explanation could sound like, “Son, on Friday we commemorated the crucifixion and death of our Savior, so today—Easter Sunday—we celebrate His resurrection.”

In other countries, the traditions of Easter Sunday vary depending on culture—yet they are still based on the same religious meaning.

Jerusalem, where the most well-known Easter celebrations take place, typically becomes jam-packed with worshippers from all across the world. Along the famous cobble street Via Dolorosa—Latin for “Way of Suffering”—thousands of parishioners walk the path Christ is believed to have taken on His

■ An illustration depicting Ishtar, the Assyrian and Babylonian goddess of fertility, love and war taken from Lewis Spence's *Myths and Legends of Babylonia and Assyria* (1916).

PHOTO: INTERNET ARCHIVE BOOK IMAGES



way to Golgotha. To them, and millions of like-minded believers, Easter is the principal feast of the liturgical year.

Elsewhere, a group of devout women in Peshawar, Pakistan, gathers around a picture of “Jesus” to reflect on the significance of the day and give prayers of thanksgiving. Farther east, thousands of South Korean Catholics attend services.

Later that evening, several German Christians in Europe light a customary bonfire to protect them against the cold. Meanwhile, during a traditional ceremony in Bulgaria, priests bless painted red eggs, which symbolize spring. And several time zones away, an Armenian priest in New York City releases doves to illustrate the original 12 apostles being commissioned to “spread the gospel.”

Certainly, long-held traditions such as Ash Wednesday, Lent, Good Friday, sunrise services, hot-cross buns, Easter eggs, and rabbits—which form the building blocks upon which Easter is established—must have deep ancient roots. If Easter traditions are all about the Christ of the Bible, then they should be found within the pages of God’s Word.

But are they?

While Acts 12:4 is the only time the word “Easter” is mentioned in the King James translation of the Bible, the customs of this holiday appeared long before Christ’s Resurrection.

Origin of Easter

American novelist Henry James wrote the following about traditions: “It takes an endless amount of history to make even a little tradition...”

Throughout the centuries, millions of people have been persuaded into believing that Easter’s purpose is to honor Christ’s death and resurrection. Yet this age-old global tradition can be traced back to thousands of years before Jesus was born.

“That God sacrificed his only Son for the salvation of the world...is so mystical, so remote...yet the extraordinary fact is that a similar belief ranges all through the ancient religions, and can be traced back to the earliest times,” Edward Carpenter wrote in *Pagan and Christian Creeds*.

Easton’s 1897 Bible Dictionary explained that the term Easter was “originally a Saxon word (Eostre), denoting a goddess of the Saxons, in honour of whom sacrifices were offered about the time of the Passover.”

Easter customs involving the celebration of death and resurrection originate from pagan rites. In his book *The Two Babylons*, Alexander Hislop explained, “Among the Pagans this Lent seems to have been an indispensable preliminary to the great annual festival in commemoration of the death and resurrection of Tammuz,

which was celebrated by alternate weeping and rejoicing.”

An article on *Christianity.com* acknowledged that “the origins of Easter are wrapped up in a celebration of seasonal renewal that has taken place in numerous cultures for thousands of years around the time of the Spring Equinox.”

The Bible records in Genesis that Nimrod, also known as Tammuz or Baal, was the founding father and builder of Babylon. His mother-wife, Semiramis, also called Ishtar, was Babylon’s first queen. She was worshipped as a goddess.

Ashtoreth (Easter), Baal’s mother and wife according to historians, was considered the “Great Goddess” throughout the ancient world, in Greece, Germany, Babylon and Phoenicia. This generally occurred in conjunction with the worship of Baal (El or Tammuz).

This is made evident in the book *Did God Have a Wife?* by William G. Dever. He wrote: “In earlier Canaan, the Great Goddess may be a cosmic deity who could be known by several names: Asherah; ‘Anat; Astarte; or Ba’alat or Elath (the feminine forms of ‘Ba’al’ and ‘El’).”

“Her role in the cult is as the consort of El, the principal male deity of the pantheon, as ‘Mother of the Gods,’” Dr. Dever further wrote.

Mr. Hislop elaborated on the origin of Easter (or Astarte) in *The Two Babylons*: “It bears its Chaldean origin on its very forehead. Easter is nothing else than Astarte, one of the titles of Beltis, the queen of heaven...That



ISHTAR: TERRACOTTA RELIEF, EARLY 2ND MILLENNIUM BC

“Ashtoreth (Easter), Baal’s mother and wife according to historians, was considered the ‘Great Goddess’ throughout the ancient world, in Greece, Germany, Babylon and Phoenicia. This generally occurred in conjunction with the worship of Baal (El or Tammuz).”

PHOTO: MARIE-LAN NGUYEN/LOUVRE MUSEUM/CC BY 2.5

name, as found by Layard on the Assyrian monuments, is Ishtar.”

In nearly all Semitic dialects, “Ishtar” is pronounced “Easter.” Easter festivities extensively refer to celebrating the personage Ishtar, Ashtoreth and the “queen of heaven,” who has many interchangeable names. Each year, citizens in pagan nations celebrated her son’s death and resurrection during spring.

Plainly, this festival was initiated long before Christ walked the Earth.

Easter and the Bible

Ancient Israel incorporated some of the practices of surrounding nations, and Easter was no exception. It is in this regard that the holiday is mentioned in the Bible.

After the house of Israel was divided into the northern 10 tribes and Judah in the south, King Manasseh of Judah “set a graven image of the grove that he had made in the house [of the Temple of God]” (II Kgs. 21:7).

But to what is “the grove” referring?

The Hebrew word *asherah*, with two exceptions, is always translated as “grove” in the King James Version of the Bible. *Smith’s Bible Dictionary* defines *asherah* in the following way: “The name of a Phoenician goddess, or rather of the idol itself...*Asherah* is closely connected with *Ashtoreth* and her worship...*Ashtoreth* being, perhaps, the proper name of the goddess, while *Asherah* is the name of her image or symbol, which was of wood.”

Dr. Dever, in his book, added, “Thus it seems clear that originally in ancient Israel there was a Goddess named ‘*Asherah*,’ who was associated with living trees and hilltop forest sanctuaries, and who could sometimes be symbolized by a wooden pole or an image of a tree.”

He went on, “It is noteworthy that in at least a handful of cases, the term *asherah* must refer to the Goddess *Asherah* herself, not merely to a ‘symbol.’”

Thus, when Israel’s ruler erected a figure of “the grove,” he may have actually set up an image of *Asherah* in God’s Temple!

Throughout Israel’s history, its people attempted to serve false gods alongside the God of the Bible. The book of Jeremiah makes clear that families in Israel also worshipped Easter—the “queen of heaven.”

Notice: “The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods” (Jer. 7:18).

Stephen Langdon wrote in his book *Tammuz and Ishtar* that “The cult of a goddess, who is supposed to be of Babylonian origin, was introduced into Judea in the age of Jeremiah under the name...‘queen of heaven,’ to whom the Jews offered *Ishtar* cakes, precisely as the Babylonians offered to their goddess.”

Israel’s devotion to false deities is also engraved in the annals of secular sources. Archeological evidence indicates that the nation of Israel fell into keeping Easter, thinking they could worship *Ishtar* alongside the true God. Archeologists have found tomb inscriptions in Israel that read, “Yahweh and his *Asherah*,” erroneously suggesting God had a goddess as wife!

The *Biblical Archaeology Society* reported that “The finds from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud [a location in the northeast part of the Sinai Peninsula] were fantastic. The zingers were two large pithoi, or storage jars, that weighed about 30 pounds each. The now-reconstructed pithoi are painted with deities, humans, animals and symbols, and feature a number of inscriptions, including three that refer to Yahweh and his *asherah* or *Asherah*, depending on your interpretation. *Asherah* is a pagan goddess. Was she God’s wife?” The article went on to emphasize the difficulty of correctly interpreting such drawings and inscriptions.

When God started to work with Israel early on, His instructions through Moses were clear: “You shall not plant you a *grove* of any trees near unto the altar of the LORD your God, which you shall make you” (Deut. 16:21).

Moreover, “you shall destroy their altars,” referring to the surrounding nations’ many idols, “and break down their images, and cut down their *groves*, and burn their graven images with fire” (7:5). These directions from God were unmistakably plain.

But, time and time again, “the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God, and served Baalim [plural of Baal] and the groves [*Asherah*]” (Judg. 3:7).

Israel’s behavior was clearly *evil* in God’s sight!

Even King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, rejected God’s counsel and was persuaded by his foreign wives to worship *Ashtoreth*. As a result, the house of Israel split into north and south—directly because “Solomon went after *Ashtoreth* the goddess of the Zidonians” (I Kgs. 11:5).

In biblical times, without any exceptions, God’s true servants never celebrated Easter to honor Him and Israel was directly forbidden to have any part in it.

Lost in Translation

How did Easter—clearly a festival not sanctioned by God—become “Christian”?

“The idea of Christ’s resurrection was injected into the old practice of Easter observance and not the other way around” (*Early Gentile Christianity and its Hellenistic Background*).

The Greek word translated “Easter” in Acts 12:4 is *pascha*. This actually refers to Passover, which was always kept on the 15th to the 21st of the Hebrew month of Nisan (*Abib*). It was *Passover*, not Easter, that God commanded His people to observe, and they did so throughout early New Testament times—they also took the Passover symbols on Nisan 14 as Christ instructed (I Cor. 11:23-26).

“Easter” in Acts 12:4 is a gross mistranslation.

But slowly, Easter, with all its pagan customs, replaced Passover. Disagreement arose surrounding how

Please see **EASTER**, page 28



10 YEARS LATER

Is Another Arab
Spring Coming?

The uprisings that took place across northern Africa and the Mideast aimed to democratize the authoritarian region. Instead, it left nations politically splintered, economically tanking and wondering whether they are better off.

BY DAVID J. LITAVSKY

ON DECEMBER 17, 2010, 26-year-old fruit seller Mohamed Bouazizi was approached by police in a town in Tunisia's neglected interior. Lacking a permit for his cart and with no funds to bribe, the authorities humiliated Bouazizi and tossed aside his cart. When he tried to complain at a government office, they refused to listen. He then walked outside, doused himself with gasoline and set himself on fire.

One man. One act. In one remote place.

That is all it took for tens of millions of citizens to flood the capitals and working-class neighborhoods of nations across northern Africa and the Middle East. The death of the Tunisian fruit seller unleashed simmering discontent and mass demonstrations against poverty, joblessness and the repression of authoritarian rule, triggering what is known as the Arab Spring uprisings.

"The people want the downfall of the regime" became the movement's rallying cry. In less than a month, Egypt's president for 30 years Hosni Mubarak was ousted. An autocrat in Tunisia was overturned. Two more regimes fell later on: Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh stepped down from office while Libya's Muammar Gaddafi—in power for nearly four decades—fled before eventually being captured and killed by opposition forces. Wealthy Persian Gulf kingdoms Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia gave payouts to appease protesters and promised changes such as voting rights to women.

From Jordan and Lebanon to Iraq and Syria, governmental shifts were promised. It had seemed the Arab world was on course toward a freer, brighter future.

Fast-forward a decade. Now that world looks a lot like it did in 2011—in many cases worse.

Today "more Arabs are now living in poverty, more are unemployed and more are imprisoned for their political beliefs than a decade ago," *The Independent* reported. The news outlet also reported that the Middle East is the *only* region in the world with a population that has been getting poorer overall.

Even in the birthplace of the history-making revolution, a third of young Tunisians are unemployed and a fifth of the country lives under the poverty line, according to the National Institute of Statistics. Discontent has spurred a wave of protests across the nation, including a rally backed by the country's most powerful political organization, the Tunisian General Labor Union. Samir Cheffi, a senior official of the union, proclaimed, "Today is a cry of alarm to defend the revolution, to protect freedoms under threat."

Yet the recent protests led to a muscular response from authorities who fear a repeat of the demonstrations that led to the exile of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali 10 years ago.

Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi has also doubled down on dissenters with an iron fist. International and Egyptian organizations have found that crackdowns on opposition are "escalating, demonstrating a clear pattern of intimidation and harassment," *Reuters* reported.

Meanwhile, Libya, Syria and Yemen are still trapped in civil wars that have killed hundreds of thousands of people. Those conflicts have sent millions fleeing to Europe, triggering the migrant crisis that has overwhelmed that continent over the last decade.

Why have the Arab Spring protests born so little positive fruit over the last 10 years? To understand, it helps to look at how uprisings in specific nations began.

Egypt: "The Wall of Fear"

Shortly after Tunisia's 2010 uprising, some young Egyptian activists formed the Revolution Youth Coalition to draw together the movement's disparate strands and give the protesters occupying Cairo's Tahrir Square a coherent voice.

They demanded freedom, dignity, democracy and social justice amid battles with police and state-hired thugs. It seemed to work. On February 11, President Hosni Mubarak resigned.

But the coalition fragmented as it faced two much more established forces: the pro-Islamist Muslim Brotherhood that swept to power in later elections, and the military that toppled the Brotherhood in 2013.

The military continues to dominate the political landscape today. Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, who became president in 2014 after leading the overthrow of the Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi, has overseen a crackdown that activists call the harshest for decades.

"Under President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi, Egypt has outdone itself as a prolific jailer and executioner—Human Rights Watch recently esti-

■ Egyptians gather in Tahrir Square to mark the one-year anniversary of the revolution in Cairo, Egypt (Jan. 25, 2012).

PHOTO: JEFF J MITCHELL/GETTY IMAGES

mated the number of political prisoners at 60,000 and rising,” *CBC* reported.

“According to activists, the government has also deployed a persistent campaign aimed at framing the revolution as the harbinger of Egypt’s myriad woes and the reason it has been ‘brought to its knees.’

“Egypt is now a country where the ‘Tahrir people’—as they’re pejoratively referred to by supporters of the regime—are either out of the country, if they haven’t been arrested, or keeping a silent vigil.”

General el-Sissi said in response that he has brought stability, allowing the country to move on from the turmoil that followed 2011. He has referred to the uprising as a “great revolution” while blaming it for unleashing economic disruption and security problems.

The Revolution Youth Coalition is now shattered. Some of its founders are now in prison or exile, while others have sided with the current ruling government. For example, one is a pro-Sissi member of parliament.

“One of the lessons of the Arab Spring, unfortunately, is that repression works, that the wall of fear can be rebuilt,” Shadi Hamid, a Brookings Institution Senior Fellow, told *NBC News*.

Egypt’s political outcome portrays that lesson.

Yemen: “Forced to Take Up Arms”

Ten years after joining an uprising in Yemen against autocratic rule and an economy in shambles, the same activists find themselves on opposite sides of a war that has pushed the country to the brink of famine with dim prospects for peace.

Ahmed Abdo Hezam, 35—a fighter with government forces who goes by the name Ahmed Abu Al-Nasr—had been a university graduate in the agro-industrial city of Taiz when he first joined youth-led protests that ended Ali Abdullah Saleh’s 33-year rule.

Even back then, some 40 percent of Yemen’s population lived on less than \$2 a day and a third suffered chronic hunger. The state was also facing a resurgent al-Qaida wing and rebellions by the Houthis in the north and separatists in the south.

“When we joined the uprising it was like a breath of air. They tried to drag us into violence...but we remained peaceful,” said Mr. al-Nasr who like many resented cronyism in the public jobs sector, the biggest employer.

More than 2,000 people died in the uprising before Saleh in 2012 yielded to pressure from the United States and Gulf Arab states to step down. He was the fourth autocrat to be toppled in the Arab Spring unrest.

The U.S. and its ally Saudi Arabia hoped former Saleh deputy Abd-Rabbu

Mansour Hadi would oversee a transition to democracy. Instead, it disintegrated.

The Houthis, enemies of Saudi Arabia and friends of Iran, partnered with former foe Saleh to seize the capital, Sanaa, and ousted Hadi’s government in late 2014, triggering a Saudi-led military coalition backed by the West to intervene.

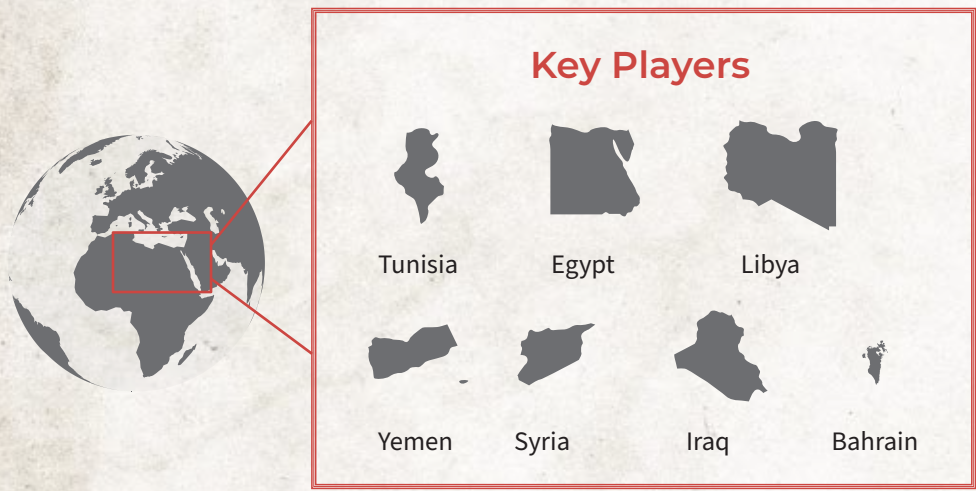
Mr. al-Nasr, a poet with four children, joined government forces when the Houthis, who later killed Saleh when he turned on them, entered Taiz, which is still effectively under siege.

“We did not think the uprising would lead to this,” said Mr. al-Nasr, who has seen comrades die, his home destroyed and family scattered. “We were forced to take up arms to defend ourselves.”

“I hope with all my heart the war ends...that weapons are laid down and all factions sit at the table.”

The war has killed more than 100,000 people and pushed millions to the brink of starvation. Now 80 percent of the population, or some 24 million, need help and are vulnerable to disease, first cholera and now COVID-19.

Ali al-Dailami, a rights defender briefly detained under Saleh’s rule who is now Houthi deputy minister of human rights, joined the uprising in “Change Square” in Sanaa in the hopes it would lead to a state representing all.



Dec. 17

BIRTH OF A REVOLUTION 2010-11

Mohamed Bouazizi sets himself on fire in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, setting off a series of street demonstrations

Speaking to *Reuters* in the square, Mr. al-Dailami recalled the early days of the revolution and lamented its results.

“At times we thought we would not live to see the sun rise because of the threats and [pro-Saleh] soldiers and hoodlums,” he said. “We wanted to move from a failed state, we wanted to break the impasse.”

He saw the Gulf initiative that ushered in Hadi as interference that “killed the revolution’s principles.”

“We wanted real change, not to repackage the old system as democracy.”

Raja al-Thaibani, a Yemeni-American who put her university studies on hold in 2011 to participate in the uprising, said to *The Guardian*, it “was so powerful and intoxicating, that feeling that for the first time ever, people in Yemen were unified. It didn’t matter what your tribe or religious or political affiliation was, the gender dynamic, we all showed up together, week after week.”

But, Ms. al-Thaibani continued, it only took a few months until “the cracks in that unity started to show, but I think a lot of us refused to acknowledge it.”

Tunisia: “It Doesn’t Work Here”

Back at ground zero of the revolution, Tunisia, conditions appear much more aligned with the goals of the

2011 revolutionaries. Tunisians have held numerous democratic elections, for mayor, parliament and president, notably putting a constitutional law professor, Kais Saied, into the presidential palace in 2019.

The Tunisia of today “joins advanced countries” as far as democracy is concerned, said Najib Chebbi, founder of the Progressive Democratic Party, the main political opposition under Ben Ali.

But a pall of disenchantment hangs over the country, marked by extremist

attacks, political infighting, a troubled economy and promises unfulfilled, including development of the interior.

Despite guaranteed rights and numerous democratic elections, protests have continued to flourish—especially in the central and southern regions where the jobless rate among youth reaches 30 percent and the poverty level is above 20 percent. According to the Tunisian Forum of Economic and Social Rights, more than 1,000 demonstrations were counted in November alone. Months of sit-

■ Thousands of protesters chant slogans against President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunis, Tunisia (Jan. 14, 2011).

PHOTO: AP/CHRISTOPHE ENA



Dec. 24-31

Most of Tunisia erupts in protest with the worst unrest in decades



Jan. 14

Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali declares a state of emergency and flees to Saudi Arabia



Jan. 25-Feb. 12

Massive protests erupt in Egypt; government shuts down internet networks; President Hosni Mubarak is ousted



Feb. 14-25

“Days of rage” spread across the Arab world with mass protests in at least seven nations; uprising against Libya dictator Muammar Gaddafi begins, leading to civil war

ins paralyzed oil and phosphate production, putting billion-dollar holes in the budget.

“The Tunisian people have political rights, but are still waiting for their demands for dignity and work to be fulfilled,” he said, alluding to the revolutionary slogan of demonstrators crying out, “freedom, jobs and dignity.”

Analyst Slaheddine Jourchi said that what has been accomplished in the decade since the revolution “is far from answering the population’s demands, especially expectations of youth—the backbone of the revolution.”

“The revolution needs a deep evaluation,” he said.

On the other hand, some “people here are now asking for the parliamentary system to be removed,” Wael, a 27-year-old civil society activist, said to *BBC*’s North Africa correspondent.

“The president has no power, he’s like a symbol of the state only,” he continued.

The news correspondent stated, “I listened with intrigue—here is a young man from a neighborhood that is reputed to have been the pulse of the 2011 revolution that overthrew an all-powerful president, now asking for a head of state with yet more power.”

“It’s true we have freedoms now,” Wael admitted to *BBC*, “but we discovered that our dreams will not materialize.”

The *BBC* correspondent continued: “When I ask him about the teenagers who were arrested recently, Wael quickly points to the high number of school drop-outs in his area. ‘Maybe this system we have works elsewhere, but it doesn’t work here... all the political parties failed us.’”

The Missing Element

“So, what do people want?” the *BBC* asked of Tunisians. A businessman responded: “We need something in-between...a strong leader who supports freedoms. This parliament, and all these political parties who work against each other are paralyzing the country.”

A strong leader who supports freedoms. That ideal could not sound more out of place in the context of the Arab Spring. Given its outcomes, either citizens suffer from limited freedoms under corrupt, overbearing governments that nevertheless offer structure, or have limited government that affords certain freedoms but inevitably bring instability, division and even violence.

But the man’s response does reveal a key facet of all mankind: it recognizes that a strong government is essential for stability. Even revolutions that seek reform show people understand some form of leadership is needed to secure their livelihoods.

Where will this leadership come from? The Arab Spring, writ large over many nations, has failed to secure a form of government that can deliver peace and prosperity. Even in the more stable nations of the West, universal contentment is always out of reach.

■ Houthi rebels chant slogans at an army compound after it was overtaken in Sanaa, Yemen (Sept. 22, 2014).

PHOTO: AP/HANI MOHAMMED



REVOLUTION ESCALATES 2011

Feb. 27

Tunisia Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi resigns

March 15

Uprisings in Southern Syria begin; government forces fire on protesters, leading to civil war

March 26-April 22

NATO-led coalition begins airstrikes in Libya to support rebels; protests in Yemen and Syria escalate, met with stiff government repression

April 22-July 11

88 killed in Syria’s bloodiest day as demonstrations turn into civil war; Jordan and Bahrain monarchies hold out under pressure

The problem in all of these cases is the human factor. To figure out why the Arab Spring has failed—and another one appears to be on the horizon—one must study human nature. Unknown to most, the Bible is *the* handbook for describing human nature and exhaustively details the innermost motives of mankind.

A verse in the book of Jeremiah begins to frame why this world’s governments can never truly deliver: “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: *it is not in man that walks to direct his steps*” (10:23).

Grasp this. Left alone, man cannot attain ultimate happiness. He may attempt to “direct his steps,” but he cannot do so without avoiding problems that come along with it.

The record of history proves this verse true!

Yet, while the Bible details man’s shortcomings, it also holds incredible GOOD NEWS of the only solution to mankind’s governance cycle.

Consider what is written in the Old Testament book of Isaiah: “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: *and the government shall be upon His shoulder*: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (9:6).

The “Child” mentioned in this passage is Jesus Christ. Notice He has a *government*. The next verse states,

“Of the increase of *His government* and *peace* there shall be no end... and upon His kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever” (vs. 7).

Peace has not been increasing since Christ’s earthly ministry. In fact, the opposite has happened—*war* has increased! Therefore, this Kingdom must yet be established in the future.

Part of how Christ will rule this coming supergovernment is detailed in verse 6. Most imagine Him as a helpless baby in a manger or weakling on a cross. Yet the meaning of the original Hebrew for the words of His described characteristics reveals the traits a truly great leader must have (all definitions taken from *Gesenius’s Lexicon*).

■ **Wonderful:** “admirable” and “distinguished.”

■ **Counselor:** “to advise, consult, give counsel, counsel, purpose, devise, plan.” Under His rulership, mankind will receive perfect advice and solutions to its problems.

■ **Mighty God:** this has a similar meaning to the modern term “strong man.”

■ **Prince of Peace:** this phrase connotes “welfare, peace,” “safety,” “health, prosperity,” “quiet, tranquility, contentment,” “friendship,” as well as peace in “human relationships,” “with God,” and “from war.” This is true peace!

Additional qualifications for Christ ruling Earth are found throughout the Bible. In gospel accounts, Jesus is seen to be an exceptional speaker, sometimes teaching crowds of thousands (Matt. 14:13-21). He must have been effective because they refused to leave even when hungry. In addition, He is shown to be a leader with integrity, good judgment, and vision—who selflessly puts others first. And as the account in Matthew 4 demonstrates, He is immune to bribery and corruption.

In short, He will be the perfect leader because He possesses perfect character! (Read Hebrews 5:8-9.)

With this soon-coming supergovernment in place—to be ruled by Christ, the Father and the saints—people will again come from near and far to hear God’s teachings. At that time: “...many people shall go and say, Come you, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths...And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isa. 2:3-4).

Back to the subject at hand. Will another Arab Spring break out this year? Sadly, it might. But be assured that the greatest overturning of governments is coming soon—the establishment of God’s government on Earth.

Only when all of man’s failed attempts at governing himself are wiped away, and the ultimate leader takes His throne over Earth, will peace and prosperity finally “break out” across the globe. These conditions will then continue “from henceforth even forever.”

Man’s long-running search for true leadership will finally be over. Only then, with rulers who truly serve the people they are under, the cycle will cease. It will be *one* world government, under *one* ultimate ruler, and people unified under *one* purpose.

To learn more, read *What Is the Kingdom of God?* and *Tomorrow’s Wonderful World – An Inside View!* on our website rcg.org. □

Aug. 20-Sept. 23	Oct. 20-23	Nov. 18-Dec. 31
<p>Rebels in Libya launch battle to take control of Tripoli; Yemenis hold “Million Man March,” a large-scale pro-democracy protest</p>	<p>Libyan dictator Gaddafi killed; Tunisia holds first democratic parliamentary elections</p>	<p>Syria civil war intensifies; Yemen’s president signs power transfer agreement; Egypt holds first democratic elections for parliament</p>

GO FOR A WALK!

Here are nine physical and mental benefits you can gain through this one simple habit.

THREE MILLION PEOPLE die every year worldwide due to physical inactivity, according to the World Health Organization. That is a stunning amount of lives lost through one of the most preventable causes!

Yet in increasingly busy and stressful times, we all know how difficult it is to take the time to get active. Whether it is getting to the gym or sticking with a consistent routine, it can be a challenge to commit to daily exercise.

However, as the oft-quoted Chinese proverb states, “a journey of a thou-

sand miles begins with a single step.” There are small, incremental changes we can make every day to combat the detriments of a sedentary life—and the solution lies quite literally in this saying: start walking.

Walking is one of the most underestimated forms of exercise and is often the last to come to mind when considering fitness activities. However, there is a growing body of evidence showing just how valuable walking is to your physical and mental health, and how this one activity can lead to a happier, more fulfilling life.

When examining these proven benefits as well as how easy it is to incorporate walking in daily routines,

you will look forward to your next opportunity to lace up your shoes and take a stroll! Following are nine major benefits to your physical and mental health.

(1) Increase Cardiorespiratory Efficiency: Walking is an aerobic activity, meaning it conditions the heart and lungs to improve circulation and better distribute oxygen throughout the body. As you move, the muscles engaged create a higher demand for oxygen and therefore your circulatory system must work harder to pump oxygen-rich blood to the tissue. Repeatedly challenging the heart in this way strengthens the organ’s muscles to control blood flow more efficiently.

While there are many aerobic exercises such as running and biking that can stimulate the circulatory system, walking has the advantage of being a low-impact activity that can be done at any time, anywhere. A recent six-year study has even shown that habitually taking a brisk stroll resulted in similar risk reductions for high blood pressure, high cholesterol and coronary heart disease as running, according to a report in the American Heart Association journal *Arteriosclerosis, Thrombosis and Vascular Biology*. In some instances, walking actually had a higher rate of reduction in these risk factors than running.

Another study published by the *Current Opinion in Cardiology* found that those who walked approximately 30 minutes every day lowered their risk of coronary heart disease by 19 percent.

(2) Strengthen Musculoskeletal Health: Prolonged sitting and inactivity can lead to muscle tightening and degeneration, which can cause pain throughout the body as the inflexible muscle fibers put undue tension on joints. Much like periodically running a machine or engine will help keep it running smoothly, incorporating regular physical activity by walking will help the musculoskeletal system work efficiently and keep muscle fibers pliable from consistent use.

Walking is not only an aerobic activity, but it also engages multiple muscle groups. When you vary speed and terrain, you could create a good strength-training program for a whole-body workout to tone muscles and burn fat—especially if you also add in some weights.

Additionally, a study in *BioMed Research International* showed that walking limited the progression of bone loss. Bone is made up of living tissue that is strengthened during exercise, particularly with weight-bearing activities that force the body to work against gravity. And according to research by *Arthritis Research & Therapy*, walking is a good low-impact activity that reduces the severity of rheumatoid arthritis by helping

lower inflammation and the advancement of this inflammatory disease in the joints.

(3) Reduce Risk of Type 2 Diabetes: Glucose is a simple sugar that the cells throughout the body metabolize as fuel to carry out their daily functions. When we eat carbohydrates, our body breaks the food down into glucose that is distributed through the blood stream. However, for those with diabetes, the body's ability to regulate the amount of glucose in the bloodstream is impaired and having too much glucose in the blood can result in damage to other tissues.

“Walking triggers the release of endorphins, a hormone known to relieve stress and pain as well as help produce feelings of well-being and happiness.”

Physical activity helps to regulate the body's blood sugar levels as the muscle fibers and other cells that help us move need to use more fuel. Research published in the *World Journal of Diabetes* shows that those who walked for at least 30 minutes per day lowered their risk of Type 2 diabetes by around 50 percent. They also found that physical activity is helpful in managing blood sugar levels in those with Type 1 diabetes.

(4) Manage Weight: When our body has excess blood sugars that are not needed to fuel cell functions, they are stored for later use in the form of fat.

To maintain a healthy weight or lose weight, we must regulate the amount of calories we take in through our diet as well as burn through physical activity. A study in the *Journal of Nutrition* recorded that moderate

walking enhanced the loss of fat and balance of blood sugars.

An article from Cleveland Clinic also explained how walking can help us curb cravings for sugar: “Recent findings from the University of Exeter show that walking can curtail the hankering for sugar, both during the walk and for about 10 minutes afterward. Researchers' findings suggest walking ultimately helps people lose weight not only by getting your heart and metabolism up but also by curbing those cravings for sugary snacks, like chocolate. By taking a short walk, the study found people are able to regulate their daily sugary treats intake—often by as much as half.”

(5) Lower Stress and Strengthen Stress Resilience: Every day we face challenges and pressures whether from work, school or other responsibilities, and stress is our body's natural response to these experiences. Hormones are released that cause our pulse to quicken, muscles to tense for action, and the brain to increase activity and oxygen demand. These are the same hormones that trigger our “fight-or-flight” response in dangerous situations. In non-life-threatening circumstances, this stress can help us be more motivated and focused.

However, if this response occurs continuously from day to day, it will put a strain on our bodies and potentially lead to serious health issues such as high blood pressure, heart disease, indigestion, anxiety, sleeplessness, irritability and other complications. Walking lowers stress by allowing us time to think and to take a break from stressors. This activity also triggers the release of endorphins, a hormone known to relieve stress and pain as well as help produce feelings of well-being and happiness.

Taking time to go on regular walks will alleviate stress as well as help you handle future stressful situations. A recent study released in the *Journal of Neuroscience* discovered that regular exercise can strengthen our resilience to stressors. Researchers found that an increase in the neural protein galanin from aerobic activity in mice not only

influenced stress levels but also lowered anxious response to future stimuli.

(6) Boost Mood and Relieve Depression: In addition to lessening stress, walking will boost your mood and help you cope with feelings of depression. An article by *NBC News* reported, “One study found that just 12 minutes of walking resulted in an increase in joviality, vigor, attentiveness and self-confidence versus the same time spent sitting.”

The article later stated that “psychologists studying how exercise relieves anxiety and depression also suggest that

a 10-minute walk may be just as good as a 45-minute workout when it comes to relieving the symptoms of anxiety and boosting mood.”

Dr. Melina B. Jampolis explains in *Prevention* magazine, “Research shows that regular walking actually modifies your nervous system so much that you’ll experience a decrease in anger and hostility.”

(7) Better Sleep: A report in the journal *Sleep Health* found that walking improved sleep quality and duration for the participants of a month-long study compared to those who were

sedentary. Exercise is known to be a natural way to elevate melatonin, the hormone responsible for regulating our sleep cycle. While research is limited regarding exactly how these two are related, studies have shown that aerobic activities increase the amount of restorative deep sleep the body needs to rejuvenate. Part of this is likely due to the other health benefits from walking, such as stabilizing mood to help with the natural transition into rest.

(8) Improve Mental Acuity and Combat Alzheimer’s: Taking a stroll is one way to enhance your mental acuity, or your brain’s ability to increase memory, focus and comprehension. Multiple studies have shown how walking sharpened thinking skills by promoting functional connectivity and the transmission of messages between neurons, slowing deterioration of neural tissue, and even stimulating the growth of new brain cells.

Researchers at New Mexico Highlands University found that the foot’s impact during walking sends pressure waves through the arteries that significantly modify the supply of blood to the brain. Also, aerobically demanding activities like walking increase a brain-derived protein critical for nerve development that impacts the structural remodeling and connections associated with learning. It also influences the resilience to aging and recovery in brain tissue caused by injury or disease.

According to a study presented at the annual meeting of the Radiological Society of North America, walking may slow mental decline in adults with mild cognitive impairment and Alzheimer’s disease, as well as in healthy adults.

“We found that walking five miles per week protects the brain structure over 10 years in people with Alzheimer’s and MCI, especially in areas of the brain’s key memory and learning centers,” said Dr. Cyrus Raji from the Department of Radiology at the University of Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania. “We also found that these people had a slower decline in memory loss over five years.”

(9) Increase Creativity: If you find yourself struggling with a creative solution to a task, going for a walk

Proper Walking Technique

A fitness stride requires good posture and purposeful movements.



SOURCE: MAYO FOUNDATION FOR MEDICAL, EDUCATION AND RESEARCH
GRAPHIC: JODY E. LYDICK

can boost your ingenuity. An *NBC News* article explains: “One Stanford University study found that walking increased creative output by an average of 60 percent. Researchers labelled this type of creativity ‘divergent thinking,’ which they define as a thought process used to generate creative ideas by exploring many possible solutions. According to the study, ‘walking opens up the free flow of ideas, and it is a simple and robust solution to the goals of increasing creativity and increasing physical activity.’”

Wherever you live, simply walking is enough to benefit your mind. Consider this passage from a *Guardian* article: “In order to walk and navigate, the brain flickers between regions, just as our waking minds are often, says [neuroscientist Shane O’Mara], ‘flickering between big-picture states—thinking about what we have to do tomorrow, plans for next year...and task-focused work. And you need to flicker between these states in order to do creative work.’ That’s how important associations get made, and this flickering seems to be bolstered by walking.

“It’s part of the reason, O’Mara suspects, that the prolific writer and thinker Bertrand Russell said that walking was integral to his work. Likewise, the Irish mathematician William Rowan Hamilton, who pondered a single problem on his daily walks for seven years, eventually inventing a number system called quaternions, without which we couldn’t make electric toothbrushes or mobile phones.”

These scenarios show that sometimes getting away is just what you need to be *more* productive and efficient.

Power of the Outdoors

The benefits of simply walking illustrate just how impactful it is on our health. But where we walk can make a difference as well. There is something about nature—especially among forests and near flowing water—that boosts brain activity.

A study from the American Psychological Association found that those who walked outside had much

more creative responses on tests than those who were indoors. Another study by the *Environmental Health and Preventive Medicine* journal reported that walking in nature promoted “lower concentrations of cortisol, lower pulse rate, lower blood pressure, greater parasympathetic nerve activity and lower sympathetic nerve activity than do city environments.”

Additional research out of Japan shows that walking in the woods also may play a role in fighting cancer. Plants emit chemicals called phytoncides that protect them from rotting and insects. When people breathe them in, there is an increase in the level of “natural killer” cells, which are part of a person’s immune response to cancer.

“When we walk in a forest or park, our levels of white blood cells increase and it also lowers our pulse rate, blood pressure and level of the stress hormone cortisol,” said Dr. Aaron Michelfelder, professor of family medicine at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine.

Taking even a few minutes to break away from the busyness of our daily schedules to stroll in nature can significantly improve our overall well-being.

A Principle of Health

Many things in life are governed by laws, and the simplest and often forgotten law is that of *cause* and *effect*—especially when it comes to our health. The World Health Organization reported that physical inactivity is the fourth-leading cause of global morbidity. In other words, a sedentary life leads to a host of health issues, complications and premature death.

Certain situations are unavoidable. For example, working at an office job and being stuck at a desk for eight hours a day requires some creativity to avoid some of the issues stemming from prolonged inactivity. However, we do have the choice on what we do about it. This touches on

one core principle of good health—getting active.

Our booklet *God’s Principles of Healthful Living* explains this vital principle: “God’s physical creation is governed by definite, physical laws. These include laws that regulate our bodies. To be healthy, you must follow them. But when they are broken, sickness results.

“When a person breaks these principles and laws of health—whether through omission or negligence—the body suffers. Among the negative results are malnutrition, atrophy from inactivity, or exhaustion from lack of rest—simple cause and effect.”

“Good health is a precious attribute,” the booklet continues. “You must maintain it. Otherwise, it deteriorates. Traditional living habits and environments are hostile to good health. Unless *you* make an effort to protect and maintain it, good health could easily disappear—even at an early age... *Activity*—exercise—is the missing vital element in the lives of most, who need to reactivate their physical being through exercise. Once this is addressed, more steps can be taken to upgrade and revitalize the body. And each of these steps yields worthwhile benefits.”

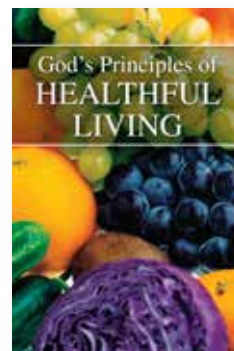
Start Today!

As we have seen, these steps yield immediate benefits to our health.

Findings published in the *Clinical Journal of the American Society of Nephrology* showed that adding just two minutes of walking each hour lowered mortality risks by 33 percent. No gym equipment or special memberships are needed—just remind yourself to take a quick stroll and you can start reaping the rewards!

You have the choice to invest in the improvement of your well-being. The many benefits outlined in this article show the difference this one easy habit can make.

There is no time like today to get started. So get up, lace up your shoes and go for a walk! □



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TRUTH

Continued from page 9

“Overall, 73% of the public—including 77% of Republicans and 72% of Democrats—say that voters in both parties ‘not only disagree over plans and policies, but also cannot agree on the basic facts.’”

Pew further stated: “Majorities in both parties say that, aside from political differences, people in the other party do not share many of their other values and goals. About six-in-ten Republicans (61%) say, thinking about more than just politics, Democrats do not share many of their other values and goals; 54% of Democrats say the same about Republicans.”

Pew also observed that as “Republicans and Democrats take an increasingly positive view of members of their own parties, they have become more negative toward members of the opposing party.”

The tangible result in society has been that each side cannot work with—or even develop relationships with—the other. In fact, most will not even accept that the other side’s viewpoint is legitimate.

This is reflected by the fact that even many romantic relationships run along party lines. The Institute for Family Studies observed that “only 21% of marriages are politically mixed, and nearly 4% (3.6%) are between Democrats and Republicans, according to...analysis of the new American Family Survey.”

Why Is This Happening?

One of the greatest reasons the world is more divided than ever before is the internet, which allows something called “confirmation bias” to run amuck.

“It is a universal element of the human condition that we seek out individuals who are similar to ourselves,” *Financial Post* explained. “People who share our values, traditions, culture, religious beliefs, political leanings, and even entertainment preferences.

“The upside of this type of behaviour is that we tend to lead more enjoyable lives and feel more fulfilled because we are surrounded by others who validate our existence.

“The downside is that we lead more sheltered lives with little adventure since we don’t feel the need to broaden our horizons or seek better alternatives to common challenges.”

This confirmation bias—the tendency to seek and accept information that supports pre-established beliefs and to avoid anything that counters them—comes in many forms. The notion, *I am right, and people agree with me*, triggers a feel-good response.

Psychology Today reported that “people are prone to believe what they want to believe. Seeking to confirm our beliefs comes naturally, while it feels strong and counterintuitive to look for evidence that contradicts our beliefs. This explains why opinions survive and spread.”

Confirmation bias also determines each person’s political identity and how they watch news. Naturally, people are driven to hear stories reflecting their own pre-established political viewpoints.

Tom Nichols, an author and professor at the U.S. Naval War College in Rhode Island, described this process in an article for MarketWatch: “Take, for example, a fairly common American kitchen-table debate: the causes of unemployment. Bring up the problem of joblessness with almost any group of ordinary American voters, and every possible intellectual problem will rear its head.”

In this scenario, he said, one person would ascribe to the belief that unemployment is purely the result of laziness encouraged by providing benefits. Another would firmly believe it is the result of a corrupt system and economic inequality that could only be fixed through wealth redistribution.

Each person’s viewpoint would be backed by personal experiences confirming what he believes.

“There’s no way to win this argument because in the end, there are no

answers that will satisfy everyone,” Mr. Nichols stated. “It’s true that unemployment benefits suppress the urge to work in at least some people; it’s also true that some corporations have a history of ruthlessness at the expense of their workers, whose reliance on benefits is reluctant and temporary. Unable to cope with this level of nuance and unwilling to see their own biases, most people will simply drive each other crazy arguing rather than accept answers that contradict what they already think about the subject.”

Confirmation bias is why fake news and media bias is so dangerous.

Jeff Green, a CEO for an advertising firm that helps companies stay away from fraudulent sites, has examined several fake news claims. *60 Minutes* reported that Mr. Green’s analysis “showed fake news consumers tend to stay in, what he calls, Internet echo chambers, reading similar articles rather than reaching for legitimate news.”

Even if there are hundreds of reports written that prove otherwise, a person who already believes in something will latch on to one website, article or even just a headline or out-of-context quote that goes along with what he already feels.

And with mediums such as Facebook, which gives users control over what they can access, people are being driven deeper into their biases.

“Unlike...real life—where interaction with those who disagree with you on political matters is an inevitability,” *The Guardian* reported. “Facebook users can block, mute and unfriend any outlet or person that will not further bolster their current worldview.

“Even Facebook itself sees the segmentation of users along political lines on its site—and synchronizes it not only with the posts users see, but with the advertisements they’re shown.”

In addition, since social media sites base their news posts on algorithms—the number of people who click—others are more easily galvanized into sto-

ries that seem popular. When a piece has lots of clicks, it seems much more likely to be legitimate.

All of this traffic is a major bonus for news writers as it generates revenue as well as a following. It also validates fake news writers' and biased reporters' jobs since they feel as though they are doing society a noble service by delivering information people feel they need to receive.

But lingering too long in a "bias bubble" has a lasting detrimental effect. As one opinion writer put it in an article published by *The Guardian*, "...factual accuracy can no longer be taken for granted. Untethered from journalistic ethics, some outlets thrive by telling their audience precisely what they want to hear."

Confirmation bias is natural, and necessary to prevent us from having to constantly question and requestion everything. Yet it is difficult to work against this tendency when we must face facts that go against our preconceived notions.

How can you know whether you have the truth when the authenticity of the information out there is so questionable?

The Source

Go back to Pontius Pilate speaking to Jesus. The governor was interrogating Christ regarding charges of plotting against Rome, which were falsely brought against Him by the Jewish elite.

Just before Pilate's sarcastic questioning of truth, he had asked Jesus if He was really a king.

Christ's response is found in John 18: "You say that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, *that I should bear witness unto the truth*. Every one that is *of the truth* hears My voice" (vs. 37).

The first half of this verse is Jesus saying that He would one day be a king. In fact, He spoke constantly during His ministry about the "gospel of the Kingdom"—His soon-coming Kingdom. But He was also saying that He came to teach the truth and that people can be "of the truth."

One chapter earlier, Jesus had already given the answer to Pilate's question in a prayer to the Father: "Your word"—the Bible—"is truth" (17:17).

These are all bold statements! If true, they would mean God's Word is the definitive source of truth.

Yet Jesus Christ does not want people to blindly follow Him, or the beliefs of those who claim to represent Him, without proving His Word is truth.

Notice the command in I Thessalonians 5:21: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."

Millions claim they believe the Bible, but do not base their religious beliefs and traditions on a sound under-

“Jesus Christ does not want people to blindly follow Him, or the beliefs of those who claim to represent Him, without proving His Word is truth.”

standing of God's Word. Yet this verse is a challenge to prove it for yourself.

One of the greatest ways to verify the Bible's validity is through fulfilled prophecy, which requires placing the record of history next to Scripture. Over and over, God has said He would do something ahead of time—and then has brought it to pass.

Prove this for yourself! The booklet *Bible Authority...Can It Be Proven?* (rcg.org/bacibp) will walk you through this process so you can have bedrock certainty that God's Word contains the truth.

You Can Know

Not all of prophecy is about specific events. Much of it is about trends that will occur at different time periods. Numerous verses even speak to our time now!

Many prophetic conditions ultimately culminate after ratcheting up. This is happening with the "post-truth" trend.

Isaiah wrote of a time when "judgment is turned away backward, and justice stands afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter" (59:14).

Truth has fallen! Few even yearn for truth in news reporting anymore—let alone God's truth.

Read verse 4: "None calls for justice, nor any pleads for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity."

As we plunge deeper into the mire of the post-truth age, honesty will disappear until, as verse 15 states, "truth fails."

Ask yourself, how much longer until this occurs? We already live in a time when people use "their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words" (Psa. 64:3).

Think of the hateful sound bites, scathing headlines, and vicious social media posts you see every day. These are all meant to gut their victims or pierce them through with bitter words.

But there is one place you can get the news filtered through the lens of the Bible: *The Real Truth*.

As this age grows darker, we will continue to produce articles that rise above political debates and personal opinions. We will bring you God's mind on subjects to better help you understand the world today.

In addition, The Restored Church of God, which publishes this magazine, has the largest biblically based website on Earth—designed to help you live God's Way. Visit rcg.org to delve deeply into His mind on almost any subject.

You can know the truth! □

ECUMENICAL COUNCIL OF NICEA, AD 325

“At Nicaea, therefore, the Roman and Alexandrian usage with respect to Easter triumphed, and the Judaizing practice of the Quartodecimanians [those obeying God], who always celebrated Easter [actually Passover] on the fourteenth of Nisan, became thenceforth a heresy.”

PHOTO: FINE ART IMAGES/HERITAGE IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

EASTER

Continued from page 15

to correctly observe it, which led to the “Quartodeciman Controversy.”

The following quote from the 11th edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* shows how Easter was “Christianized”: “Polycarp, the disciple of St. John the Evangelist and bishop of Smyrna, visited Rome in 159 to confer with Anicetus, the bishop of that see, on the subject; and urged the tradition, which he had received from the apostle, of observing the fourteenth day...A final settlement of the dispute was one among the other reasons which led Constantine to summon the council of Nicaea in 325...The decision of the council was unanimous that Easter was to be kept on Sunday, and on the same Sunday throughout the world, and ‘that none should hereafter follow the blindness of the Jews’...”

In his book *History of the Christian Church*, Peter Schaff wrote, “At Nicaea, therefore, the Roman and Alexandrian usage with respect to Easter triumphed, and the Judaizing practice of the Quartodecimanians [those obeying God], who always celebrated Easter [actually Passover] on the fourteenth of Nisan, became thenceforth a heresy.”

Britannica stated, “There is no indication of the observance of the Easter festival in the New Testament, or in the writings of the apostolic Fathers...The first Christians continued to observe the Jewish festivals [God’s festivals of Leviticus 23], though in a new spirit...

Thus the Passover, with a new conception added to it of Christ as the true Paschal Lamb...continued to be observed.”

The apostle Paul exhorted New Testament brethren to continue to keep these Holy Days: “For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the *feast*, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the *unleavened bread* of sincerity and truth” (I Cor. 5:7-8). Matthew 26:19 states that the “disciples did as Jesus had appointed them”—He had commanded them to make “ready the Passover.”

In Matthew 28:20, Christ also instructed His disciples “to observe *all things* whatsoever I have commanded you...”

Clearly, Jesus commanded the Passover—connected with the Feast of Unleavened Bread—to be kept as a “statute forever” (Lev. 23:31). In contrast, Easter is a human tradition that was *never* commanded by the God of the Bible.

Mystery Unwrapped

Every child loves to receive a gift, but does not know its contents until it is unwrapped. Professing Christians similarly cherish their traditions in keeping Easter, but are blind to its real meaning or “content.”

Very few take the time to truly seek God’s perspective. It is much easier to continue attending sunrise services, painting eggs and focusing on shared experiences.



QUINCENTENARY COUNCIL OF NICEA.

Easter is a pagan festival concealed in “Christian giftwrap” to make it acceptable to the masses. But when this day is “unwrapped,” the true content is unmistakable. You have seen the parallels between the pagan worship in ancient times and present-day Easter celebrations are painfully obvious.

The popular concepts and traditions of Easter have convinced many that this day is all about Christ—but when exposed, it has everything to do with a pagan deity.

Today, the ancient unbiblical Easter tradition is still celebrated worldwide. Millions gather annually to celebrate the death of their “savior” (on Good Friday) and his resurrection (on Easter Sunday). They sincerely believe that they honor Christ, but little do they know that they are unwittingly serving “another Jesus”! (See II Corinthians 11:4.)

With the wrappings of Easter removed, it becomes plain that any attempt to Christianize the holiday is in “vain” (Mark 7:7).

To more fully understand Easter and its customs—as well as “another Jesus”—read *The True Origin of Easter* and *The True Jesus Christ – Unknown to Christianity*. □

PERSONAL

Continued from page 2

Perhaps the single most powerful tool to teach your children is your example—the way *you* live.

All children, but particularly small ones, automatically look up to parents. For younger children, you are the center of their expanding world, and your example affects them more deeply than anything you could teach them.

Will you apply the laws of success in *your* life? Will you live the way of “give” and follow what you are learning about the true God of the Bible?

The success of your children hinges on your answers!

Do you want your children to regularly pray and study God’s Word? Then show them how—study and pray *with* them. Do you want them to save and spend money wisely? Then do the same. Do you want them to spend less time watching television and to pursue worthwhile things—books, hobbies, sports, etc.? Set the example.

Too many parents, in effect, unconsciously tell their children, “Do as I *say*, not as I *do*.” Be careful. Your children might be unable to hear what you are *saying* because of what you are *doing*.

All-important Character

Think for a moment about all the things that people pursue in search of success and happiness—money, possessions, power, fame, education, skills, beauty, youth and strength. None of these eternally benefit the person who has them. Literally, there is not one of them that “you can take with you.” Those who obtain any or even all of these are doomed to see them fade even before death, with no possibility of taking them past the grave.

Now, if you were told that there is one thing that you can teach your children that is spiritual—therefore eternal, indestructible and perfect—what would you say it is?

The answer is character, once referred to as *virtue*, the term used in the Bible. Almost no one today values or even talks about character. Yet this topic speaks to the supreme purpose for which every human being who has ever lived was born.

Sadly, it is also true that very few have any idea *why* they exist—*why* God gave them life and put them on Earth. (Read my book *The Awesome Potential of Man* at rcg.org/tapom to understand truths beyond your imagination. Find out why you, and your children, were born. You will find that whole new vistas of understanding lie before you.)

You must come to understand—to deeply grasp—*why* you exist—*why* you are here—or you will never be able to teach this supreme truth to your children. Once this is clear in your mind, two things will happen: not only will you find it easier to teach them, but you will also be more eager to fulfill this duty!

The best definition for character I have ever heard comes from Herbert W. Armstrong, the man who taught me much of what I teach you now: “What is perfect character? It is the ability, in a separate entity with free moral agency, to come to the knowledge of the right from the wrong—the true from the false—and to choose the right, and possess the will to enforce self-discipline to do the right and resist the wrong” (*The Incredible Human Potential*).

It is your responsibility—your DUTY—to teach your children the absolutely vital, all-important, life-long pursuit of character development. Character forms the greatest defense a human being can have against every conceivable pitfall, threat, roadblock and hurdle that life can throw at him.

Guide Toward the Pursuit of Excellence

Strive to instill within your children the desire to reach their POTENTIAL, to go above and beyond what is expected of them—to learn how they can do much more than they ever thought possible. Teach the principle of Ecclesiastes

9:10: “Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with *your might*.”

Any goal or thing of worth requires HARD WORK—one must pay the price. Most today are no longer willing to pay that price and will happily settle for second best, or less.

Teaching your children to persevere will give them the inner strength needed to achieve their goals. This will have implications in not just their goals and desires but in *every* aspect of their lives! Teach your children to never give up—even in the face of hardship—and you will virtually ensure their success.

Inspire your children with the knowledge that life rewards those who go the extra mile: “See you a man diligent in his business [NKJV: “who excels in his work”]? He shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean [inferior] men” (Prov. 22:29).

Most people today are not interested in going above and beyond, preferring instead to do as little as possible. Many are now perfectly willing to do sloppy, slipshod work, no matter the waste or cost to the company, because they are in a hurry to finish—with so many always looking ahead to the next thing that will be “fun.”

Not only should your children be willing to go the extra mile, but they should always be willing to do it with joy, zeal and enthusiasm—from the heart!

Help Your Children Discover Their Talents

Some people live their entire lives unaware of what their strengths are, or worse, believing that they have none. Most often, this has been because no one helped them discover these talents, and they did not know how to do this themselves.

While this Personal can only scratch the surface of the subject, it should at least inspire you to see that you can greatly encourage and inspire your children if you help them see the natural talents that they were born with. If tapped, apart from the importance of their relationship with God, these

qualities offer them the greatest chance for fulfillment and happiness.

Think of it this way: almost every human being has strengths and weaknesses. There are virtually no exceptions to having *some* talents and absolutely no exceptions to having certain weaknesses. One of your tasks is to help your child discover his or her God-given abilities, talents and interests. For instance, your child may be extremely gifted in a particular area or way, and this gift could be something that has never before appeared in your family.

Be on the lookout for such gifts and do not squash them when you see them simply because you have never seen these particular talents or abilities before, or because they are not *your* strengths. On the other hand, do not decide that you see talents that are not really there. Be careful that you do not try to remake your child in your own image. You are a unique human being, unlike any other person on the face of the Earth. So is your child!

What if your parents, teachers, coaches or employers had never taken an interest in your potential, or worse, actively sought to quash these interests? What if you had never been able to discover and develop them? How different would your life have been? Would you be in the same career or even close to the level of happiness that you have been able to enjoy? The answer is almost certainly not.

The other side of the coin is that it is possible that your mentors did *not* encourage you to develop your strengths, and to become all that you could have. If this is the case, avoid doing the same with your children.

Helping your children realize their talents and successfully develop them—especially if you never had the opportunity yourself—will be a REWARD unlike any other a parent can enjoy!

Make Clear the Importance of Setting Goals

Do your children have an interest in music, art, science, mathematics, sports, horticulture, animals, reading, rock-

climbing or a host of other things? Strive as hard as you possibly can to *recognize* and *nurture* these interests.

ASK your children what they enjoy. Observe and talk to them. Try to discern where they may and may not be naturally talented and where their interests lie. Try to be supportive in a balanced way, also not allowing them to quit simply because the early going in a particular sport or activity is tough, which is always the case in any new endeavor.

Teach your children to read books—and to perhaps write book reports (my

“Helping your children realize their talents and successfully develop them will be a REWARD!”

grandfather paid me one dollar for every book report that I wrote and read to him over the phone, as long as it had over 300 words).

Encourage them to take up hobbies such as building model ships or airplanes, or collecting coins, stamps or postcards. Guide them to participate in sports such as basketball, soccer, tennis or swimming.

Encourage them to learn a musical instrument, such as the flute, guitar or piano. They can learn to skate, build and fly a kite, keep a journal, make watercolor or oil paintings, model with clay, keep a garden, and many more things—the list is endless.

Help your children expand their minds and explore their talents. They have untapped gifts just waiting to be discovered. But they need your guidance to do this.

Teach your children to *write down* their goals. Over time, they will learn which goals can be reached, which should be amended and which should be dropped. Then teach them how to take steps toward the goals, and to be able to measure their progress

along the way. Be sure to remind them often that the Proverbs teach, “The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul” (13:19).

Teach Your Children Constantly!

Parents, do not allow your children to merely stumble into adulthood. Just as God teaches you, so you must teach *them*. This has been God’s Way from the very beginning: “And these words, which I command you this day, shall be in your heart: and you shall teach them *diligently* unto your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deut. 6:6-7).

Be prepared to teach your children *all* the time—on every occasion—the proverbial morning, noon and night. Your responsibility is to instruct them in all the values they need in order to succeed.

God designed children to be like sponges—they were literally *created to learn*. Your children are unconsciously looking to you to teach them how to navigate the increasingly complex maze of today’s world—again, of its perfect storm of factors and conditions arrayed against them.

As parents, you possess immense power. You have the authority—coupled with a tremendous amount of revealed spiritual knowledge—to give your children the maximum opportunity to discover their strengths, to achieve right goals, to learn about the true God and to build *His* righteous character, to develop their extraordinary human potential, and to lead lives filled with success, productivity and service to others, which will lead to the supreme happiness and joy that all long for.

Seek God and ask for the crucial wisdom and constant guidance that you need. Then go fulfill your potential as parents by helping your children fulfill theirs.

They are counting on you!

To learn more, read—and study—my thorough, free book *Train Your Children God’s Way* at rcg.org/tuyc. □

INTERNATIONAL

How North Korea Skirts Sanctions to Make Billions, Build Nukes

United Nations (AP) – North Korea has modernized its nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles by flaunting United Nations sanctions, using cyberattacks to help finance its programs and continuing to seek material and technology overseas for its arsenal, UN experts said.

In its weapons development, the experts said, Kim Jong Un's government has also produced fissile material—an essential ingredient for producing nuclear weapons—and maintained its nuclear facilities.

“It displayed new short-range, medium-range, submarine-launched and intercontinental ballistic missile systems at military parades,” they said. “It announced preparation for testing and production of new ballistic missile warheads, and development of tactical nuclear weapons...and upgraded its ballistic missile infrastructure.”

The panel of experts monitoring sanctions on the Northeast Asian nation said in a report sent to Security Council members that North Korea's “total theft of virtual assets from 2019 to November 2020 is valued at approximately \$316.4 million,” according to one unidentified country.

The panel said its investigations found that North Korean-linked cyber actors continued to conduct operations in 2020 against financial institutions and virtual currency exchange houses to generate money to support its weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs.

In August 2019, the UN panel said North Korean cyber experts illegally obtained proceeds “estimated at up to \$2 billion” to fund its weapons programs.

The panel said in the new report that it investigated “malicious” activi-



■ North Korean leader Kim Jong Un speaks during a meeting of the Central Committee of Worker's Party of Korea in Pyongyang (Feb. 8, 2021).

PHOTO: KOREAN CENTRAL NEWS AGENCY/KOREA NEWS SERVICE VIA AP

ties by the Reconnaissance General Bureau—North Korea's primary intelligence agency, which is on the UN sanctions blacklist—including “the targeting of virtual assets and virtual asset service providers, and attacks on defense companies.”

North Korea continues to launder stolen cryptocurrencies especially through over-the-counter virtual asset brokers in China to acquire fiat currency which is government backed, like the U.S. dollar, the experts said.

The panel said it is investigating a September 2020 hack against a cryptocurrency exchange that resulted in approximately \$281 million worth of cryptocurrencies being stolen, and transactions on the blockchain indicating the \$281 million hack is related to a \$23 million second hack in October 2020.

“Preliminary analysis, based on the attack vectors and subsequent efforts to launder the illicit proceeds strongly suggests links to the DPRK,” the experts said, using the initials of the country's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

According to one unnamed country, North Korea also continues to

generate illegal revenue by exploiting freelance information technology platforms using the same methods it does to access the global financial system—false identification, use of virtual private network services, and establishing front companies in Hong Kong, the panel said.

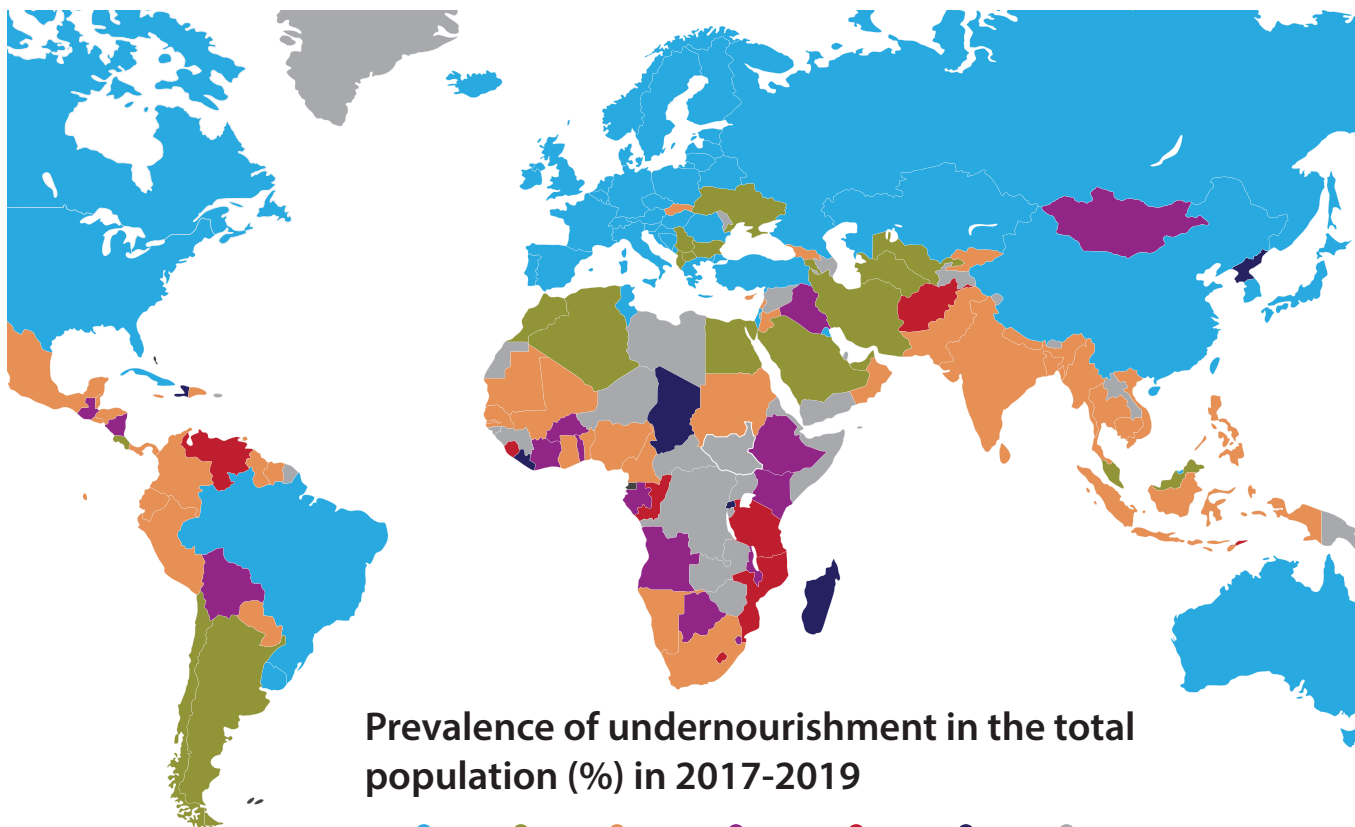
The panel said it also investigated “the country's continued illicit import of refined petroleum, via direct deliveries and ship-to-ship transfers, using elaborate subterfuge.”

It cited images, data and calculations from an unidentified country showing that between January 1 and September 30 last year North Korea received shipments of refined petroleum products exceeding “by several times” the annual ceiling of 500,000 barrels set by the Security Council.

UN sanctions ban North Korean coal exports, and the panel said shipments of coal appear to have been largely suspended since late July 2020.

It said that last year, North Korea continued to transfer fishing rights in violation of sanctions, which earned the country \$120 million in 2018, according to an unnamed member state. □

270 Million on the “Brink of Starvation”: World Food Program Chief Warns of Vulnerable Supply Chains



If current trends continue, the number of hungry people will reach 840 million by 2030.

Source: World Food Program

Graphic: Sarah O. Vidal

The head of the World Food Program said that the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need to strengthen vulnerable supply chains to impoverished nations struggling to feed their populations.

David Beasley, executive director of the United Nations’ Nobel Peace Prize-winning food program, said that the pandemic put further stress on supply chains getting food to the hungry.

“We’ve got to continue to work the system, we’ve got to make certain that we are...less vulnerable to COVID type impacts,” Mr. Beasley told a World Economic Forum virtual panel.

He continued, “If you think you’ve had trouble getting toilet paper in New York, because of supply chain disruption, what do you think’s happening in Chad and Niger and Mali and places like that?”

Mr. Beasley stressed that the food supply system is “not broken” but that 10 percent of the global population is in extreme poverty and need to be reached by suppliers, and that the global pandemic exacerbated existing problems.

The UN food program director said that “with 270 million people on the brink of starvation, if we don’t

receive the support and the funds that we need, you will have mass famine, starvation, you’ll have destabilization of nations and you’ll have mass migration. And the cost of that is a thousand times more.”

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, whose country is a center for agricultural innovation and a major exporter of farm produce, announced that his country would host a global coordination center for regional “food innovation hubs” established by the World Economic Forum to help tackle what he called “food system challenges.” □

Empty Seas: Oceanic Shark Populations Dropped 71 Percent Since 1970

When marine biologist Stuart Sandin talks about sharks, it sounds like he is describing Jedis of the ocean. “They are terrific predators, fast swimmers and they have amazing senses—they can detect any disturbance in the ocean from great distance,” such as smells or tiny changes in water currents.

Their ability to quickly sense anything outside the norm in their environment helps them find prey in the vastness of the open ocean. But it also makes them especially vulnerable in the face of increased international fishing pressure, as global fishing fleets have doubled since 1950.

“You drop a fishing line in the open ocean, and often it’s sharks that are there first—whether or not they’re the primary target,” said Mr. Sandin, who works at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

Scientists have known for decades that individual shark species are declining, but a new study drawing on 57 global datasets underscores just

how dramatically worldwide populations have collapsed in the past half century.

Globally, the abundance of oceanic sharks and rays dropped more than 70 percent between 1970 and 2018, according to a study published in the journal *Nature*.

And 24 of the 31 species of sharks and rays are threatened with extinction, while three species—oceanic whitetip sharks, scalloped hammerhead sharks and great hammerhead sharks—are considered critically endangered.

“The last 50 years have been pretty devastating for global shark populations,” said Nathan Pacoureau, a biologist at Simon Fraser University in Canada and a co-author of the study.

Sometimes sharks are intentionally caught by fishing fleets, but more often they are reeled in incidentally as “bycatch” in the course of fishing for other species such as tuna and swordfish.

Sharks and rays are both fish with skeletons made of cartilage, not bone.

In contrast to most other kinds of fish, they generally take several years to reach sexual maturity, and they produce fewer offspring.

“In terms of timing, they reproduce more like mammals—and that makes them especially vulnerable,” said Mr. Pacoureau. “Their populations cannot replenish as quickly as many other kinds of fish.”

The number of fishing vessels trolling the open ocean has risen steeply since the 1950s, as engine power expanded ships’ range. And while pollution and other factors also imperil shark survival, increased fishing pressure is the greatest threat for every oceanic shark species.

“When you remove top predators of the ocean, it impacts every part of the marine food web,” said Stuart Pimm, an ecologist at Duke University, who was not involved in the study. “Sharks are like the lions, tigers and bears of the ocean world, and they help keep the rest of the ecosystem in balance.” □





**17,670,000,000,000
miles**

The night sky has a way of making us ponder our existence. The stupendous grandeur of stars, planets and galaxies—or the Bright Pillar in the Carina nebula pictured here—can make us feel tiny and insignificant. This feeling is nothing new. Millennia ago, ancient Israel's King David wrote this in Psalm 8:3-4: "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; WHAT IS MAN THAT YOU ARE MINDFUL OF HIM?"

What is your purpose? While most never find a concrete answer to this question, you CAN know! To learn about your incredible human potential, read the eye-opening book *The Awesome Potential of Man*.

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