

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2019

THE

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REAL TRUTH™

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING



Has Israel Reached a Tipping Point?

**The Battle for
Hong Kong**

**How to Avoid
Ingratitude**

**Burning Earth's
Biggest Rainforest**

**Obesity:
An Unusual Epidemic**

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VOL. XVII | NO. 6 | NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2019

A R T I C L E S

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■ Riot police stand guard inside a train station in Hong Kong. The police fired tear gas and water cannons at pro-democracy protesters hurling rocks and petrol bombs (Sept. 15, 2019).

PHOTO: ISAAC LAWRENCE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The Battle for Hong Kong
Protests in Hong Kong have spiraled into a clash of East and West, communism and democracy.
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FRONT COVER: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu attends a special cabinet meeting for Jerusalem Day.

PHOTO: GALI TIBBON/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

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At the end of each year, society focuses on charitable works and sharing with others—with mixed results. What is the secret to getting the most out of giving?
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The world watched over the summer as large swaths of the Amazon rainforest roared with uncontrollable flames. While many demanded swift action, it was quickly apparent there are no simple solutions.
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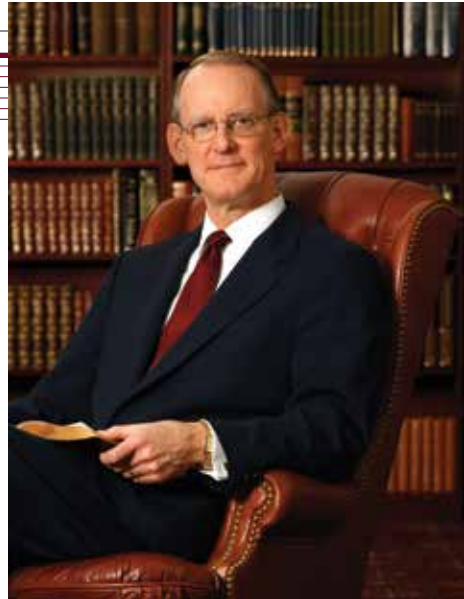
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PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



How to Avoid Ingratitude

INGRATITUDE IS an integral part of society. If you ask most people if they are ungrateful, they will probably reply, “Of course not!” However, this attitude is so ingrained in their lives, they cannot openly admit—or even realize—that they are ungrateful.

But how can you tell if *you* are ungrateful? Are there things that identify ingratitude? And if so, what can you do about it?

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “ingratitude” as: “Forgetfulness of or poor return for kindness received.” It can also be defined as not appreciating or valuing what you have, or have been given. *Unexpressed* gratitude is also ingratitude!

In today’s fast-paced world, most people seem to not have time for thankfulness. Work, traffic, family, soccer practice, doctor appointments and countless other things are their main priorities. They seem to have no time to thank others.

But consider the following. Have you ever given someone a gift and not received thanks for it? Have you ever been in a grocery store or restaurant and were not thanked for your business? Have you ever felt unappreciated by family or friends or at your work-

place? If so, how did it make you feel? Probably not very good.

Have you ever thought about *where* this mindset of ingratitude comes from? This is vital to understand before one can *overcome* this problem.

Past to Present: One Nation—Ungrateful

If you live in America or any other nation descended from ancient Israel, you live in one of the most abundantly blessed lands in the world. This country enjoys plentiful food, shelter, electricity, running water, wealth, air conditioning, heating, transportation, sanitation and many other blessings. If you live in one of these countries, take a moment to look around and fully take in all of the many blessings.

However, these lands are filled with chronic grumblers and complainers. Although there are *countless blessings*, there seem to always be countless things to *gripe* about—be it traffic, the economy, food prices, problems at work, difficulties with family, desire for additional material possessions, ill health, etc. Never before in the history of man has the world shown this horrible characteristic as it does today!

The Bible records the experiences of another nation—the ancient nation of Israel—whose people also

constantly complained and murmured. No matter what God did for them, it was *never* enough.

After many years of slavery to the Egyptians, the Israelites, through God's miraculous intervention, were released from bondage. As they left Egypt, God allowed them to collect riches, cattle, food, gold, jewels and supplies. God performed many miracles as they traveled through the wilderness. He selected them as His people, promising to take them to a land "filled with milk and honey."

Notice God's plain words to the Israelites: "And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a *good land* and a *large*, unto a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. 3:8).

But this was *not enough* for them!

Upon approaching the Promised Land, the Israelites were instructed by God to send spies to survey the land. It was located between other nations that were enemies of Israel.

After 40 days of spying the land, they returned and presented to Moses, Aaron and the congregation of Israel the fruit from the land, saying, "We came unto the land whither you sent us, and surely it flows with milk and honey...Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great" (Num. 13:27-28).

Caleb, one of the spies, asked Moses for permission to take the land. But the other spies—except for Joshua—lied to the people, claiming that it was infested with strong, powerful giants.

Notice the reaction of the crowd: "And all the children of Israel *murmured* against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt!

"And wherefore has the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? Were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt" (14:2-4).

Israel was so blatantly ungrateful that they wanted to go back to Egypt—where they had undergone many years of brutal slavery. They did not appreciate the astounding blessings that God provided or the many powerful miracles He performed for them.

Notice God's response to their attitude: "And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke Me? And how long will it be ere they believe Me, for all the signs which I have showed among them? I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them..." (vs. 11-12).

However, Moses reasoned with God, prompting Him to change His mind.

Numbers 14 continues: "And the LORD said, I have pardoned according to your word...Because all those men which have seen My glory, and My miracles...have not hearkened to My voice; surely they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that *provoked* Me see it" (vs. 20-23).

"How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which *murmur* against Me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against Me.

"Say unto them, As truly as I live, says the LORD, as you have spoken in Mine ears, so will I do to you: your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness... you shall not come into the land, concerning which I swore to make you dwell therein...But your little ones, which you said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised... and the people mourned greatly...saying, Lo, we be here, and will go up unto the place which the LORD has promised: for *we have sinned*" (vs. 20, 22-23, 27, 29, 31, 39-40).

God called the Israelites an "evil congregation" for their sinful ingratitude. To God, an ungrateful attitude is sin—evil—which provokes Him to anger! Although God did not strike Israel with pestilence at that time or disinherit them, He did cause them to wander in the wilderness for 40 additional years until those who dem-

onstrated this attitude died. Their murmurings and unthankful attitude condemned them from ever seeing the Promised Land.

Recall the common phrase, "Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it." This applies to the modern-day descendants of Israel—the United States, Britain, Australia and other democratic, primarily English-speaking people scattered throughout the world. These nations are foretold to relive history—and experience many soon-coming horrific events for much the same reasons as ancient Israel!

Ingratitude in Christ's Day

Most are familiar with the many Bible accounts of Christ's miracles. He walked on water, turned water into wine, fed thousands of people from a small amount of food, cast out demons and healed many people. But how many do you think actually came back to thank Him? You will be surprised.

Luke's gospel records one such miraculous healing. In this account, Christ healed 10 lepers. Verse 12 records, "And as He entered into a certain village, there met Him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: and they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.

"And when He saw them, He said unto them, Go show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice *glorified God*, and fell down on his face at His feet, *giving Him thanks*: and he was a Samaritan.

"And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give *glory* to God, save this stranger. And He said unto him, Arise, go your way: your faith has made you whole" (Luke 17:12-19).

Of the 10 lepers, only *one* returned to thank Christ. Think of that statement. Only *one* of the 10 thanked God for healing them of an awful disease!

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Should You Celebrate Thanksgiving?

For many in North America, the yearly celebration of giving thanks is reduced to gorging on a big meal, excessive drinking the night before, or snoozing in front of a football game. For others, Black Friday—a day of frenzied shopping to capture the best market deals of the year—overshadows the holiday altogether.

Given all of the media hype, excess and sensational commercialism surrounding it, the original meaning of Thanksgiving can easily be

lost for Americans and Canadians. Yet citizens of these prosperous nations should have every reason to keep the day as it was intended.

Although the national holiday was not instituted in the Bible, the scriptures have much to say about thankfulness. The article “Should You Celebrate Thanksgiving Day?” provides historical and biblical insight into this holiday that can help you better appreciate everything that you have.

Read the article today at rcg.org/syctd.



Has Israel Reached a Tipping Point?

The Middle East nation is in full-on political, cultural and religious gridlock.

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER

ISRAEL'S SEPTEMBER 17 national election stripped away the usual talking points. The Palestinian issue was almost completely off the agenda, along with a general consensus about security challenges. With those swept aside, the vote laid bare bitter, growing rifts in the nation.

First off, it was the second national election after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu—who has been in office since 2009—failed to form a government after a vote in April.

Instead of bringing clarity to the direction of the nation, the latest trip to the polls ended in *another* political stalemate.

Mr. Netanyahu's conservative Likud party took 31 seats. Chief rival Benny Gantz's centrist Blue and White political alliance secured 33 seats in the 120-seat Knesset, Israel's parliament.

Both party leaders quickly expressed the need for "unity" following the inconclusive election.

"There is no choice but to form a broad unity government," Mr. Netanyahu said in a video statement. "We cannot and there is no reason to go to third elections."

"The people chose unity, the people want Israel to come before everything, and therefore, Blue and White under my leadership won the elections," said Mr. Gantz, a former military chief of staff.

Sixty-one seats are needed to form a majority coalition government. And any hopes for the two largest parties to work together quickly evaporated.

After preliminary meetings between Likud and Blue and White bore no fruit, President Reuven Rivlin gave Mr. Netanyahu the first stab at forming his own coalition starting September 25. Remember, the prime minister tried and failed to do this in April. If up to six weeks go by with no government, Mr. Gantz will have a shot. If both fail, there will likely be an unprecedented *third* set of snap elections.

■ PHOTO: MENAHEM KAHANA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The simple solution would be for the two largest parties to work together. It is simple math: 33 seats plus 31 equals 64—easily surpassing the needed number.

Yet deep differences between the two political groups indicate the country could be headed for a long and contentious period of uncertainty.

Mr. Gantz has said he will not partner with Likud if Mr. Netanyahu is at the helm, citing the prime minister's legal problems. Israel's attorney general has recommended charging the prime minister with a series of corruption-related charges.

Also, Mr. Netanyahu has signed a deal with his smaller allies, including ultra-Orthodox parties, to negotiate as a bloc.

These alliances make the prime minister's task even harder. It also reveals how much outsized power smaller parties can wield in the nation. Avigdor Lieberman, the leader of the ultranationalist Yisrael Beiteinu party, refuses to work with the ultra-Orthodox amid growing public frustration against the minority among the secular population. Mr. Lieberman controls eight seats and is instead demanding the prime minister and Mr. Gantz join him in a broad, secular unity government that excludes the ultra-Orthodox parties—who are Likud's longtime partners.

Mr. Lieberman's stance demonstrates the shifting political sands in Israel. He was a former aide and ally of Mr. Netanyahu—yet forced the September 17 repeat vote by refusing to join the prime minister's coalition and robbing him of his parliamentary majority.

Along with his supporters, Mr. Lieberman objects to what he calls excessive influence by the religious parties.

As *The Real Truth* goes to print, Mr. Netanyahu continues his hunt for a majority. Even if there is a solution reached by him or Mr. Gantz, the dual snap elections exposed a nation at a series of tipping points. Should the nation be more religious or secular? Conservative or liberal? How much of

a voice should Arab parties have in the so-called Jewish state?

At its core, this is a crisis of national identity. Israel is currently rent in two.

Secular Pushback

In Israel's secular heartland, religion played a central role in the deadlocked September election. For many, a vote for the opposition was driven by a desire to keep rabbis out of their schools, businesses and relationships.

Yamit Dulberg considers herself a traditional Israeli woman with right-wing views who would usually vote for Mr. Netanyahu's Likud party. Yet the 37-year-old mother of two cast her ballot for his main rival. Her main reason? The prime minister's ties to ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties and what she sees as a disproportionate power over daily life.

"Something has changed in recent years, the coercion has gone overboard," said Mrs. Dulberg, who runs a small family-run jewelry business. "We are a Jewish state, but not a religious state."

Secular leaders from the left and center have pulled away from Mr. Netanyahu. *The New York Times* stated such people "say that the mushrooming ultra-Orthodox population, with its unemployed religious students and large families subsidized by the state, is imposing excessive fiscal and social burdens on other Israelis. They are demanding more pluralistic options for marriages and conversions."

Yet the "ultra-Orthodox parties insist that they are simply defending a status quo that dates to Israel's founding and is meant to preserve study of the Torah by its most pious devotees. A compromise with Israel's then-fledgling religious community gave Orthodox rabbis control over family and dietary laws, among other things, in exchange for their support for the new state."

Ultra-Orthodox parties represent about a 10th of the population, but larger parties have historically relied on them to assemble majority coalitions. This gives these groups incredible clout to ensure the needs of ultra-Orthodox Haredi Jews.

"This country is split down the middle and no one should force anything

on the other,” Mrs. Dulberg said. “Just like I wouldn’t drive a car through their neighborhood on the Sabbath and park in front of their synagogue, they should stay out of my life.”

She said her husband, who was a leftist, even considered voting for the nationalist Mr. Lieberman because of the ultra-Orthodox. But eventually they both settled on Mr. Gantz’s Blue and White alliance, which has also promised to advocate for the secular.

“My opinions are right-wing, but that’s not the issue anymore,” she said, seated outside City Hall in Kfar Saba, a midsized city northeast of Tel Aviv. “The world has changed but religion hasn’t. That’s a problem.”

“This time the agenda was different,” said Yohanan Plesner, president of the Israel Democracy Institute, a Jerusalem think tank. “Israelis voted more on religion and state as a result of the political growth and appetite of the ultra-Orthodox parties.”

Many feel the cloistered communities of the ultra-Orthodox are being left behind by modern society, creating a culture of poverty that threatens the future well-being of the entire country. Yet the ultra-Orthodox disagree. While 53 percent of the minority group do fall below the poverty line (it is 9 percent for non-Haredi Jews), just 8 percent report feeling poor.

On top of carrying the military and financial burden, many in the secular majority resent having the ultra-religious encroach upon their lifestyle and civil liberties. The ultra-Orthodox establishment prevents public transportation and most commerce on the Sabbath and wields a monopoly over matters of mar-

riage, burials and conversions. In recent years, they have also delayed infrastructure projects and archaeological digs over religious concerns.

Shmuel Rosner, a senior fellow at the nonpartisan Jewish People Policy Institute in Israel, said Mr. Lieberman’s rise showed that many right-wing Israelis are tired of their elected officials being so tightly bound to the ultra-religious.

“There is a large group of regular Israelis in the middle,” he wrote in the *Maariv* newspaper. “This is what they said for the second consecutive time: we want normalcy.”

Doubling Down

Leading up to the September election, Mr. Netanyahu worked to bolster his base of religious and nationalistic voters. This strategy came with a list of conservative promises.

The prime minister chose to open the new school year in the Jewish West Bank settlement of Elkana, where he reaffirmed his pledge to annex Jewish settlements and never allow them to be removed again.

“We are building new homes here,” he said to first-grade students. “God willing, we will impose Israeli sovereignty in all the communities as part of the land of Israel and the state of Israel.”

Such a move would be a sharp departure from long-standing Israeli government policy, which has been to not annex settlements even while expanding them in hopes of progress in negotiations with Palestine.

The Palestinians claim all of the West Bank, which Israel captured in

the 1967 Mideast war, as the heartland for a future independent state. The international community considers all settlements in the West Bank and east Jerusalem to be illegal, though the Trump administration has signaled that it might accept Israeli annexation of some West Bank land.

Mr. Netanyahu had made a similar pledge to begin annexing part of the Israeli-occupied West Bank on the eve of April elections this year but did not act on it.

A New Voice

While Mr. Netanyahu’s and Mr. Gantz’s parties took center stage after the election, another group gained ground. The Arab Joint List coalition could emerge as the main opposition bloc, a historic first that would grant a new platform to a long-marginalized minority.

Joint List won 13 seats in the 120-member assembly, coming third after Blue and White and Likud. In absolute terms, the Arab bloc has repeated its performance in 2015, when it won 13 seats.

But this time around, due to the shifting constellation of Israeli politics, it is well-placed to lead the opposition if a national unity government of the two largest parties is formed.

That would put a representative of Israel’s Arab citizens closer to the center of power than ever before and strengthen their ability to influence the national agenda.

Israel’s Arab minority makes up about 20 percent of the population of 9 million and is descended from Palestinians who stayed in Israel after it was established as a state in 1948.

“Many feel the cloistered communities of the ultra-Orthodox are being left behind by modern society, creating a culture of poverty...”





“While Mr. Netanyahu’s and Mr. Gantz’s parties took center stage after the election, another group gained ground.”

■ Opposite page, ultra-Orthodox Jews read from the book of Lamentations during an annual day of fasting commemorating the destruction of ancient Jerusalem’s Temple (Aug. 10, 2019). Above, members of the Arab Joint List alliance celebrate before supporters at the alliance’s campaign headquarters in the northern Israeli city of Nazareth as the first exit polls are announced on television (Sept. 17, 2019).

PHOTOS: GIL COHEN-MAGEN/AFP/ (OPPOSITE PAGE); MENAHEM KAHANA/AFP/ (ABOVE); GETTY IMAGES

They enjoy full citizenship, including the right to vote.

Decades of marginalization have bred voter apathy, and in April’s elections more than half the Arab electorate stayed home. This time around, Arab leaders joined forces and mobilized turnout, vowing to topple Mr. Netanyahu and push for improvements in public services.

Arab citizens have close family, cultural and historical ties to Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza, and largely identify with the Palestinian cause. That has led many Israelis to view them as a security threat.

The Joint List is unlikely to sit in any Israeli government because that would entail endorsing military operations against the Palestinians. Many Jewish-majority parties still refuse to sit with Arabs as political partners.

But the Arab parties’ increased clout could allow them to block right-wing legislation like the law narrowly passed last year defining Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people. An

informal alliance supporting the ruling coalition from the outside could also help deliver legislation to improve housing, education and law enforcement in Arab communities.

The Arab bloc is also expected to advocate for a two-state solution to the conflict with the Palestinians at a time when none of Israel’s main parties have made the peace process a priority.

If and when a broad unity government is established, Joint List would emerge as the largest alliance outside the government and make its leader Ayman Odeh Israel’s first-ever Arab opposition leader.

In his official duties as opposition leader, Mr. Odeh would hold monthly consultations with the prime minister and meet with visiting dignitaries. He would be granted a state-funded bodyguard, access to high-level security briefings and an official platform to rebut the prime minister’s speeches in parliament.

“This is a very significant, unprecedented level for us,” Mr. Odeh told *Army Radio*. “When presidents from

around the world come they’ll meet with us as well.” He has described the prospect of an Arab leader receiving security briefings as “interesting.”

Mr. Odeh says his bloc also mobilized support from Israeli Jews, some of whom welcomed its success.

Nahum Barnea, a prominent columnist with Israel’s main daily *Yedioth Ahronoth*, said the Joint List’s achievement should be measured not in the number of seats it won but in “its ability to build bridges to the mainstream of Israeli politics and society.”

“It is unthinkable to continue to exclude and to humiliate forever 20% of the electorate,” he wrote. “Their expectations in all that pertains to integration, influence and respect all emanate from the ground up. Those expectations have to be met somehow.”

On top of being the potential opposition party, a group of Arab parties added *yet another* complication to the coalition Rubik’s Cube.

After the September 17 poll results, they broke with custom by endorsing Mr. Gantz. It was the first time they had recommended a candidate since 1992. Arab parties have usually refrained from an endorsement, not wanting to be seen as legitimizing Israeli policies

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THE BATTLE FOR HONG

KONG

Protests in Hong Kong have spiraled into a clash of East and West, communism and democracy.

BY DAVID J. LITAVSKY

THE MASSIVE, violent demonstrations that stopped Hong Kong in its tracks this summer—even as protesters went so far as staging the largest-ever shutdown of a major airport—had perhaps as many angles as participants.

For one, China viewed the protests as a challenge and potential embarrassment to its authority.

At first, it appeared Beijing was prepared to deal with the protests using a militaristic hand. In July, it deployed fresh troops to the semi-autonomous Chinese city. Video broadcast on *China Central Television* showed a long convoy of armored personnel carriers and trucks crossing the border at night and troops in formation disembarking a ship.

“This time the task has a glorious mission. The responsibility is great. The job is difficult,” an unnamed major said to troops before they departed. “The time for a true test has arrived!”

Yet Beijing stopped short of a forceful intervention. “We believe the [Hong Kong] government has the capability to calm down the current situation,” a deputy commissioner of the foreign ministry office in the city said.

Even as Communist leaders celebrated 70 years in power on October 1, they stood by as protests escalated after a teenager was shot by a Hong Kong police officer.

On the other hand, many democracy-loving residents of Hong Kong see their city as a “capitalist enclave in a Communist empire” (as *Time* reported) that is preparing to take over. The city, once under the British crown, was returned to China in 1997 under a “one country, two systems” framework, which promises certain democratic rights not afforded on the mainland. These concessions are slated to remain in place until 2047.

In recent years, however, some residents have accused Beijing of steadily eroding these special freedoms. They went so far as to stage a demonstration in front of the U.S. embassy demanding Washington’s intervention.

Consequently, Beijing has slammed the protests as efforts by criminals to split the territory from China, backed by what it said were hostile foreigners.

Yet *another* group of demonstrators urged others to not listen to “extrem-

ists” seeking foreign intervention, suggesting that would only further complicate Hong Kong’s cause.

For all its viewpoints, the city’s upheaval did have a definite starting point.

The protests began in June against legislation pushed by the city’s leader, Carrie Lam, that would have allowed criminal suspects to be sent to mainland China for trial. Mrs. Lam, who was elected as the city’s chief executive by a pro-Beijing committee of Hong Kong elites, has come under withering criticism for pushing the extradition bill. Many in Hong Kong saw the bill as a glaring example of the city’s eroding autonomy.

This pushed demonstrators clad with black T-shirts, masks and hard helmets to break into the city’s legislature building on the anniversary of Hong Kong’s





handover to China on July 1. There they spray-painted walls and furniture with slogans like: “Hong Kong is not China, not yet.” Across the city, the activists infiltrated government offices and defaced portraits of the city’s leaders.

Since then, clashes with police have become increasingly violent as the demands evolved into wider calls for democracy.

Despite the uncertainties on how to handle the situation, it is clear Hong Kong has become a battleground between dichotomies—between capitalism and communism, democratic liberties and authoritarian stability, and—arguably—the United States and China.

Ultimately, many fear Hong Kong is the clearest example of a resurgent Communist China and a possible relapse into Cold War-type thinking.

Symbolic Fight

Chinese authorities have long eyed the former British port and subtly worked to win control of the city.

“Under President Xi Jinping, the Communist Party has quietly used its levers of social control: the freest courts, schools, media and economy on Chinese soil,” *Time* reported. “Just as he’s cracked down on any signs of dissidence in mainland China,” says Chris Patten, the last British governor of Hong Kong, there has been a ‘whittling away of free speech, the autonomy of universities, an undermining of the rule of law, and that’s increased people’s anxieties.’”

Another of these quiet “levers” of control is the use of the Chinese national anthem, played during the handover of Hong Kong from Great Britain in

■ Protesters wave their phones in the air during a rally against police harassment in Hong Kong, China (Aug. 28, 2019).

PHOTO: CHRIS MCGRATH/GETTY IMAGES





1997. It is emblematic of the kind of spirit Beijing seems to want to first impose on, then imprint into, Hong Kong's DNA.

The anthem, which includes the lyrics, "With our flesh and blood, let's build a new Great Wall! China is now facing its greatest danger," and "millions of hearts together," was originally written to represent the fight against Japan prior to the start of World War II. It was later adopted to glorify Mao Zedong's Communist China.

Today, it is likely China views democracy as the force from which it must protect itself.

When the city was handed over from the British crown, Beijing mandated that government-funded schools require its students to sing the anthem at flag-raising ceremonies. Though the rules were long ignored, it was reiterated in 2004 following mass demonstrations and now most schools are holding such ceremonies. Ever since 2004, Hong Kong's TV networks are required to begin evening news with government prepared promotionals including the song.

■ Above, a policeman holds a shotgun during pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong (Sept. 21, 2019). Opposite page, a protester throws a petrol bomb in Hong Kong as the city observes the 70th anniversary of Communist China's founding (Oct. 1, 2019).

PHOTO: NICOLAS ASFOURI/AFP/ (ABOVE); AMARK RALSTON/AFP/ (OPPOSITE PAGE); GETTY IMAGES

However, the majority of Hong Kongers are not proud or fond of the anthem.

Thousands of Hong Kong soccer fans booed loudly and turned their backs when the Chinese national anthem was played before a World Cup qualifier match against Iran on September 10, taking the city's months of protests into the sports realm.

The crowd broke out into "Glory to Hong Kong," a song reflecting their campaign for more democratic freedoms. After the match started, fans chanted "Fight for freedom" and "Revolution of Our Times."

In an appeal to the U.S., some protesters waved American flags and sang "The Star-Spangled Banner."

"We, Hong Kongers and Americans, are united by our yearning for freedom and dignity," some placards read. Some urged Washington to intervene.

Hong Kong billionaire Jimmy Lie told *CBS*: "We are fighting a war. We

are fighting with the same value against a dictatorship which will become the greatest competitor to the Western values in future."

The demonstrations appear to show that, at their very core, Hong Kongers identify more with the American way of life than their own Chinese neighbors!

A survey from the University of Hong Kong revealed that only 11 percent of the city's residents call themselves Chinese citizens. Seventy-one percent of those in the city said they are not proud about being Chinese citizens.

Such deep-seated division is strikingly odd for two cities that share a language, culture and land—akin to Los Angeles or New York City defying the federal government in Washington.

Their unique histories explain the rift.

Family Grown Apart

Hong Kong's character is heavily flavored by the more than 150 years it



was under the authority of the British crown.

“The United Kingdom had held Hong Kong as a colony since 1841, when it occupied the area during the First Opium War,” the *National Geographic* reported. “The war broke out after Qing-dynasty China attempted to crack down an illegal opium trade that led to widespread addiction in China. Defeat came at a high cost: In 1842, China agreed to cede the island of Hong Kong to the British in perpetuity through the Treaty of Nanjing.”

Finally, a treaty in 1898 called the Convention for the Extension of Hong Kong Territory effectively gave the prosperous trading port in its entirety into British hands for a 99-year period.

During that century, “British Hong Kong’s trajectory was different from that of mainland China, which became a Communist country in 1949,” *National Geographic* continued. “Up to 100,000 Chinese found refuge in Hong Kong after the Communist Party took power. Capitalist Hong

Kong soon experienced an economic boom, becoming home to a multicultural, international community.”

When the deadline neared, the “one country, two systems” principle was adopted. In it, China granted the prosperous trading city another 50 years of autonomy in every area except foreign affairs. The city has its own legal systems, borders and rights such as free speech.

Hong Kong’s special status continued from 1997 without any serious threats. But starting in 2014, candidates for Hong Kong’s leaders were vetted by Beijing. That, along with the recent extradition bill, has triggered the mass protests fueled by concern that China is working to cut short the 50-year guarantee of freedoms.

Communist Resurgence?

“Mr. Xi, who is 66 and in his seventh year of his now unlimited tenure as the country’s paramount leader, has cast himself as an essential commander for a challenging time,” *The New York Times* reported of Xi Jinping, China’s president. “He has been lion-

ized in the state news media as no other Chinese leader has been since Mao.”

While economic reforms in the 1970s had the West thinking China would slow-walk its way to democracy, the opposite appears to be the case.

National Interest wrote on the growing concerns: “Under President Xi Jinping, China has become noticeably more authoritarian, not less, at home. His presidency has been characterized by an insistence that all individuals in positions of responsibility devote more serious study of and adherence to Marxist-Leninist doctrine. He has conducted a systematic purge of the Party’s ranks in the name of combating corruption. Although that appeared to be a reasonable justification in some cases, given the level of corruption that had developed along with China’s meteoric economic growth, in other cases Xi seemingly used it as a pretext to get rid of personal and ideological rivals.”

Mainland China is not just seeing political crackdowns. *Forbes* described

Please see **HONG KONG**, page 31

The Gift of Giving

At the end of each year, society focuses on charitable works and sharing with others—with mixed results. What is the secret to getting the most out of giving?

BY EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

MONEY CANNOT buy happiness. Spending it on others does.

We all know this is intrinsically true. Even science proves that giving makes us happier than receiving. A person's brain is more engaged when giving, specifically because of increased levels of the pleasure chemical dopamine.

Science aside, adults can remember happily receiving gifts as a child, and then growing up to relish even more in being the giver. The joy of seeing someone else appreciate a gift of service or sacrifice surpasses the pleasure of being on the receiving end.

Yet cutting-edge science is just backing up what the Bible stated long before computers could register brain waves. Acts 20:35 states: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." The word "blessed" here means happy.

We are happy when receiving and even happier when giving.

The final three months of the calendar centers very much on giving. It is when generosity is most on people's minds. The holiday season, which seems to stretch longer every year, is a time of gift buying and giving, altruism

and acts of kindness. Thanksgiving, Christmas and even the U.S. tax code (31 percent of all annual donations to nonprofits occurs in December) drives much of this charity.

With the giving-to-happiness equation in mind, every year should end on a blissful high note—with happiness, joy, contentment and overall life satisfaction bursting at the seams.

Right?

Sadly, this is nowhere near the case. "The most wonderful time of the year" is far from it and not just because of a handful of Ebenezer Scrooges.

Instead, the holiday blues are taking over. Happiness is *decreasing* during the holidays as depression and anxiety replaces it. This time of year evokes feelings of loneliness and stress, even among those with families. Divorces skyrocket during and in the wake of the holiday season. Lawyers actually plan for an increase in clientele—dubbing the first day after the new year "Divorce Day." As one lawyer's website put it, some couples hold out hope that the holidays will rekindle their relationships only to be greatly disappointed.

Even going beyond the holiday season, it is ironic that some of the

most generous nations are not the most happy. The United States ranks second on the five-year World Giving Index and Britain ranks seventh. According to the WGI, 76 percent of Americans acknowledged helping a stranger, 62 percent donated money and 44 percent volunteered their time. For the UK, the statistics were 62 percent, 71 percent and 30 percent respectively.

Both nations rank surprisingly low on the happiness scale. The U.S. ranks 19th in the World Happiness rankings and the UK is 15th—revealing an anomaly in the connection between generosity and overall gladness.

While statistical factors between the giving index and the happiness scale are admittedly nuanced, the point stands. Our giving is not leading to happiness.

There Is Good in the World

Having monetary wealth does not automatically bring happiness.

Psychology Today demonstrated this: "...it comes as a shock for many people to learn that there is no straightforward relationship between wealth and well-being. Once our basic material needs are satisfied (i.e. once we're assured of regular food and



adequate shelter and a basic degree of financial security), wealth only has a negligible effect on well-being.

For example, studies have shown that, in general, lottery winners do not become significantly happier than they were before, and that even extremely rich people—such as billionaires—are not significantly happier than others. Studies have shown that American and British people are less contented now than they were 50 years ago, although their material wealth is much higher.”

Distributing some of this wealth to others is how many strive for contentment.

Philanthropy is woven into the fabric of U.S. society. According to Charity Navigator, the largest charity assessment organization in America, there are more than 1.4 million nonprofits in the U.S., and 1 million of these are tax-exempt public charities.

There is no denying that many people are genuinely interested in sacrificing for the sake of others. Consider the public reaction in the wake of Hurricane Dorian, which slammed the Bahamas and left a trail of damage along the

American East Coast. Millions of Americans parted with their hard-earned personal funds to help people whose livelihoods were devastated by the tropical cyclone.

Even a month after the storm, a small Florida restaurant pulled down thousands of dollar bills customers attached to its wall for decor purposes to donate about \$15,000 to the relief effort.

Corporations are also heavily involved with giving efforts. Altruism is one of the core tenets of Food Lion, for example, a company that operates more than 1,000 grocery stores in Southeastern and Mid-Atlantic states. Their ambitious goal is to end hunger for 1 in 8 neighbors and 1 in 6 food-insecure children. They have committed to donate 1 billion meals by the end of 2025. They reached their previ-

ous goal of donating 500 million meals and did so 18 months earlier than expected.

This is merely one small example as many companies, public and private, have charitable foundations through which they “give back.”

But as stated before, despite our benevolent ways, we still seem unable to give our way to happiness.

The Perfect Giver

Think of the most generous person you know. It could be a family member, a rich uncle perhaps. It could be a lenient employer or a neighbor willing to provide you the shirt off his back.

If you have never encountered such a person, consider the business moguls and philanthropists who have given away billions of dollars, or even the Mother Theresa-types who dedicated their lives to giving.

There is one who exceeds them all—in fact, one who may have been the inspiration for the previous examples.

God is the most generous, giving Being in existence—by far.

Recall the oft-quoted scripture that characterizes God's inherently giving character: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Most focus on the gift, Jesus Christ, and less on the giver, God the Father. A Father willing to give His Son as a sacrifice for all humanity's sake demonstrates amazing generosity. The Son followed the Father's example by being willing to give His own life.

In fact, Jesus Christ said, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). He fulfilled this Himself by laying down or giving His life for His sheep (10:11).

We are instructed to follow the example Christ left us (I Pet. 2:21). This does not mean we should go out and allow others to torture and kill us. Rather, it is an instruction to be willing to lay down or sacrifice our resources—time, effort, attention and even money—for others.

It is one thing to give out of abundance. Sacrifice, by definition, is to give up something one would otherwise want to keep.

The timeless story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) illustrates several elements of the kind of sacrifice Christ described. Many point to the demonstration of kindness around the holidays as a microcosm of this story—which teaches the importance of making sacrifices to help those in need. However, as you read the summary of the account, consider whether the holiday season measures up.

Before telling the parable, Jesus was asked how to inherit eternal life. Christ went on to explain a willingness to give to others as an important criterion and demonstrated it through the parable.

He then described a Samaritan (who were considered foreigners in the land of Israel at the time) risking himself to assist a Jewish stranger he happened upon who had been robbed and nearly beaten to death. Before the Samaritan arrived, the victim was passed over by a priest and a Levite who most would expect to stop and assist him. Instead, the Samaritan

took notice of the beaten man, provided medical treatment and transported him to a lodge to allow him to heal. The Samaritan instructed the caregiver to bill him for any charges incurred.

This level of hospitality sounds like a dream scenario.

In telling the story, however, Jesus showed several elements of proper giving—the kind that leads to happiness.

The Samaritan did not give out of his abundance. He used his own wine, oil and bandages to provide medical treatment. By offering to take care of expenses incurred over time, he demonstrated that the welfare of the wounded man was more important than his money. He also risked his own safety by helping the man even though the thieves could have returned. He gave his time to personally clean and bandage the man's wounds on the scene and then transported him to safety. He also over-

■ Volunteers move food and supplies in Beaumont, Texas, after Tropical Depression Imelda dumped more than two feet of water across some areas (Sept. 20, 2019).

PHOTO: THOMAS B. SHEA/GETTY IMAGES



came ethnic differences to come to the Jewish man's aid.

With these details in mind, the Good Samaritan is a stellar example for all. Though it is difficult to achieve, it represents the mindset of selfless giving that brings real happiness.

Give vs. Get

People give for many reasons. Most who give often wonder why they are not as blessed or happy as they could be.

This is because some give for the wrong reasons. They do so to get in return and are usually disappointed when they do not receive anything. Even if there is a return on investment, disappointment can come from not receiving it soon enough or the return is deemed insignificant in comparison to the gift. Others give out of a sense of responsibility or out of habit, not fully understanding or appreciating why they should give willingly.

Look at God's example. He gives willingly and does not expect anything in return.

Well, perhaps that is not quite accurate. What God *does* want to see in return is the happiness and joy that comes from His providence. As a divine Parent, He wants His children to enjoy the gifts He gives.

Giving with true altruism—the kind that God exhibits—is rare. As a supreme giver, God exhibits what can be called the GIVE way of life. This is polar opposite to the *get* way of life that is prevalent today. A person cannot achieve true happiness with a GET mindset, regardless of occasional gifts or things they do for others. It is the giving mindset—a *life* of giving—that leads to happiness.

Where do you stand? Are you more of a giver or more of a getter?

Here is a litmus test. When reading the following verses, do you find yourself *fully* agreeing with them or do you feel some guilt?

“He which sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and *he which sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully*. Every man according as he purposes in his heart, so let him give;

not grudgingly, or of necessity: for *God loves a cheerful giver*. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work” (II Cor. 9:6-8).

Do you give cheerfully or grudgingly? God says He loves the first category.

Here are two more verses from the book of Proverbs that describe a cheerful and abundant giver: “He that has a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he *gives* of his bread to the poor” (22:9). Also, the slothful “covets greedily all the day long: but the righteous *gives* and *saves not*” (21:26). Do you read these and see areas in which to grow?

How do you compare to one of the clearest statements Christ made about giving: “*Give* to every man that asks of you...as you would [wish] that men should do to you, do you also to them likewise...*do good*, and *lend*, hoping for nothing again; and *your reward shall be great...*” (Luke 6:30-31, 35). This clearly describes an attitude of giving. For those who adhere to this, giving is a way of life.

Verse 38 adds more about what happens when we give in this way: “*Give*, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and *running over*, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you mete withal it shall be measured to you again.”

In this case, the giver *does* get something in return.

King Solomon added to the promise attached to being a cheerful giver: “Cast your bread upon the waters [give to others]: for you shall find it after many days” (Prov. 11:1). He also stated: “There is that scatters [gives], and yet *increases*; and there is that withholds more than is meet [gets for himself], but it tends to poverty. The liberal [generous] soul shall be made fat: and he that waters shall be watered also himself” (vs. 24-25).

God ultimately set the example of how to give and told us how to

match His generosity: “*Freely you have received, freely give*” (Matt. 10:8). He later showed that one of the things mankind received freely is the life of Jesus Christ: “He that finds [the Greek can also mean “gets”] his life shall lose it: and he that loses his life [gives it up] for My sake shall find it” (vs. 39).

Christ gave His actual life for mankind. We should follow in His steps and, like the Good Samaritan, give up elements of our lives in the service of others. If we do so, we will find true happiness.

Learn the Give Way

Living the GIVE way is not intuitive or automatic. It must be learned, hence Christ's multiple instructions. If you are not the giver you want to be, do not beat yourself up. It takes practice and consistently experiencing the results to grow in this area. Knowing that the rewards are plenty, including lasting happiness, helps.

Christ's example reveals this reward. After performing the duties of a house servant, in this case washing His disciples' feet, He described the feeling they would experience doing it for others: “If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you...If you know these things, *happy* are you if you do them” (John 13:14-15, 17).

Most people may not think that washing someone's feet will bring happiness. But Christ's point is a willingness to meet the needs of others—even if inconvenient—makes you happy because it makes them happy. This is the core of the principle that it is better to give than to receive. Serving others provides happiness and allows us to experience it ourselves.

Learn to live the GIVE way of life and avoid the GET way. Joy wrought from getting is temporary. Happiness from giving is lasting.

Ultimately, the gift of giving is to receive abundant gifts from God, which pleases all involved. □

BURNING EARTH BIGGEST RAINING

The world watched over the summer as large swaths of the Amazon rainforest roared with uncontrollable flames. While many demanded swift action, it was quickly apparent there are no simple solutions.

BY NESTOR A. TORO

THE HYMN OF the Brazilian state of Rondonia takes pride in the region's famously beautiful skies. "Blue, our sky is always blue," it says. "May God keep it unrivaled, crystal, pure, and always keep it that way."

Yet, during the summer, a haze of thick smoke blanketed Brazil.

The South American nation always has fires during its annual dry season,

but they have been more widespread this year. *Alarmingly more.* Satellite data from the Brazilian Space Agency revealed a sharp increase in deforestation and forest fires over the past 12 months. In August, the agency issued an alert that blazes in the Amazon rainforest had increased 84 percent in the first seven months of 2019 compared with the same period in 2018.

"The smell is of barbecue, caused by vast swathes of the world's largest

tropical rainforest going up in flames," *Metro* reported. The news outlet added that "the blazes have created a layer of smoke estimated to be 1.2 million square miles wide that spreads across Latin America to the Atlantic coast."

More than a thousand miles southeast of the flames, the megacity of Sao Paulo experienced what felt like a terrible omen on August 19.

"Sao Paulo was blackened for around an hour...after strong winds

■ Fire consumes the Amazon rainforest in Altamira, Brazil (Aug. 27, 2019).

PHOTO: AP/LEO CORREA

TH'S FOREST

and a cold front brought in smoke from forest fires burning in the states of Amazonas and Rondonia, more than [1,700 miles] away," *BBC* reported. "Sao Paulo resident Gianvitor Dias [described] what it was like in the city during the smoke-filled blackout..."

"It was as if the day had turned into night," he said. "Everyone here commented, because even on rainy days it doesn't usually get that dark. It was very impressive."

Some portrayed the scene as "apocalyptic."

As the smoke spread, so did reports of health impacts—particularly among children and elderly. The number of people treated for respiratory issues during the blazes increased sharply at the Cosme e Damia Children's hospital in Porto Velho, the capital of Rondonia.

Elane Diaz, a nurse in Porto Velho, spoke about respiratory problems while waiting for a doctor's appointment at a hospital with her 5-year-old son Eduardo.

"The kids are affected the most. They're coughing a lot," Ms. Diaz said. "They have problems breathing. I'm concerned because it affects their health."

As the crisis continued to develop, more people questioned: At what point has the situation simply gone too far? Are any solutions simply too little, too late? What are the long-term ramifications of incinerating such a vast amount of rainforest off the planet?

"Scientists warn that if enough of the forest is lost, it could enter a spiral of collapse. This is an outcome with global consequences, and if we cross this threshold of deforestation,

it could be a point of no return," *Vox* stated.

While the Brazilian government has reported it has contained the worst of the blazes, the record fire season continues. Exactly how to solve the crisis remains a contentious open question.

Core Issue?

The threat to the Amazon, what some call "the lungs of the planet," ignited a bitter blame game. Tensions particularly flared between Brazil and Europe, which accused the South American nation of neglecting its commitments to protect biodiversity.

At the height of the fires, some politicians found themselves on the same page as sports superstars, who used their global social media followings to call for action to preserve the rainforest.

Soccer's five-time world player of the year Cristiano Ronaldo tweeted a widely cited figure of how much oxygen the rainforest emits: "The Amazon Rainforest produces more than 20% of the world's oxygen and it's been burning for the past 3 weeks. It's our responsibility to help to save our planet."

The French president and many others reported the same figure.

Clearly, the fires in Brazil are a dire problem, and everyone who spreads this 20 percent figure has noble intentions. Yet it is factually inaccurate and distracts from the core of the problem. *The Atlantic* explained: "The Amazon is a vast, ineffable, vital, living wonder. It does not, however, supply the planet with 20 percent of its oxygen."

Quoting biochemist Nick Lane, the magazine wrote: "Even the most

foolhardy destruction of world forests could hardly dint our oxygen supply, though in other respects such short-sighted idiocy is an unspeakable tragedy."

Most scientists do not link Brazil's uptick in fires to climate change—despite many political statements and widespread news coverage on that point.

Yet these blazes *are* manmade.

The Chicago Tribune stated: "The current fires in the Amazon are not wildfires. They are manmade and are mostly set illegally by landgrabbers who are clearing the forest for cattle ranching and crops.

"Deforesting the Amazon is a long, slow process. People clear the land by cutting down the vegetation during the rainy season, letting the trees dry out and burning them during the dry

season. Fully clearing the dense forest for agricultural use can take several years of slashing and burning."

Casting these "landgrabbers" as the villains of this story is easy to do. Yet most of these farmers and ranchers are just trying to eke out a living.

A *National Geographic* reporter spent time with one such family. He said they are "the most environmentally destructive people I have ever met. They are also some of the nicest. They are a family trying to survive in a very hostile environment through often brutal, hard work. Their view and understanding of the problems the Amazon faces are, therefore, very different than mine. I see the Amazon as an extraordinarily valuable, cathedral of life that should be cherished and protected at all costs—the world needs it, we all need it. [The head of the family] sees the Amazon as a vast, regenerating resource that allows him to feed his family. After talking extensively with him I realized his respect for it was as deep as my own, he just saw it very differently."

For Brazil as a whole, agriculture is hugely important. It is the world's leading producer of coffee. Same for oranges. It produces over twice the amount of this citrus fruit than the United States, which is in second place. It is also the main producer of the tuber crop cassava and a leading grower of beans, corn, cacao, bananas and rice.

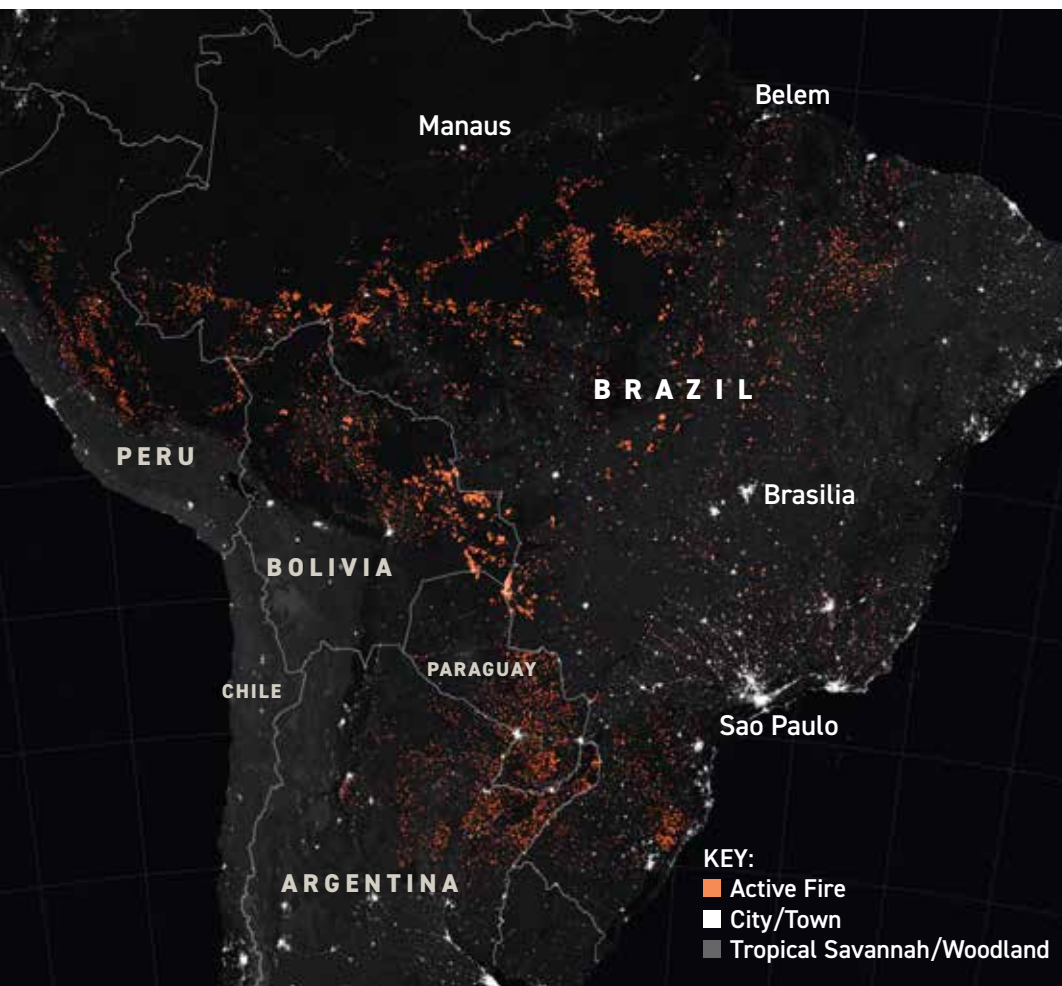
Brazil also has one of the world's largest livestock populations (at more than 200 million) and slaughters more cattle annually than does the U.S.

In fact, agriculture makes up 6.6 percent of the nation's GDP. While this may seem like a small number, the U.S. amount for the same figure is just 0.9 percent. Also, nearly 10 percent of Brazilians work in this sector.

For a nation struggling to find its economic and political footing around the world, slowing

■ Satellites identified active fires in South America for the period of August 15-22, 2019.

PHOTO: JOSHUA STEVENS/NASA EARTH OBSERVATORY





■ A lush forest sits next to a field of charred trees burned by fires in Villa Nova Samuel, Brazil (Aug. 27, 2019).

PHOTO: AP/VICTOR R. CAIVANO

down agriculture growth is a tough pill to swallow.

Shortsighted Practices

Taking economics out of the equation, forest clearing in the Amazon is alarming for many reasons. It had decreased 80 percent following a peak in 2004 and now is back with a vengeance.

Why is this trend troubling? Tropical forests harbor many species of plants and animals found nowhere else. They also contain enormous stores of carbon as wood and other organic matter.

Doug Morton, a NASA scientist, said there is now “an uptick in the pressure against the remaining Amazon forest, to expand agriculture production in areas that are the leading edge in the deforestation frontier.”

“Most of the richness and productivity we associate with the Amazon is bound up in the living organisms in

the ecosystem” NASA reported on its website.

“Layer upon layer of plants, animals, fungi, and bacteria that are spread throughout the forest endlessly recycle the ecosystem’s nutrients. The infertile soil is not well suited to farming, and when the forest is cleared to make way for farms, farmers face the dilemma of how to enrich the soil. In a part of the country where millions of people earn less than \$100 per month, expensive soil additives and fertilizer aren’t options. Instead, farmers clear cut the forest and set it on fire in order to turn the nutrients locked up in the forest biomass into a soil-fertilizing ash.”

The NASA article continued: “This slash-and-burn method of agriculture is never more than a short-term solution. Typically, within a few years, the initial influx of nutrients from the burned forest is used up. ‘I think people are very similar whether they are in Texas

or Pará, Brazil,’ said ecologist Daniel Nepstad of the Woods Hole Research Center in Massachusetts. ‘People are looking to maximize the profit of their land in the short term; they don’t look too far down the line.’”

Global Problem

When all the dynamics of this crisis are considered, any initiatives serve only as temporary solutions. The problem is as thick as the Amazon forest itself, and no one seems to know exactly how to penetrate the thinking of those initiating the fires and accomplish a permanent solution.

The implications can be devastating. For a wake-up call it helps to be reminded that the Sahara, Earth’s biggest desert, was itself once lushly forested.

Will mankind’s inaction turn Earth’s biggest rainforest into a 2-million-square-mile desert? That is one answer not worth finding out.



■ Above, a Brazilian farmer walks over a burnt trunk after a fire in the Amazon region (Aug. 26, 2019). Opposite page, trees burn near Abuna, Brazil (Aug. 24, 2019).

PHOTOS: CARL DE SOUZA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The Amazon, however, is not the only place where massive land fires are raging. For example, NASA has called Africa the “fire continent” that is home to at least 70 percent of the 10,000 fires burning worldwide on an average August day, though the agency says the number of fires is consistent from year to year.

Angola had almost three times more fires than Brazil over a period in August, according to NASA satellite imagery, which indicated around 6,000 fires in Angola, more than 3,000 in Congo and just over 2,000 in Brazil.

Though Angola and Congo dominate in numbers of fires, they often occur in sparsely wooded savannas and on fields cultivated by small farmers, making them less of a concern for deforestation than those in the Amazon, said Sally Archibald,

a professor at Wits University in Johannesburg.

Tosi Mpanu Mpanu, chief negotiator for the Africa Zone at the 2015 United Nations climate change conference, said agricultural practices known as “slash and burn” need to be better managed, citing the over 3,000 fires in Congo.

“It is a great threat to our forests,” he said of the technique used by farmers in Congo and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa. “You need a global ambitious program, or you train people to use other practices for people to go into intensive agriculture. You have to organize these small farmers by giving them fertilizer, seeds.”

No More Destruction

Solving the forest fire problem means teaching farming on a multinational

scale. Yet this can seem impossible. When has a “global ambitious program” ever been successful?

Yet, unknown to almost all, this is *precisely* what the Bible says is going to happen—and soon.

In his book *Mounting Worldwide Crisis in Agriculture*, author Dale L. Schurter explained: “The Bible paints an exciting picture about some of the tremendous and wonderful changes that will occur in coming years.

“At that time, society will be agriculturally oriented. Farming and gardening, orchards and vineyards, livestock and poultry husbandries will be so popular that even city dwellers will want to take part. But not in the way so many do today, ‘playing at’ farming just to gain tax benefits.

“Rather, people in tomorrow’s cities will want to have their own gardens

and small orchards just for the pleasure of working with the soil, of being close to God's Creation, and of growing part of their own food."

The Bible describes that, in this new world, nations "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" (Mic. 4:3).

Mr. Schurter continues: "Instead of making instruments of destruction for a war-oriented society, men will make instruments of peace, and society will become agriculturally oriented, productive and service-oriented—excited about serving our Creator, family and neighbors. Agriculture will be a respected profession, and many, many people will be engaged in it: 'But

they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken it'" (vs. 4).

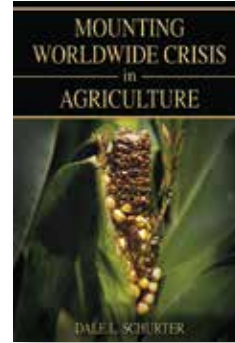
Few understand the importance God has placed in His Word about the role of proper agricultural practices in the world prophesied to come soon. The words "every" and "his" in the last Bible verse quoted imply all heads of families will have access to their own land acreage and be trained to properly grow food for their households. These practices will be based on agricultural laws origi-

nally established by the God who made all of it.

The words "none" and "afraid" are also reassuring within the same agricultural context, pointing to the absence of *anything* that can instill fear or hinder man's process of peacefully cultivating the land—including destructive fires.

Only then, the wishes sung in the state hymn of Rondonia will be fulfilled for the entire planet: God will make sure to "keep it unrivaled, crystal, pure, and always keep it that way."

To learn more about this coming agricultural transformation, read *Mounting Worldwide Crisis in Agriculture*. □



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1950s



1970s

O B E S E S

BY TIMOTHY D. RANNEY, M.D.

ILLNESS abounds in society. What if there was a prescription—a hypothetical pill—that a person could take to reduce the risk of acquiring many of these diseases?

This treatment would have no adverse effects. It would cost nothing. Would you take it? Specifically, what if it could reduce the risk of heart attacks, strokes and cancers while even curing certain diseases?

Taking such a pill would be a “no-brainer.”

As you ponder this mysterious treatment, note a conclusion from an April 2018 study “Impact of Healthy Lifestyle Factors on Life Expectancies in the US population,” published by the National Institutes of Health. It demonstrated a dramatic effect on average

life expectancy by implementing five healthy habits.

The study’s authors compared those who implemented these habits to those who did not. Both men and women who put these habits into practice had a higher life expectancy at age 50.

Women increased their life expectancies from 29 to 43 years (to reach age 93), and men increased their life expectancies from 26 to 38 years (to reach age 88). That is up to a 46 percent increase in life expectancy for men and a 48 percent increase for women. That is a big difference!

What are the habits that allowed for such a positive outcome?

They are a healthy diet, daily exercise, maintaining a body mass index (BMI) between 18.5 and 25, no excess alcohol, and smoking avoidance.

Just one of these all by itself has been shown to have the positive health

benefits mentioned in the first paragraph. This will be the hypothetical pill mentioned in the introduction: maintaining a BMI below 25.

Body Mass Index

What exactly is body mass index?

BMI is a screening tool based on a simple calculation. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, BMI is a measure of an adult’s weight in relation to his or her height. It is calculated by taking a person’s weight in kilograms divided by the square of his or her height in meters. This is represented as kg/m².

People are classified into four categories based on their BMI:

- Normal: 18.5 to 24.9
- Underweight: anything less than 18.5
- Overweight: 25.0 to 29.9
- Obese: 30.0 and higher

■ According to data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the average restaurant meal today is four times larger than in the 1950s. A classic example is the cheeseburger, which weighed an average 3.9 ounces in the 1950s and today weighs 12 ounces.

1990s



2000s



ITTY AN UNUSUAL EPIDEMIC

BMI is not adjusted for gender, race, geography or any health-related metrics. However, there are special circumstances. For example, those who are under 18, pregnant or have weight-related medical problems should seek professional counsel before addressing an abnormal BMI.

Serious Problem

Addressing excessive weight is one of the hardest things for people to do. Difficult is an understatement. Yet it is a serious individual and societal problem—and rapidly growing worse. Many experts refer to overweight and obesity trends as a societal *epidemic*.

The United Nations' World Health Organization frames the global trend with these facts:

- Worldwide obesity has nearly tripled since 1975.
- In 2016, more than 1.9 billion adults 18 years and older were overweight. Of these, over 650 million were obese.
- 39 percent of adults ages 18 years and older were overweight in 2016, and 13 percent were obese.

■ Most of the world's population live in countries where overweight and obesity kills more people than underweight.

■ 41 million children under the age of 5 were overweight or obese in 2016.

■ Over 340 million children and adolescents ages 5-19 were overweight or obese in 2016.

WHO then stated the saddest part of this health pandemic: "Obesity is preventable."

As more of the population carries around excess pounds, being overweight can seem normal. Also, even if an individual is striving to slim a waistline, it is a daunting task. So, it is natural to ask, why does being overweight even matter?

WHO answers: "Overweight and obesity are major risk factors for a number of chronic diseases, including diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and cancer. Once considered a problem only in high income countries, overweight and obesity are now dramatically on the rise in low- and

middle-income countries, particularly in urban settings."

Let's state this another way: A BMI of 25.0 or greater is associated with an increase in weight-related diseases affecting nearly all countries, rich and poor. In low- and middle-income countries, this is called a double burden of disease. These countries face the consequences of both undernutrition *and* obesity-related diseases. Many studies confirm these risks.

Benefits of Weight Loss

There are many benefits from maintaining a proper weight: better overall health, increased energy, an improved body image, more confidence, and generally better sleep and mood. It also helps you avoid disease and sickness, and because overweight and obesity is preventable, such people are *unnecessarily* sick, *unnecessarily* dying prematurely.

In just one analysis involving 2.8 million adults, the chance of suffering serious illness was shown to increase with weight gain. One of several find-

ings showed people with a BMI of 40 to 45 had an almost quadrupled risk of heart failure compared to people of normal weight, those with a BMI of 35 to 40 had a more than doubled heart failure risk, and those with a BMI of 30 to 35 had a 70 percent higher risk. Even being in the overweight range (25 to 29.9) increases heart failure risk by 20 percent compared to those with healthy weight.

The study also found that, compared to normal-weight individuals, a BMI of 25 to 30 increased the risk of Type 2 diabetes and sleep apnea by more than double, while a person with a BMI of 30 to 35 was more than five times as likely to develop Type 2 diabetes and almost six times as likely to develop sleep apnea.

Perception May Not Be Reality

So, what do we do? How do we even begin the task of shedding excess pounds?

To address any problem, we must first see and admit it is a problem. Weight is a particularly sensitive and difficult area for many to address. Yet to not address it only compounds the problem.

While this article focuses on BMI ranges 25 and above, it is important to note that a distorted body image is to be avoided. This is true of both underweight *and* overweight individuals.

Our society has shifted the perception of normal weight so that those between 18.5 and 24.9 often have the perception they are underweight and unhealthy.

On the other hand, those who are overweight often believe they do not have a problem. Yet countless clinical studies agree that a BMI above 24.9 poses serious health risks.

Treatment

It is hard to deal with weight problems. So what *can* you do if you have a BMI above 24.9 and want to avoid becoming one of the statistics already mentioned?

First, take a deep breath. There is a plethora of online information available for self-treatment of excessive weight. WHO and the CDC are two credible sources.

There is also qualified medical help available both online and in most communities. These resources will aid you in making health decisions based on your situation.

Balanced Diet

As you work toward reaching and maintaining a healthy weight, begin with the understanding that calorie intake that is greater than calorie expenditure results in weight gain. Likewise, calorie intake that is less than calorie expenditure results in weight loss.

Calories are primarily gained by ingesting food and drink.

As for calorie expenditure, it is important to note that you do not have to burn every single calorie you ingest on the treadmill. For most individuals, the metabolism burns the bulk of calories while your body is at rest.

Exercising does have the benefit of burning extra calories immediately. But, more importantly, it maintains and even boosts a person's metabolic rate for 24 to 48 hours. This means you burn more calories while you are at rest for the next one or two days after your workout!

To balance your calorie intake and expenditure, maintain a program of reduced calories with adequate nutrition. With very few medical exceptions (see your healthcare provider if you believe an exception may apply to you), balanced diet control plus appropriate exercise to boost your metabolism will result in weight loss.

Food choices matter. Some find eating at least six combined vegetable and fruit servings every day to be the easiest approach to get started when they need to shed excessive weight. Some promote eating even more servings of vegetables as tolerated.

Others find limiting food and drink to certain hours of the day helps. Avoiding eating after the last meal of the day also works well for many people.

Researching credible information will provide options that work for your specific situation.

Still, it can be difficult to follow through on your goals. Always remember that you are not "finished" with a

diet when you have reached your weight target. You have simply changed your lifelong approach to maintaining an appropriate weight.

Exercise

Be sure to do *something* at least four days a week: running on treadmills and ellipticals, bicycling and even walking. *Any* amount of exercise is better than none.

Do not push yourself too hard when you are first starting out. Start at your current tolerance then gradually increase that tolerance.

Just *do* something! Tiny amounts regularly matter. Also, by increasing even small amounts daily, you can progress greatly over weeks, months and years.

Regular exercise will ensure you feel good—not guilt—when you take days off from physical activity. In fact, intermittent days of inactivity will be beneficial since recovery is an important part of a long-term exercise regimen.

Persistence

Persistence is one of the most important components for a weight management regimen.

Having an exercise buddy will promote ongoing exercise. Engage family and friends, who can encourage you, eat healthy around you and celebrate your small successes of a few pounds of weight loss.

Professional health coaching has helped many. Short-term, intermediate- and long-term goal development are crucial to staying motivated. Be sure to implement a plan to keep the weight off once it has been lost.

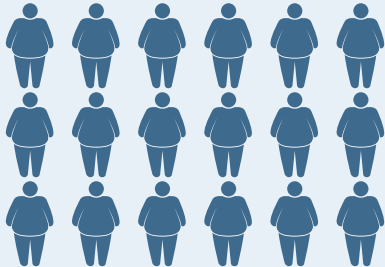
Regardless of the methods you choose, your overall goal is to achieve and maintain a BMI of 18.5 to 24.9 for your sake and for those you care about.

Unique Perspective

This magazine, *The Real Truth*, is published by The Restored Church of God. It is a singular organization that is dedicated to explaining biblical truths such as faith, love and the Ten Commandments. Yet it also teaches that God's way of life goes beyond the

WORLDWIDE OBESITY/OVERWEIGHT

691 MILLION OBESE WORLDWIDE



~2.8 MILLION

DEATHS CAUSED BY OBESITY PER YEAR

About 50% of the world's obese population live in these countries:



Source: The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation

$$\text{BMI} = \text{kg}/\text{m}^2$$

Body Mass Index (BMI) is an index of weight-for-height that is commonly used to classify overweight and obesity in adults. It is a person's weight in kilograms divided by the square of his height in meters (kg/m²).



WAYS TO REDUCE OBESITY



Data based on a 2016 study by the World Health Organization.

Graphic: The Real Truth

OVERWEIGHT/OBESE CHILDREN

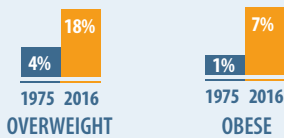


41 MILLION

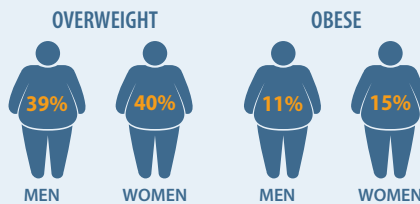


340 MILLION

In children ages 5-19:



ADULTS (18+ YEARS)



HEALTH CONSEQUENCES



theological, revealing that the Bible is practical and encompasses all areas of our lives.

God's Word has championed these healthy principles since ancient times.

The prophet Daniel insisted on a proper diet when being prepared to meet a king. This is noted in Daniel 1:12-16. He ate clean foods and requested "pulse to eat" instead of the king's decadent food. Pulse refers to vegetables! He also avoided wine, likely contaminated with varied pharmaceuticals of the day—such as aphrodisiacs—and instead requested water to drink.

Daniel's request, which allowed him to avoid contaminants, also demonstrated an important principle for us today: Drink water. Doing so is a simple way

to avoid extra calories from carbohydrate-heavy liquids.

As a result of his diet choices, in just 10 days, Daniel and his colleagues looked much better than everyone else (vs. 15)!

There are many other examples of physical fitness in the Bible. One is in Acts 20:11-13, which describes the apostle Paul declining a ship ride of about 60 miles around a peninsula. Instead, he walked 20 miles across this same peninsula on his own two feet—after preaching ALL NIGHT.

This would be considered a major hike today. It is remarkable that no one in this story seemed amazed at this feat. It is only mentioned as a side note to Paul's zeal for preaching the gospel. That is likely because walking long-

distance was a normal part of people's lives back then.

What Else Can We Do?

There are many additional aspects to developing healthful living. These are explained in more detail in our booklet *God's Principles of Healthful Living*, which is available at rcg.org/glohl. You can download your free copy now online.

The obesity epidemic is another example of a problem mankind, despite his best efforts and intentions, cannot seem to solve—we need God to help us, individually and collectively. For more information on how to develop a relationship with Him—and a wide variety of other subjects—visit rcg.org. □

PERSONAL

Continued from page 2

Notice Christ's rhetorical question. Understanding the characteristics of human nature, He perfectly understood why the others had not returned to thank Him.

But *why* is mankind so intrinsically ungrateful?

The Most Common Sin

From television commercials, programs, movies, shopping malls and homes, a widespread attitude of selfishness is sweeping the nations of this world. Adults, children and teens are becoming more ungrateful each day.

A main accelerator of this ingratitude is *commercialism*. Society has been caught up in the "you-work-hard-so-you-deserve-a-new-car-and-a-vacation-in-Barbados" mentality. This, in turn, has caused many to believe the ideology that, if they do not *acquire* these extravagant luxuries, life is somehow treating them unfairly.

Before calling for a national day of fasting, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln stated: "We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown; but we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own" (*Abraham Lincoln: Complete Works Comprising His Speeches, Letters, State Papers, and Miscellaneous Writings*).

This is a tremendously powerful statement! Since the time President Lincoln issued this proclamation, the wealth, prosperity and peace experienced by the United States is far greater—along with the attitudes of pride, selfishness and ingratitude.

But if this were said today, there would be quite an uproar!

In contrast to Lincoln's day, or even to 50 years ago, ungrateful attitudes today are worse by far. If that generation *forgot* God, and the many blessings He provided for America, then this generation *does not even know God exists!*

In this world of being obsessed with what's "in"—from the newest fashions, to the latest songs, and to absurd political correctness—gratitude has been all but declared unconstitutional!

To find the source of this attitude, one must look in the pages of the Bible. It reveals the most selfish, proud, arrogant, self-centered and ungrateful being that ever existed—Satan the devil.

Before his rebellion against God, Satan (first named Lucifer) was a perfectly created archangel. The prophet Isaiah records: "How are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How are you cut down to the ground, which did weaken the nations! For you have said in your heart, *I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High*" (Isa. 14:12-14).

Lucifer's heart was lifted up with arrogance—vanity. He was *ungrateful* to God for giving him life. Neither was he grateful to God for creating him so perfectly. Instead, he rebelled against God, choosing to believe that he was *better* than his Creator—that his way was *greater* than God's Way.

As the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2), he broadcasts this same attitude into us.

How to Be Grateful

It has been said that ingratitude is the most common sin. Although it is a part of our nature, you must learn to avoid it.

Following are just a few simple ways to show your gratitude toward God and fellow man.

Thank God daily: God commands us to go to Him in prayer with praise and thanksgiving. The Bible is filled with examples of God's servants showing their gratitude toward Him.

I Chronicles 29 records King David being deeply moved at the people's generosity in preparing God's Temple. David was inspired and expressed his earnest and sincere gratitude in honor of the great God. He exclaimed: "Blessed be You, LORD God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and You are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come of You, and You reign over all; and in Your hand is power and might; and in Your hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of You, and of Your own have we given You" (vs. 10-14).

Paul wrote: "Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks" (I Thes. 5:16-18).

Psalms 92 records a special Sabbath psalm used to praise God: "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto Your name, O most High: to show forth Your lovingkindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night...For You, LORD, have made me glad through Your work: I will triumph in the works of Your hands. O LORD, how great are Your works! And Your thoughts are very deep...You, LORD, are most High forevermore" (vs. 1-2, 4-5, 8).

You should never run out of things to thank God for! Go to Him in prayer and continually thank Him for all the blessings He has provided you!

The Bible records God's faithful servants continuously doing so. We also find that the Bible commands us to always give thanks and praise to God.

Why? Why does God command that we praise Him with thanksgiving?

Does He require this because He needs our praises?

No!

This command is repeated throughout the Bible because we need it! In order for us as Christians to be more like God—the most thankful Being in the universe—we need to learn to be thankful and give praises every day!

Another vital way to demonstrate gratitude toward the great God is through tithes and offerings. The prophet Malachi records God's words: "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me. But you say, Wherein have we robbed You? In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse: for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring you all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Mal. 3:8-10).

Although God provides absolutely everything that we have, He promises to provide more—through pouring out blessings from heaven—if we merely do our part by paying tithes and offerings! Through our heartfelt dedication in supporting His end-time Work, He promises us much more than we can possibly desire.

Say "thank you" often: Many people fear thanking others. They often fall into the mentality that, by thanking, they are somehow in debt or owe something to that person. But the truth is far from this!

Throughout history, great men have been known for specifically thanking others. It is not a sign of weakness—it is a sign of meekness.

Think of the things people do for you—from opening a door, to giving you a ride to the store, or providing a kind and reassuring word. We live in an age when common courtesy and politeness are all but extinct.

Say "thank you" and "please" often. You should never run out of people to thank. You would be surprised how happy those little words can make others feel!

Count your blessings, not your worries: Look around you. When was the last time you lost a loved one to starvation or rampant disease? When was the last time you gave up eating to make sure your children had food? When was the last time you had to sell your children because you did not have the money to survive or even provide for them? Chances are you have never experienced these things. Unfortunately, these are grim realities that many around the world face each day. Thank God each day for not having to endure all these terrible things!

It is common to fall into the routine of constant grumbling and complaining about problems and worries. When you find yourself complaining about finances, traffic, problems at work, family issues, car troubles, or whatever other difficulty or trial you may be experiencing, remember that everything God does and allows is for a reason. Although difficult, it is for a greater good—if you overcome them.

Consider the following analogy: Each ingredient used in making a cake is not always sweet or good to the taste. By themselves, their tastes can range from bitter, to salty, to sweet, to chalky. But the end result—the cake—is delicious and sweet!

King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, recorded, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" (Ecc. 3:1).

Although it is difficult to do, when you are experiencing trials, look for the good that God wants you to learn from them. For example, if you are having car problems and will need an expensive repair, perhaps you are mishandling, or wasting money on other things, and God wants you to re-examine your budget. Many of the difficulties that you encounter can help you realize whether or not you are living properly. You can learn from these experiences.

When people grumble, they are complaining about a situation that God has allowed—and sometimes even caused—them to be in!

Paul admonishes us to "do all things without murmurings and dis-

putings: that you may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom you shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:14-15).

Finally, consider Paul's example of dealing with trials and afflictions: "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me. Notwithstanding you have well done, that you did communicate with my affliction" (4:11-14). We must learn from experiences—both good and bad!

Things to Be Grateful For

The following lists just a few things for which we should show gratitude. Upon reading them, picture how your life would be without them:

Loving family and friends: After creating man, God declared, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him" (Gen. 2:18).

God created humans with the need for family. If you are married, appreciate your husband or wife. If you have children, appreciate all the fond memories that you are building *together*. Problems and arguments will occur from time to time, but at those moments, imagine your life without your loved ones. Realize how different it would be.

Employment: Without a job, how would you earn a living? How would you eat or feed your family? How would your rent or mortgage be paid? At times corporations lay off hundreds, even thousands of employees. Be thankful to God for the job He has provided for you. Although you may experience hardships with co-workers or employers, acknowledge that, without your job, you would not have a means to support your family or yourself.

Food, clothing, shelter: Although man has systematically pillaged, destroyed and raped the land that provides the materials needed for food, clothing and shelter, the United States and the other modern-day descendants of Israel have an *abundance* of these great blessings. Other nations, however, do not. Appreciate these things!

God understands that, as physical humans, we need physical substances for survival. Notice: “And why take you thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?... For your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things” (Matt. 6:28-32).

If God cares for and clothes even the flowers, how much more will He provide for those that obey Him? This is what His Word declares.

Are you grateful for this promise? Or do you take it for granted?

God’s truth: How much do you appreciate God’s Word—the Holy Bible? God has provided a way for us to know and understand His laws through this great Book of Instruction. Notice President Lincoln’s statement concerning it: “...I believe the Bible is the best gift God has given to man. All the good Saviour gave to the world was communicated through this Book...All things most desirable for man’s welfare, here and hereafter, are to be found portrayed in it” (*America’s God and Country – Encyclopedia of Quotations*).

The apostle Peter stated to Christ: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

Do you feel the same way?

God’s Sabbath and Holy Days: How much do you appreciate,

and thank God for, His Sabbath and Holy Days? By observing these, you are separate—different—from the world. They help you understand the great Plan of God, and how He has made it available to us.

Keeping God’s purpose for these days in mind will allow you to better see the “big picture,” and be thankful toward God for allowing you to be a part of it!

Christ’s sacrifice: Suppose that you just received news that you only

“Always remember that ingratitude is a deadly sin. God directly calls it evil! An ungrateful attitude is something most are unaware that they have, but everyone else sees. It is a deep character flaw.”

had 30 minutes left to live. How much more would you appreciate your life—and everything in it? You would appreciate *these things*, as the saying goes, “like there’s no tomorrow.”

But you may have not realized that you are currently on death row!

Unless you are baptized, and have been redeemed from under the death penalty—sin—you are condemned to *death* (Rom. 6:23).

Christ—who is perfect and sinless—shed His blood in our stead, dying for *our* sins. He became the Savior for all humanity.

Do you fully comprehend this knowledge? Do you appreciate this great sacrifice? Like an inmate being pardoned seconds before the switch on the electric chair is thrown, you must be grateful—*truly thankful*—for this redemption!

Without these things, your life would be empty, shallow, miserable—and completely *non-existent*!

The Choice Is Yours

Always remember that ingratitude is a *deadly* sin. God directly calls it *evil*! An ungrateful attitude is something most are unaware that they have, but everyone else sees. It is a deep character flaw. Although few will tell you about it, ingratitude sticks out like a sore thumb.

Often it goes unchanged and untreated because of people’s ignorance of it. It is something that, after many years of “perfecting,” needs to be *completely* removed!

Remember Israel’s example. They grumbled, complained and showed ingratitude because they were afraid of being unable to overcome the giants that might have kept them from the Promised Land. But in reality, the only “giant” that held them back from enjoying this great blessing from God was their *ingratitude*! An entire generation—except for two men—died without seeing this land.

Learn from this example. An ungrateful attitude exists in our human nature. But simple steps can be taken to overcome it. By honestly analyzing yourself, and applying biblical rules and principles of etiquette, you can ensure that you are not committing this most common—and deadly—sin.

Remember Paul’s three commands for true Christians in I Thessalonians 5:

- (1) “Rejoice evermore” (vs. 16).
- (2) “Pray without ceasing” (vs. 17).
- (3) “In *everything* give thanks” (vs. 18).

Do not let this sin keep you from God’s many promises. Do not let it steal your happiness. The choice is yours! □



6,000 Years Ago— or 460 Million?

Geologists record that trilobites appeared during the Cambrian era—more than 500 million years ago—and existed for hundreds of millions of years more before they went extinct.

What does the Bible say about such prehistoric creatures? Does their existence disprove—or does it actually prove—the validity of Scripture? Read the article “Is the Earth 6,000 Years Old?” for the answer!

rcg.org/realtruth

ISRAEL

Continued from page 7

they consider discriminatory or hostile toward their Palestinian brethren.

Arab leaders said the decision was aimed at toppling Mr. Netanyahu. All of this was good news for Mr. Gantz.

Soon after, however, three Arab lawmakers said they were withdrawing their recommendations for Mr. Gantz, trimming his support to below Mr. Netanyahu's. The former now has 54 seats of support and the latter 55.

Global Tipping Point

Let's restate the questions from the start of this article: Will Israel continue catering to ultra-Orthodox Jews or move toward more secular society? Should the nation expand Jewish settlements or go back to the table with the Palestinians for a two-state solution?

In a sense, voters answered these questions by giving Mr. Netanyahu 31 seats and Mr. Gantz 33. Nearly split down the middle.

For Arabs, will they ultimately relent and help form a majority coalition? This would mean more directly supporting Israel's national defense, which includes airstrikes on fellow Arabs. Yet being allied with the prime minister would mean more attention to Palestinian issues. Another seemingly impossible situation.

Given a few years, the Israeli political and cultural landscape would likely

tip one way or another on all of these issues. Today, it must settle for gridlock.

But stop. Israel is not the only nation in flux—deciding its identity for the future. There is a vicious battle between left and right in the United States. Brexit has Britain tearing itself in two. Leading up to Canada's October 12 national election, an Ipsos poll predicts 36 percent of the vote will go to Conservatives, 32 to Liberals.

While Israel is not located in the West, it has more in common with these nations than those in the Middle East. And they have all reached significant tipping points in regard to national identity.

Yet uncertain identity is nothing new for these peoples. And a great common factor between them all shows why.

Ask: What is the greatest similarity between Israel, the U.S., Britain and Canada? All have them have foundations based on the Bible, though the Jews stick with just the Old Testament. Think Judeo-Christian values.

Now, many in these nations are distancing themselves from religion altogether, yet scriptural principles are part of each nation's DNA. Even more, the Bible itself reveals an even greater commonality between these peoples—and strikes at the heart of their collective identity crisis.

Ancient Israel had 12 tribes, which makes the modern nation of Israel somewhat of a misnomer. The majority of those who live there are Jews, descended from the tribe of Judah. The children of Benjamin have also dwelt

with Judah over the millennia. That leaves 10 more tribes.

Cutting to the chase, the U.S., UK and Canada are all of Israelitish stock. They are the descendants of the tribes Manasseh and Ephraim. Copious evidence in God's Word and the record of history make this clear. Many other *Real Truth* articles demonstrate this. Also, our book *America and Britain in Prophecy* proves this without a doubt.

These nations DO NOT know their true identities. Much of today's confusion stems from this alone!

Yet God does not want modern Israel and its brother nations to be left in confusion. Here is how He describes the current generation in the book of Isaiah: "The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel does not know, My people does not consider" (1:3).

Realize what this is saying. Those in the U.S., Britain, et al, do not know their God!

Verses 4 and 5 continue: "Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters...*Why should you be stricken any more?* You will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint."

Think of the overall political, religious and societal landscape in all these nations. God's words in Isaiah cry out now: "WHY SHOULD YOU BE STRICKEN ANY MORE?"

Thankfully, these words will *soon* be delivered directly to these peoples. Visit rcg.org/aabibp to read *America and Britain in Prophecy* to learn how. □



■ From left to right, leader of the Israel Resilience party Benny Gantz, leader of the nationalist Yisrael Beiteinu party Avigdor Lieberman, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

PHOTO: SEBASTIAN SCHEINER/AP (LEFT, RIGHT); LIOR MIZRAHI/GETTY IMAGES (MIDDLE)

HONG KONG

Continued from page 11

a rise in “antagonistic behavior toward religious minorities.”

“In May 2015 and April 2017, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) reiterated its commitment to the ‘Sinicization’ of China’s religions, which is the CCP’s attempt at both secularizing and subjugating religious thought and practice to the control of the party.

“Sinicization runs concurrent with a decision made in October 2017 at the 19th Party Congress to write ‘Xi Jinping thought’ into the Chinese constitution (a move similar to those made previously by Mao and Deng Xiaoping).”

Chinese authorities are accused of placing over a million Uighur Muslims and Christians in re-education camps. In 2018, it demolished a megachurch that had 50,000 congregants.

There are also China’s increasing aggression toward Taiwan and territorial domination in the South China Sea, its One Belt and One Road initiative, and the pushback against the United States through a trade war—all exclusively recent examples of Beijing’s assertiveness under President Xi.

Think: *What does this mean for Hong Kong?*

“If the view from Hong Kong is one of impending doom, the view from mainland China has been one of irritation,” *Time* reported. “China is a nation of 1.4 billion people, and Hong Kong no longer a key portal. Its residents are seen as spoiled and disloyal, the problem as distant and isolated.”

“Yet the signs of Beijing’s growing impatience are hard to miss. Having initially blacked out news of the protests, China is now spreading misinformation freely.”

“The crisis has become a test of Xi’s willingness to show restraint and abide by global norms. What is unfolding in Hong Kong is the largest, most visible repudiation of Beijing since the pro-democracy rallies at Tiananmen Square in 1989, which ended in a state-san-



tioned massacre of unarmed activists. Few believe a repeat of that event is likely...”

So far, the jostling has been limited to the protesters themselves and their local government officials. But that does not preclude the possibility that, if agreements are not reached soon, the conflict in Hong Kong could turn even more violent.

New Cold War

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned global leaders of the looming risk of the world splitting in two, with the United States and China creating rival internets, currency, trade, financial rules “and their own zero sum geopolitical and military strategies.”

In his annual “state of the world address” to the General Assembly’s gathering of heads of state and government, Mr. Guterres said the risk “may not yet be large, but it is real.”

That risk was practically confirmed as China’s Communist Party marked 70 years in power with a military parade showcasing the country’s global ambitions.

Trucks carrying nuclear missiles designed to evade U.S. defenses, a supersonic attack drone and other products of a two-decade-old weapons development effort rolled through Beijing as soldiers marched past President Xi and other leaders on Tiananmen Square. Fighter jets flew over spectators who waved Chinese flags under a cloudy autumn sky.

■ Protesters attend a pro-democracy march in Hong Kong (Sept. 15, 2019).

PHOTO: ISAAC LAWRENCE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The display highlighted Beijing’s ambition for strategic influence to match its status as the second-largest global economy.

Those strategic goals include displacing the United States as the Pacific region’s dominant power and enforcing potentially volatile claims to Taiwan, the South China Sea and other disputed territories.

“No force can stop the progress of the Chinese people,” Mr. Xi said in a nationally televised speech.

Supported by China’s economic boom, military spending has risen 400 percent over the past decade as Beijing tries to match the United States, Russia and Europe in weapons technology.

The People’s Liberation Army, the world’s biggest military with 2 million men and women in uniform, also is working on fighter planes, the first Chinese-built aircraft carrier and a new generation of nuclear-powered submarines.

In a speech a day before the parade, Mr. Xi reminded Taiwan, which Beijing claims as its own territory, of the ruling party’s pledge to unite the self-ruled island with the mainland, by force if necessary.

Whether that happens to Taiwan or Hong Kong, and if the United States does get drawn in, the world may have to prepare for a new Cold War. □

AMERICAS

Mexico's New Drug War May Be Worse than Old One

Coatzacoalcos, Mexico (AP) — Mexico's drug war appears to be back—and it may be worse this time around than in the bloody years of the government's 2006-2012 offensive against drug cartels.

Back then, the worst of the violence was confined to a few cities. Now it is spread throughout the country. Once it was not uncommon for gangs to kill adults but leave children unharmed. Now, the killing of children alongside their parents has become all too frequent.

Perhaps the most disconcerting change: Bloody cartel violence outraged Mexicans and captured international attention for the drug war, which saw 27,000 homicides during its peak in 2011. Today, even though the number of Mexico's homicides soared to near 35,000 last year, the bloodshed seems to draw less attention and indignation.

It has all left many Mexicans wondering which way to turn.

That was evident in Coatzacoalcos, an oil industry city in the Gulf coast state of Veracruz where residents say gangs have been fighting over turf and extorting business owners with threats of violence. On August 27, suspected members of the Jalisco cartel showed up at the Caballo Blanco nightclub, blocked its exits and set a fire that killed 28 people trapped inside, apparently because the owner had either refused to make extortion payments or sold drugs from another gang.

Vanessa Galindo Blas lost her common-law husband, Erick Hernandez Enriquez, to the blaze. Both were natives of Coatzacoalcos, but had been discussing moving away.

"We had talked about leaving here for somewhere safer, so our kids could have a better future," Ms. Galindo Blas said as she stretched her hands out over Erick's bare metal coffin.

But they could never agree on a place to move, in part because vio-

lence is now a problem across much of Mexico, so no place is really safe.

From 2006 to 2012, much of the drug war killing occurred in a string of northern Mexico cities—Ciudad Juarez, Tijuana, Culiacan, Reynosa and Nuevo Laredo. "Now it is more dispersed, and that also makes it harder to control," said Alejandro Hope, a security analyst in Mexico.

But counting down all the similarities—deadly arson attacks, bodies left piled in heaps or hung from overpasses, massacres at parties, beheading videos posted on social media—the parallels between now and then are all too clear. "It's like *deja vu* all over again," said Mr. Hope.

Another disturbing trend is that young children are being gunned down by killers targeting adults. The Sinaloa and Juarez cartels once prided themselves on their targeted killings, which riddled intended targets with bullets while leaving family members untouched.

Now, children are being killed with chilling frequency. In June, a young boy was killed along with his father in Sonora state. In July, a 10-year-old was killed during a robbery in Puebla state. In August, gunmen burst into a home in Ciudad Juarez and fired 123 bullets that killed three girls, aged 14, 13 and 4, along with an adult male who apparently was the real target.

Two years ago, Coatzacoalcos made headlines across Mexico when a man, his wife and three young children were gunned down by a drug cartel. In contrast, the shooting of the three Ciudad Juarez girls drew less attention.

"It seems like we are becoming accustomed to this, to people killing children. I don't want to become accustomed to that," said Lenit Enriquez Orozco, an activist in Coatzacoalcos.

Her brother, Jonith Enriquez Orozco, has been missing since he was abducted on September 25, 2015. There has been no trace of him since, even though

her group, the Mothers' Collective of Searchers, has hunted for traces in clandestine burial grounds across Veracruz.

Mr. Hope notes Mexico has a lamentable record in investigating and prosecuting killings—over 90 percent of crimes go unpunished.

"The risk involved in killing a man, or killing his whole family, is the same," the analyst said. Under that logic, wiping out an entire family "has its advantages. It is more intimidating, it is easier to carry out, and it makes escaping easier."

The relentless violence has numbered many people.

In 2010, gunmen burst into a party of high school students in Ciudad Juarez's Villas de Salvarcar neighborhood, killing 15 in what appeared to have been a case of mistaken identity. The bloodbath provoked large, angry street protests and a visit by an apologetic President Felipe Calderon.

This year, in April, gunmen burst into a party in Minatitlan, near Coatzacoalcos, and killed 14 people. Days later, a few dozen people held a subdued peace march.

"It's politics as usual, nothing happened. This should generate generalized indignation" against cartels and government leaders alike, Mr. Hope said.

He attributes the muted response to new President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's high approval ratings, topping 70 percent in some polls nine months into his term. Such ratings "tend to intimidate expressions of indignation," Mr. Hope said.

Many Mexicans also are willing to give Mr. Lopez Obrador the benefit of the doubt as even the president acknowledges that violent crime is the most serious challenge he faces.

Mr. Lopez Obrador insists his go-slow policies of reducing youth unemployment will eventually solve the root causes of the problem better than declaring another frontal offensive against drug cartels. □

U.S. and Canada Lost More than 1 in 4 Birds in Past 50 Years

A Cornell University study published in the journal *Science* revealed that, since 1970, bird populations in the United States and Canada have declined by 29 percent, or almost 3 billion birds, signaling a widespread ecological crisis. The results show tremendous losses across diverse groups of birds and habitats—from iconic songsters such as meadowlarks to long-distance migrants such as swallows and backyard birds including sparrows.

“Multiple, independent lines of evidence show a massive reduction in the abundance of birds,” said Ken Rosenberg, the study’s lead author and a senior scientist at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and American Bird Conservancy. “We expected to see continuing declines of threatened species. But for the first time, the results also showed pervasive losses among common birds across all habitats, including backyard birds.”

The study notes that birds are indicators of environmental health, signaling that natural systems across the U.S. and Canada are now being so severely impacted by human activities that they no longer support the same robust wild-life populations.

The findings showed that of nearly 3 billion birds lost, 90 percent belong to 12 bird families, including sparrows, warblers, finches and swallows—common, widespread species that play influential roles in food webs and ecosystem functioning, from seed dispersal to pest control.

Among the steep declines noted:

- Grassland birds are especially hard hit, with a 53 percent reduction in population—more than 720 million birds—since 1970.

- Shorebirds, most of which frequent sensitive coastal habitats, were already at dangerously low numbers and have lost more than one-third of their population.



■ The Canada warbler is one of many bird species that has declined since 1970.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

- The volume of spring migration, measured by radar in the night skies, has dropped by 14 percent in just the past decade.

“These data are consistent with what we’re seeing elsewhere with other taxa showing massive declines, including insects and amphibians,” said coauthor Peter Marra, senior scientist emeritus and former head of the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center and now director of the Georgetown Environment Initiative at Georgetown University. “It’s imperative to address immediate and ongoing threats, both because the domino effects can lead to the decay of ecosystems that humans depend on for our own health and livelihoods—and because people all over the world cherish birds in their own right. Can you imagine a world without birdsong?”

Evidence for the declines emerged from detection of migratory birds in the air from 143 NEXRAD weather radar stations across the continent in a period spanning over 10 years, as well as from nearly 50 years of data collected through multiple monitoring efforts on the ground.

Although the study did not analyze the causes of declines, it noted that the steep drop in North American birds parallels the losses of birds elsewhere

in the world, suggesting multiple interacting causes that reduce breeding success and increase mortality. It noted that the largest factor driving these declines is likely the widespread loss and degradation of habitat, especially due to agricultural intensification and urbanization.

Other studies have documented mortality from predation by free-roaming domestic cats; collisions with glass, buildings, and other structures; and pervasive use of pesticides associated with widespread declines in insects, an essential food source for birds. More research is needed to pinpoint primary causes for declines in individual species.

“It’s a wake-up call that we’ve lost more than a quarter of our birds in the U.S. and Canada,” said coauthor Adam Smith from Environment and Climate Change Canada. “But the crisis reaches far beyond our individual borders. Many of the birds that breed in Canadian backyards migrate through or spend the winter in the U.S. and places farther south—from Mexico and the Caribbean to Central and South America. What our birds need now is an historic, hemispheric effort that unites people and organizations with one common goal: bringing our birds back.” □



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