

MAY-JUNE 2021

THE

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# REAL TRUTH™

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

## WATER CRISIS

What Happens  
When There's  
Nothing Left  
to Drink?



**Myanmar on the Edge  
Should We Intervene?**

Model the  
Perfect Father

**Social Media  
Censorship**

Making Sense of an Earth  
Filled with Violence

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**REAL TRUTH™**  
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VOL. XIX | NO. 3 | MAY-JUNE 2021

A R T I C L E S

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■ A child plays with a toy gun next to a banner put up by activists in protest against a military coup, in Yangon, Myanmar (April 11, 2021).

PHOTO: STR/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

## Myanmar on the Edge *Should We Intervene?*

As the Southeast Asian nation spirals into chaos, the international community ponders how or even whether to get involved.

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**FRONT COVER:** Pollution has significantly reduced the amount of water available to a world population desperately in need of it.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: SARAH O. VIDAL

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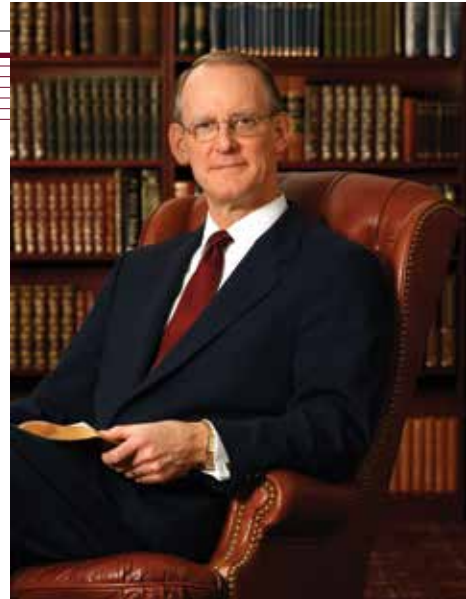
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## PERSONAL FROM

*David C. Fack*



# *Does Church Attendance Matter?*

**A**SK AMERICANS if they believe in God and most will say yes. But a growing number are departing from organized religion altogether.

For the first time since the late 1930s, fewer than half of Americans say they belong to a church, synagogue or mosque, according to a new report from Gallup.

Allow these facts to sink in: 47 percent of Americans now say they belong to a house of worship, down from 70 percent in the mid-1990s and 50 percent in 2019. The decline is part of a continued drop in membership over the past 20 years, according to Gallup data.

The polling giant has been measuring church membership since 1937 when nearly three-quarters of the population (73 percent) reported membership in a house of worship. For much of that time, membership remained at about 70 percent but began to decline after 1999. By the late 2000s, membership had dropped to about 62 percent and has continued to fall.

The decline in membership coincides with the rise of the so-called “Nones”—those who claim no religious affiliation. Gallup reports about one in five Americans (21 percent) is a None—making them as large a group as

evangelicals or Catholics. Other polls put the number at closer to 30 percent.

Younger Americans are increasingly disconnected from organized religion, according to the report from Gallup. But the number of older Americans who are members of a house of worship has also declined in recent years.

The gap between those who believe in a specific religion and those who participate in a specific congregation is likely to prove a challenge for houses of worship. And the decline in church membership is likely to continue.

This begs the question, is church attendance important to God? Is it enough for those who believe in God to simply worship Him alone—on his or her own terms?

To begin answering this crucial question, let’s examine the first Christian church service.

Acts 2:1 records the historic scene of the New Testament Church as it came into existence. Luke writes, “they were all with one accord in one place.” This annual Sabbath of Pentecost proves to be an event not to be missed or to be late for. Peter gives a powerful sermon. Miracles are recorded. The Holy Spirit is given. After repentance is explained, thousands request baptism. About 3,000 are “called” (vs. 39) and “gladly receive his [Peter’s] word” (vs. 41). Probably the largest single group

baptism in history occurs. The *New Testament Church* is born!

(You must prove for yourself that this organization Christ built nearly 2,000 years ago still exists today. Read my book *Where Is the True Church? – and Its Incredible History!*, found at [rcg.org/thogtc](http://rcg.org/thogtc), to discover where God’s Church exists today.)

What did this signify—what did it mean? Of course, the Church of God was established, but what else? Even in its infancy there were clues. Allow the Bible to answer.

### Our First Glimpse of the Church

What did this new Church look like? The first answers come immediately: “And they continued steadfastly in the *apostles’ doctrine and fellowship*” (Acts 2:42).

Why is this significant? The two earliest and most defining features of God’s Church are evident: (1) steadfastness in the apostles’ doctrine, and (2) FELLOWSHIP. Then, after verse 43 explains that the fear of God is apparent in “every soul,” verse 44 adds, “... all that believed were *together*.” Verse 46 also states that they continued to be of “one accord [agreement],” meeting together “daily” in various houses in “singleness of heart.”

The Church of God was unified, continuing a practice founded in ancient Israel.

God instructed Moses to write, “...the feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be HOLY CONVOCATIONS, even these are My feasts. Six days shall work be done: but the *seventh day* is the *Sabbath* of rest, an HOLY CONVOCATION; you shall do no work therein: it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings” (Lev. 23:2-3).

The Hebrew word for “holy convocation” is *miqra*, which means “something called out, an assembly, a reading.” This is a *commanded assembly*. God’s Church has always understood and taught this meaning. It is inseparable from the overall keeping of the Sabbath—and is as important as “resting” and “[doing] no work therein.”

### A Vital Warning

Hebrews 10 states, “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering...Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as you see the day approaching. For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins” (vs. 23, 25-26).

Let’s take a closer look. Several points are important in this passage: (1) The context is *holding fast*. (2) This must be done without wavering, or going back and forth. (3) We must *never stop assembling*. (4) *Some do* adopt this approach to Sabbath attendance. (5) We are to *exhort others* to attend. (6) It is “so much the more” important as we “see the *day* [of Christ’s Return] *approaching*.” And finally, (7) this is in the context of a direct *warning against willful sin*—leaving “no more sacrifice for sins.”

Christ’s sacrifice does not permit us to override true knowledge. Notice that in Hebrews 4:9, the apostle Paul reminded God’s people that “There remains therefore a rest [*Sabbatismos*: Margin—keeping of the Sabbath] to the people of God.”

If Sabbath assembly is optional, then what is the point of Hebrews 10:23-26? WHY do we need to assemble? What are the purposes for this command?

In John 21:15-17, Christ bluntly told Peter (three times) that, if Peter loved Him, he would “FEED My sheep.” It is evident that this admonition was not lost on Peter. Later in his ministry, Peter instructed elders to “FEED the flock of God which is among you” (I Pet. 5:2).

Paul admonished the assembled elders at Ephesus in the same way: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to FEED the Church of God, which He has purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).

God’s ministers can never take this lightly. Yet, how could God command His ministers to feed sheep who

were *not* commanded to attend and eat the spiritual food?

Here is why God has ordained a ministry: “For the *perfecting* of the saints, for the *work* of the ministry, for the *edifying* of the body of Christ: till we all come in the *unity of the faith*, and of the *knowledge* of the Son of God, unto a *perfect man*, unto the measure of the stature of the *fullness of Christ*: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the *truth in love*, may *grow up* into Him in all things” (Eph. 4:12-15; also read I Cor. 12:28-29).

Congregating on the Sabbath has been, and always will be, the test command (Ex. 31:13-17).

### Another False Idea Enters

Many would-be “leaders” promote the false idea that you must no longer regularly attend Sabbath services.

They preach a smooth counterfeit: “Everyone is on his own... We must do the best we can by attending wherever we can... You may even be safest by staying at home on the Sabbath.”

These leaders flatter people with what they *want* to hear—not what they *need* to hear. Instead of resolving members’ problems, they increase them!

Certain verses are usually cited and twisted to support a “do-it-yourself” approach to Church attendance and Christianity. Do not believe *any* of these ideas. They are all false and do not square with the many other plain Bible verses about assembling together.

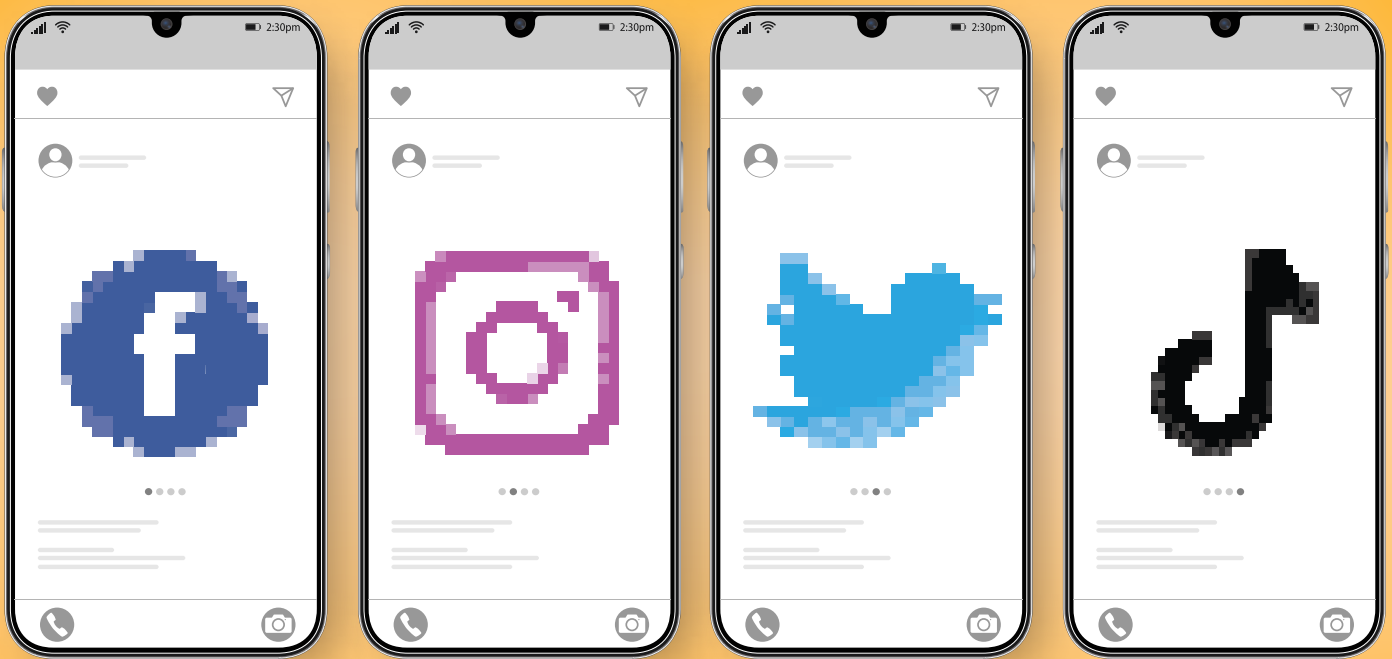
God’s purpose and intent for His faithful servants is that they remain together, believe the full truth, submit to His government and actively continue His Work (Matt. 24:14, 44-45; 28:19-20; Ezek. 33:7-9; Isa. 62:6).

### Why Assembling Builds Faith

There is another critical aspect of Sabbath assembly that is little under-

Please see **PERSONAL**, page 31





# Social Media CENSORSHIP

BY JUSTIN M. FRAZIER

**A** FIRE ONLY needs a small amount of heat and fuel to start, and even a tiny spark can light a fire. If the wind is strong enough and the humidity low enough, then a small, local fire can grow into a large, uncontained wildfire that burns until the fuel is gone or the wind dies down.

Similarly, societies need very few conditions to ignite unrest that can lead to upheaval—and today social media posts can fan the flames of discontent to a conflagration of outrage. The Arab Spring uprisings, George Floyd protests

and storming of the U.S. Capitol are just a few examples of people using social media to organize large, sometimes violent, demonstrations.

James 3:5-6 describes this situation perfectly: “Consider how small a spark sets a great forest ablaze. The tongue also is a fire” (Berean Study Bible translation). Nowhere is this truer than social media.

Sometimes these social media fires have real-world impacts involving physical injury and death. Other times, they are targeted on a single person online, leading to emotional and financial injury.

*The Atlantic* summarized it this way: “Throngs on social media vio-

late fundamental notions of fairness and due process: People may be targeted because of a misunderstanding or an out-of-context video. The punishment online mobs can mete out is often disproportionate. Being attacked and ridiculed by perhaps millions of people whom you have never met, and against whom you have no defenses, can be devastating and lead to real trauma.”

So, should you really be able to say anything you want online? Should companies like Facebook, Twitter or Google’s YouTube step in and censor inflammatory speech? Should national governments hold them accountable?

Where does freedom of expression fit in all of this?

## From Virtual to Violence

A Pew Research poll conducted August 31 to September 7, 2020, found that 86 percent of Americans get their news from a digital source. While Americans ages 30 and above most often use news websites or apps, those under 30 show a dramatic shift to preferring social media.

The rise of citizen journalists—those in the general public helping to distribute and analyze the news—has helped people understand the world around them. Social media is usually the first place that editorially unfiltered information is available when news events happen.

But this lack of oversight means that anything can be, and often is, posted online—including personal insults, threats of harm, and complete lies that can have far-reaching impacts.

Circulating posts on social media regarding the coronavirus is just one example of how fear can escalate to bloodshed from inaccurate information. Healthcare workers fighting COVID-19 in dozens of countries face violence from fearful communities who have attacked doctors and burned down clinics, aid agencies said.

Some of the most common beliefs are that the coronavirus is man-made, that it is not real, or that new testing facilities or health centers will bring it to communities. The International Committee of the Red Cross recorded 611 incidents targeting health workers, patients and facilities from February to July, including blocking ambulances from entering a town to screen for COVID-19 cases in Colombia.

People in South Africa who did not want responders in their neighborhood burned down a testing station and a clinic, according to medical charity Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF).

“It’s a byproduct of the new, novel, infectious disease—there’s a lot of fear,” said Sean Christie, a spokesman for MSF in South Africa. “Even for areas that have experienced very big HIV and T.B. epidemics, this was just different. The media response was

so overwhelming, and [there is] so much social media misinformation.”

Sometimes a single post can ignite conflict from existing tensions. When a Buddhist woman in Mandalay, Myanmar, reported to the police that two Muslim brothers raped her in 2014, a local Buddhist monk posted the story on Facebook. The brutal clashes between the two religious groups over the next several days left 19 people injured and two dead. Calm only returned once government authorities temporarily shut down local access to Facebook.

But the woman had lied. She later admitted that a rival shop owner trying to damage the Muslim brothers’ reputation had paid her to file the police report. She recanted, but that could not undo the damage already done.

The old saying, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me,” is simply untrue in the digital age.

## Content Moderation

With the potential for horrific outcomes, people are demanding that social media companies begin implementing some level of “content moderation,” a polite term for censorship.

Under pressure to clean up its site, Twitter started labeling or removing misleading tweets last year. The move intensified debates about the role major social media platforms play in public discourse and fueled allegations from lawmakers that tech companies are promoting specific political agendas.

In January, Twitter started asking U.S. users to help identify and fact-check posts in a new pilot program called Birdwatch. Participants can flag misleading tweets and annotate them with “notes” to give more information, which other users can rate as helpful.

The experiment, running with about 2,000 participants in a separate section of the site, faces many of the same challenges as Twitter itself—discerning facts from opinion and dealing with the potential for harassment or people trying to manipulate the system.

Public Birdwatch data shows notes ranging from balanced fact-checks

to partisan criticism. Many gave opinions—a “note” on a tweet from SpaceX and Tesla CEO Elon Musk said that he should “go to Mars. And stay there”—while others added comments to opinions.

People are “fact-checking things that professional fact-checkers never would,” said Alex Mahadevan, a reporter with the Poynter Institute’s MediaWise project, who analyzed Birdwatch’s data.

Crowd-sourced knowledge and community moderation are not new models; they underpin platforms like the social network Reddit. Facebook runs a “community review” program that pays users to identify suspect content for vetting by professional fact-checkers.

Katherine Maher, CEO of the Wikimedia Foundation that runs Wikipedia, said Twitter would need to develop standards and its enforcement for Birdwatch and decide how people could appeal annotation. Twitter needs to solve the issue, she said, of “who watches the watchers?”

## Who Should Moderate?

Facebook has tried to address this with multiple levels of content moderation. The three-tier system uses companies contracted to Facebook to provide content moderators the first level of oversight, capped with periodic review by Facebook employees.

But this process does not address the impact on the moderators themselves. Facebook and its contractors employ people to watch the worst that Facebook users have to offer, from hate speech to graphic pornography to violent attacks, including murder.

Prolonged exposure to these images has resulted in PTSD symptoms in former employees. Some employees admitted to using alcohol and marijuana while on the job to numb themselves to the stress.

Viewing this type of content also leads moderators to question reality and pushes them to the fringes. One Facebook contractor in Phoenix employs a flat Earther and a former employee now questions the truth of

the Holocaust, while another former employee has begun to believe that terrorists did not commit the 9/11 attacks.

Twitter's experiment with Birdwatch shows that people cannot be impartial enough to decide what should be allowed on the platform. Regular and prolonged exposure to raw human nature on Facebook leads to severe mental health issues. Perhaps the solution to content moderation is an impartial artificial intelligence, trained to spot problem content and automate removal before people ever see it. That experiment has already begun with the biggest social media companies.

YouTube, Facebook and Twitter warned in March that videos and other content might be erroneously removed for policy violations, as the coronavirus pandemic forced them to empty offices and rely on automated takedown software.

But digital rights activists warn those AI-enabled tools risk confusing human rights and historical documentation with inappropriate material like terrorist content—particularly in war-torn countries like Syria and Yemen.

"A.I. is notoriously context-blind," said Jeff Deutch, a researcher for Syrian Archive, a nonprofit that archives video from conflict zones in the Middle East. "It is often unable to gauge the historical, political, or linguistic settings of posts...human rights documentation and violent extremist proposals are too often indistinguishable," he said in a phone interview.

Erroneous takedowns threaten content like videos that could become formal evidence of rights violations by international bodies such as the International Criminal Court and the United Nations, said Dia Kayyali of digital rights group Witness.

Social media companies try to police themselves, but the issues with human or computer moderators limit their effectiveness. People's biases hamstring the human-powered attempts and subject people to the kind of emotional abuse that results in long-term health issues. Artificial intelligence is not capable of distin-

guishing between content that violates standards and eye-witness reporting. And yet, the need for censoring what gets posted remains.

### Legislative Proposals

Many people turn to the government for the solution. The 2014 violence in Myanmar was quashed after the local government limited access to Facebook, suggesting that such intervention can help defuse violence that online rhetoric incites.

**"Social media's ability to influence people towards fear, abuse, and violence is only a symptom of a more significant problem."**

Put simply, such intervention is problematic.

Despite this, United States politicians are coming under increasing pressure to do *something*. Social media companies in the U.S. are protected from prosecution for user-generated content by a Communication Decency Act of 1996 provision often referred to as "Section 230." This protection allowed companies like Facebook and Twitter to become internet giants by crowd-sourcing their content instead of developing it themselves. It also makes forcing those companies to do something with their platform to address these issues nearly impossible.

In March, U.S. lawmakers asked chief executives of Facebook, Google and Twitter whether their platforms bore some responsibility for the riot

and storming of the U.S. Capitol building.

"We fled as a mob desecrated the Capitol, the House floor, and our democratic process," said Democratic Representative Mike Doyle, who asked the CEOs about their responsibility. "That attack, and the movement that motivated it, started and was nourished on your platforms," he added.

In the joint hearing, held by two subcommittees of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, lawmakers also questioned the executives on the proliferation of COVID-19 misinformation and raised concerns about the impact of social media on children—including asking questions about Facebook's plan to create a version of Instagram for kids.

"Your business model itself has become the problem, and the time for self-regulation is over. It's time we legislate to hold you accountable," said Democratic Representative Frank Pallone, chair of the Energy and Commerce committee.

Some lawmakers are calling for Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act to be altered. There are several pieces of legislation from Democrats to reform Section 230 that are slowly making the rounds in Congress. Several Republican lawmakers have been pushing to remove the law entirely.

Countries that do not have similar protections for online businesses already censor social media. However, this leads to governmental suppression of free, independent voices. A study by the African Digital Rights Network (ADRN) focusing on 10 countries found governments used a plethora of measures over the last two decades to stifle people's ability to organize, voice opinions and participate in governance online.

"Our research shows online civic spaces are being closed through various repressive actions, including unwarranted arrests, unwarranted surveillance, and various forms of intimidation," said digital rights researcher Juliet Nanfuka from the Collaboration



on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa and member of the ADRN. “Self-censorship online is being fueled by financial restrictions and online content regulation. All of these actions inhibit freedom of expression and access to information, which are fundamental to a flourishing civic space.”

The new research covered South Africa, Cameroon, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Nigeria, Zambia, Sudan, Kenya, Ethiopia and Egypt. It documented 115 examples of technologies, tactics and techniques used to control or censor the internet.

The study found that governments’ most common methods were digital surveillance, disinformation, internet shutdowns, the introduction of laws reducing digital rights, and arrests for online speech.

Government shutdowns of the entire internet or mobile phone system have become increasingly common. The number of intentional internet shutdowns by African governments rose to 25 in 2020 from 21 in 2019, with Algeria, Ethiopia and Sudan the worst-affected countries, said the study.

Government-mandated or controlled online censorship leads to problems that can be worse than the lies and abuse spread through social media.

### **There Is a Solution**

Social media’s ability to influence people toward fear, abuse and violence is only a symptom of a more significant problem. The Proverbs state that “the curse causeless shall not come” (26:2). This principle lays out the starting point: *all* adverse effects *must* have a cause.

The inflammatory things people say online are a curse on all society, which means there must be a cause for such harmful rhetoric. The violence to people’s reputation, health and lives is only the last and most obvious link in a chain of cause and effect.

American philosopher Henry David Thoreau said, “There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root.” Most people see the impacts of a problem but do not

take the time to understand the source—the root cause.

Social media companies will never come up with a workable solution, even with government legislation, because they cannot address the real issue—what is in the *hearts* of the users who generate and consume social media content.

The *only* solution to this problem requires addressing *that*. Anything else is just putting a bandage on a bullet wound. It may mitigate the immediate effects, but it never addresses the core cause.

People have always said terrible things about others—yet social media allows them to speak louder and have more people hear them than ever before. God taught that people speak out “of the abundance of the heart” (Luke 6:45), meaning that people say the things they believe deep in their hearts. And “the heart is deceitful above all things, and *desperately wicked*” (Jer. 17:9). The words “desperately wicked” can also be translated “incurably sick.”

The awful things people post on social media come from a sick, wicked heart. Just think of the disturbing content moderators have had to face so we do not have to see it. And where the source of the problem is the individual, so too is the solution. The Bible explains that anyone who would “love life, and see good days” should “refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile” (I Pet. 3:10).

Instead of the government stepping in, individuals need to refrain their tongues from evil—they need to moderate themselves.

The apostle James wrote, “If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body” (Jms. 3:2). He then likened controlling powerful horses with a small bridle and mighty ships with only a small rudder to how “the tongue is a little member, and boasts great things” (vs. 3-5).

People must recognize the far-reaching effects their words can have—particularly on social media where readers around the world can wrongfully act upon what is said.

King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, understood that “death and life are in the power of the tongue” and realized that those who use their voice publicly will “eat the fruit thereof” (Prov. 18:21). The words people use on social media have consequences.

People may not see an immediate impact in their lives, but over time the result becomes obvious. The Berean Study Bible renders James 3:6 as, “The tongue also is a fire” that “sets the course of his life on fire.”

A person who routinely lies, insults, is divisive, harasses, stalks, trolls or is otherwise abusive and hateful burns down his own life and happiness. Such people become so challenging to be around that their friends and family eventually cut them out of their lives.

Social media makes the situation worse by giving such individuals a place to go. They can easily find others who say and believe the same things. As they go deeper and deeper into the online echo chamber of similar ideas, they lose touch with reality, as seen with several content moderators for Facebook.

And no wonder because “a lying tongue *hates* those that are afflicted by it” (Prov. 26:28). Social media is full of inaccuracies, shading the truth, and outright lies. Solomon explained thousands of years ago that every single one of these is *hate* against those being affected by it. Those who post wrongful content do not have the care to consider the harmful effects it could bring to others.

Social media spreads lies, misinformation, abuse and hate because people post from the malice in their hearts and minds that comes from being cut off from God. No amount of social censorship will ever be able to deal with that. Yet individuals can turn to God—and this involves coming to grips with their own human nature. Read *Did God Create Human Nature?* at [rcg.org/dgchn](http://rcg.org/dgchn) to understand how to curb what is in your own heart—as well as the words that come out of your mouth. □

IT WAS NOT a typical Easter weekend in Yangon, Myanmar's biggest city. As thousands of citizens pelted tanks and goose-stepping soldiers with bottles, rocks and Molotov cocktails—in protest of the military's February 1 coup of the democratic government—others took to inscribing messages on Easter eggs.

“Spring Revolution,” “We must win” and “Get out MAH”—referring to military junta leader Min Aung Hlaing—were seen on eggs in social media photographs.

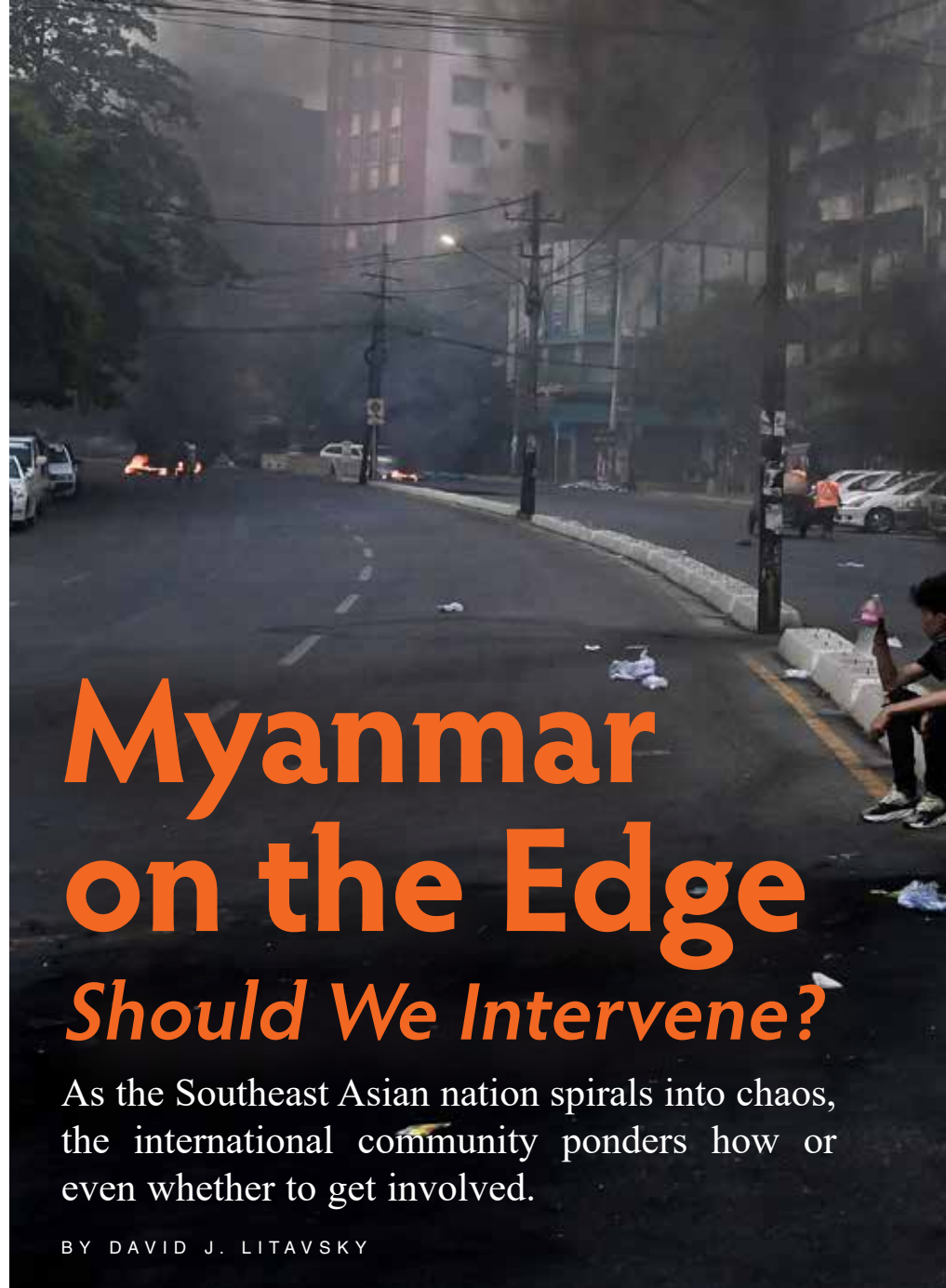
“Easter is all about the future and the people of Myanmar have a great future in a federal democracy,” Dr. Sasa, international envoy for the ousted civilian government, said in a statement.

Dr. Sasa, an honorific name for politician Salai Maung Taing San, is a member of a largely Christian ethnic minority in the predominantly Buddhist country with more than 130 religious and ethnic identities. Yet his statement represents the spirit driving Myanmar's people to rally after they watched their fragile democracy seemingly disappear overnight.

Ever since the coup, when the military ousted the National League for Democracy and its popular leader Aung San Suu Kyi after claiming elections in November that resulted in a landslide victory were rigged, security forces have cracked down on dissent with brutality. At least 800 protesters and bystanders have been killed in less than three months.

Myanmar is no stranger to protests. During five decades of strict military rule, international isolation and sanctions, citizens have frequently vented their discontent in uprisings. This culminated in Ms. Suu Kyi's rise to leadership in 2015 as generals loosened their grip.

But now that the people of Myanmar have had a taste of democratic freedoms over the past five years, it appears they are ready to fight for their very lives. “I don't care if they shoot,” one protester told *The New York Times*, “because



# Myanmar on the Edge *Should We Intervene?*

As the Southeast Asian nation spirals into chaos, the international community ponders how or even whether to get involved.

BY DAVID J. LITAVSKY

under the military, our lives will be dead anyway.”

As Myanmar's people fight for their livelihoods, the nation is shutting down. Public services including internet have stopped and businesses paralyzed as soldiers sift through rebel areas killing at random. Protesters retaliate by burning down shops connected to the military. The months-long chaos is putting the nation's very survival on the line, according to a chorus of pundits.

■ *Foreign Affairs*: “The country is not witnessing just another brutal setback to democracy but the creation

in slow motion of a failed state in the vital heart of Asia.”

■ *The Economist*: “The New Afghanistan: Myanmar could be Asia's next failed state”

■ The United Nations: The governing body's special envoy for Myanmar warned that the country faces the possibility of civil war “at an unprecedented scale” and “is on the verge of spiraling into a failed state.”

All three sources urged some kind of foreign intervention.

“What is required is not complacency but urgency,” *Foreign*



■ A protester stands near a burning makeshift barricade during a protest against a military coup, in Yangon, Myanmar (March 30, 2021).

STR/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

*Affairs* continued. “Major powers must set aside their instinctive geopolitical competition, and ASEAN [the Association of Southeast Asian Nations] should lead the international community to develop a coordinated policy that both appeals to and pressures the Tatmadaw [Myanmar’s national armed forces] to end the carnage and help put Myanmar back on the democratic track its people demand.”

And the subtitle of the *Economist* article: “Only its neighbours can help put the country on a better path.”

The UN special envoy implored the UN Security Council to consider “potentially significant action” to reverse the military coup to restore democracy.

But what this “significant action” entails is unclear—and both neighboring nations and democratic bastions including the United States are not

ready to square off with a military governing system that has been in power since the 1940s.

Plus, foreign intervention by democratic forces rarely goes as planned. Think of Afghanistan—where the U.S. plans to pull out its troops after 20 years of a stalemate war against the Taliban.

Myanmar will need a precise kind of intervention that assures both its survival and prosperity of its citizens.

### Drawing the Line

While most analysts say intervention is necessary to save Myanmar, there is no clear agreement on how that would be accomplished.

So far, regional players have pulled most of the weight. Southeast Asian countries have considered a proposal to send a humanitarian aid mission to Myanmar as a potential first step in a long-term plan to broker dialogue between the junta and its opponents.

ASEAN—worried by the bloodshed in a nation that faces economic collapse, mass civil disobedience and the resurgence of conflict between the military and ethnic groups—have stepped up diplomatic efforts since the coup. Myanmar is a member of the 10-member ASEAN, and the bloc’s mediation could be key to resolving the crisis.

Still, the UN has called for a coordinated global effort driven by the U.S., United Kingdom and European Union. What can these democratic powerhouses do?

Sanctions have been ineffective. Myanmar’s military has managed to flourish despite decades of sanctions from the West. The junta benefits from investments in the gem-trade, the nation produces 70 percent of the world’s jade, and uses this revenue stream to purchase military equipment from China and Russia.

“But while the West, most notably the US, has been keen to take the lead in imposing sanctions, Myanmar’s biggest trade partners in Asia have rejected that approach,” *BBC News* reported.

“Critics worry that the uneven pressure won’t be enough to force change.”

“The leverage is not really there,” Richard Horsey, a Myanmar expert with the International Crisis Group, told the news outlet.

There are also potential unintended consequences from sanctions, where citizens pay the price for economic penalties. For example, the U.S. State Department estimated that a 2003 ban on Burmese textile imports eliminated up to 60,000 jobs.

The UN’s options for Myanmar boil down to “two possibilities,” the Asia-news-centric *Diplomat* stated.

“The junta remains in power and consolidates its rule through a rigged election, or the junta is overthrown and the military is forced to return to its barracks for good. On the one hand, this simplifies the options. On the other, it complicates things for the international community, parts of which, not least the Southeast Asia bloc (ASEAN), were hoping that a compromise could be found around the negotiation table. Now, the international community must either accept the junta or work toward its downfall.”

Full-scale military intervention is historically fraught with failure. Harvard’s Belfer Center noted a paradox with Western intervention: “Policymakers weighing foreign-imposed regime change as a path to democracy in foreign states face a paradox: weak or poor states are the most vulnerable to imposed regime change, but are also the least likely to democratize following intervention.”

“The war in Iraq, for example, resulted in approximately 4,500 U.S. military fatalities and over 100,000 Iraqi civilian deaths (according to conservative estimates), at an estimated financial cost of over \$4.5 trillion, including the cost of funding military operations, interest payments on the debt incurred, and long-term medical care for injured veterans. Yet after a decade of war, these efforts have produced little democratic progress: according to measures such as Freedom House’s Freedom in the World survey, Iraq is barely more democratic than it was prior to the 2003 invasion.”

For the West, setting up a unified democracy in a nation composed of competing Muslim groups—Shiite and Sunni—proved an impossible task. Now imagine wading into Myanmar, a state with more than 130 ethnicities and religious groups from Christian to Muslim to Buddhist!

Yet failing to intervene and letting the southeast Asian people save themselves could prove even more devastating. The think tank Brookings Institution observed that the “unintended consequences” of the Arab Spring, for example, was that “peaceful protests in middle-income countries [led] to sectarian conflict and violent civil wars.”

Left alone, the situation in Myanmar would likely be the same.

### Coming Intervention

“A bloodbath is imminent” if the coup is not reversed in Myanmar, the UN special envoy to the nation warned.

Sadly, Myanmar is not the only hotbed of violence in the world. Sectarian violence is exploding. Think of loyalists versus separatists in Northern Ireland—mounting tensions between Ukraine and Russia—even racial violence within the U.S.

As we all watch these tragic events unfold, we can feel like the prophet Habakkuk in the Old Testament: “O LORD, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear! Even cry out unto You of violence, and You will not save!” (1:2).

Habakkuk was describing what he saw in a vision—harrowing bloodbaths that could describe Myanmar today. “For spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention” (vs. 3).

Some of these conditions God displayed to the prophet are a result of ethnic conflict also prophesied to occur. Jesus Christ spoke of a time when “*nation shall rise against nation*” (Matt 24:7). The term “*nation*” in this passage is from the Greek word “*ethnos*,” which refers to ethnic groups.

In other words, there would come a time when differing ethnicities would clash like never before. This is



happening today, and Myanmar is just one tragic example.

Yet God answered Habakkuk’s question. When we see the terrible conditions of today—brought on by thousands of years of mankind attempting to rule itself—it means something else is close. God replied: “Behold you...and regard, and wonder marvelously: for I WILL WORK A WORK IN YOUR DAYS, which you will not believe, though it be told you” (1:5).

This marvelous work—by God’s own hands—will be the greatest intervention in world affairs of all time. It seems unbelievable, and many scoff at it, but it is *really* going to happen.

When Jesus Christ came to Earth 2,000 years ago, He urged everyone to “BELIEVE the *gospel*” (Mark 1:15). Gospel simply means “good news.”

What is that good news? Read Christ’s full statement to the public:



■ Left, smoke rises from tires burning at barricades erected by protesters after military junta forces attempted to breach them in Yangon, Myanmar (March 16, 2021). Right, a person holds a poster featuring democratic party leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who was ousted in a military coup, in Yangon (March 2, 2021). Bottom, protesters react as tear gas is fired by police during a demonstration against the military coup in Yangon (March 2, 2021).

STR/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



“The time is fulfilled, and the *kingdom of God* is at hand: repent you, and believe the gospel.”

The Kingdom of God is the good news—the unbelievably good news sorely needed in a world succumbing to ethnic division and more bloodbaths. God’s ultimate work is to set up His *Kingdom*, a world-ruling SUPER-GOVERNMENT that will end strife, foster unity, and heal all peoples.

This will be the *intervention* Myanmar desperately needs, as does the entire world.

You have been told the incredible promise of what is coming to end mankind’s insoluble problems. But, “though it be told you,” will you “believe”?

Our booklet *What Is the Kingdom of God?* explains in detail God’s soon-coming awesome, wonderful work. Read it at [rcg.org/witkog](http://rcg.org/witkog). □



# Model the Perfect Father

*The best dads copy the best Father there is.*

BY EDWARD L. WINKFIELD



**I**MAGINE THE Earth being annihilated. This climactic scene plays out in sci-fi movies or in scenarios of a wayward asteroid crashing into Earth's surface. But it is also part of an astounding Bible prophecy foretold to occur unless God intervenes in men's affairs.

The end of the Old Testament explains that unless the Creator successfully turns "the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers" He would have no choice but to "come and *smite the earth with a curse*" (Mal. 4:5-6). The word "curse" is tied to a Hebrew word meaning *doom* and *extermination*.

These ominous words make clear that the planet's survival hinges on one thing: FATHERHOOD.

Before dismissing this as allegorical Hebrew literature, consider the *current* impact of the lack of good fathers. As many as 7 out of every 10 youth in state-correctional facilities come from fatherless homes, according to the United States Department of Justice. In addition, a staggering 85 percent of all children who exhibit some type of behavioral disorder come from a fatherless home, as do 90 percent of children who run away from home or become homeless.

Girls who live in a fatherless home are two times more likely to experience obesity and are four times more likely to become mothers before age 20, *National Public Radio* reported. Fatherless children are more likely to smoke and abuse alcohol and drugs in childhood *and* adulthood.

Any society that continues along this path will not have to wait for God to exterminate it—it will destroy itself. If fathers only understood the crucial significance of their role!

A stable family unit is the foundation of a stable world. As family structure disintegrates, conditions in society decline.

Why does God place such importance in fathers and families? He originated the family structure. The husband was made to be the leader in his home with his wife offering crucial support (Gen. 2:18). Genesis 2:24 describes the regular family building process: a man leaving his father and mother to join a wife and start his own family.

Notice all the specific familial roles: father, mother, wife—and a husband, children and grandparents by extension—were all explained in this one verse. The process repeats as children from the new family have sons and daughters of their own (Gen. 1:28).

Sadly, many men have abdicated this God-given leadership duty. Whether due to ignorance or bad priorities, the result is the same. The traditional family unit is broken, which is breaking future generations. In many cases, this is the result of men not taking the lead. Because nature abhors a vacuum, women and children are taking the reins (Isa. 3:12).

Yet fathers should not resign themselves to failure. Realize that God is *also* a Father. Jesus Christ said, "Be you therefore perfect, even as your *Father* which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

The reason God gives Himself the same label as the head of a physical family is spectacular beyond imagination. It also means men looking to be better dads and husbands do not have to guess what it takes—we can look to the Father in heaven for guidance.

### Who Is the Father?

God created human beings in His image, and in His likeness (Gen. 1:26-27). He made people to *look* and *act* like Him. This connection applies even more to human fathers who are to *look* and *act* like the Father in leading their families.

Jesus Christ is the *Son* of God. The angel told Christ's mother Mary she would "conceive" in her "womb, and bring forth a son," and He would be called, "Son of the Highest" (Luke 1:31-32). Initially confused about how

she would have a child without her husband, Mary learned that she would give birth to the "Son of God" through the power of the Holy Spirit (vs. 35).

Most know of Christ as God's Son—but few consider God's role as His Father.

Jesus Christ talked about His Father throughout His earthly ministry. During His introductory Sermon on the Mount (recorded in Matthew chapters 5-7), Christ referred to the Father 17 times. Aside from one time Jesus said "*My* Father," every reference was "your Father" or "our Father." God wants to be a father to us all.

Realizing that the God of the entire Bible—both Old and New Testaments—is a Father opens worlds of possibilities for His human counterparts. Dads have an entire book of perfect and powerful examples of what a father is and what a father does.

God "fathered" Creation. He, along with Christ, made all things (Eph. 3:9; John 1:1-3), including the first human family which went on to fill the Earth with children. Similarly, fathers create and build their own families.

Our Creator has many characteristics and traits that make Him an effective Father. Consider the nine "fruits" or expressions of God's spiritual personality: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (Gal. 5:22). A man who exhibits these characteristics—*loves* his wife and children, creates an atmosphere of *joy* and *peace* in his home, is willing to *suffer long* and be *gentle* when his children make mistakes, is *kind* and has *faith* in his family's ability to overcome anything under his guidance, and who is himself *humble* and has *self-control*—is a father anyone would want!

Here is an extended list of God's attributes for fathers to emulate. (Take the time to look up each verse as a Bible study.) The Father:

■ Is a leader (Psa. 5:8; Isa. 42:16; Eph. 5:1)

■ Is a teacher (John 6:45; Isa. 54:13; Psa. 71:17)

■ Is a provider (Phil. 4:19; Matt. 6:31-33; 7:7, 11)

■ Is our example (I Pet. 1:16; Psa. 85:13; I John 2:5-6)

■ Is loving, kind and generous (I John 4:11; John 3:16; Rom. 2:4)

■ Is consistent (Mal. 3:6; Jms. 1:17)

■ Is merciful and forgiving (Eph. 1:7; I John 1:9; Luke 6:35-36; Psa. 130:3-4)

■ Disciplines when necessary (Heb. 12:6; Deut. 8:5)

■ Is a protector (Psa. 23:1; Isa. 41:10; Psa. 145:14)

■ Provides guidance (Prov. 3:6; Eph. 5:1)

You do not have to simply imagine a human family headed by man with these qualities—God the Father openly sets Himself as the standard (Lev. 20:7; Matt. 5:48). He is the original head of the human family and uses human fathers to develop and exhibit the qualities needed to lead their families the way He would.

This may all sound unattainable for earthly fathers, but it is not. Remember, God used the same word to describe Himself and men leading their families. Fathers, let this *inspire* you.

### **Be Like the Father!**

A natural question if you feel you have fallen short in any area of fatherhood is, “Where do I begin?” The short answer to that question is, “Begin where you are.” Your children are never too young or too old for you to change. Just as important, neither are you. You will always be their father—no matter how old they get!

Becoming a better dad can feel daunting at first, but a few basic biblical principles can help you start on the right track toward becoming like God the Father.

You have heard it said that the man is the “head” of his home and that his wife must “submit” to him. Such language is typically met with an eye-roll or scoff. This is mostly because it is taken out of the context God intended. Read *all* of Ephesians 5:22-29.

This passage describes marriage and the parental relationship like a human body. All living bodies have a

head attached to it. The human head cannot function without a body to supply it with life-giving blood and to help it move around. At the same time, the human body with its chest, torso, arms, legs, hands and feet must be directed by a brain that sits inside its head.

The label “head of the house” is not code for a man’s wife and children being his slaves, merely existing to do his every bidding. God told the

**“God told the husband and father to see his wife and family as an extension of himself. The body is no better than the head and the head is no better than the body!”**

husband and father to see his wife and family as an extension of himself. The body is no better than the head and the head is no better than the body!

Do not miss the point. The man and the woman *need* each other (I Cor. 11:11).

It is crucial to keep in mind that the man is not the one ultimately in charge. God says, “The head of every man is Christ. And the head of a woman is the man. And the head of Christ is God” (I Cor. 11:3). How often have you heard this verse? Probably not nearly as much as the ones twisted to justify men being domineering to their wives and mistreating them and their children.

God the Father leads Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ leads human fathers. Human fathers lead their wives and wives lead the children. It is all set up to work seamlessly so long as everyone knows and fulfills their roles.

### **Treat with Love and Respect**

Husbands are to love their wives *the same* as Christ loved the Church and gave His life for it. Jesus Christ gave His life for all mankind to have life (John 3:16).

Giving your life for someone else is the greatest form of love anyone can show. However, God is not advocating men to hang on a cross or a stake for their wives and children, though most might say they would give their lives to save the life of a family member.

Instead, a husband and father must devote himself to his wife and children by being a *living* sacrifice. This means he will brush aside other pursuits that crowd out his responsibility as the leader of his home.

John 15:13 says: “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” If this goes for friends, how much more does it go for family?

A good father treats his wife with love and respect at all times. God does not look kindly on men who mistreat their wives and children. Husbands are told to “love your wives, and be *gentle* to them” (Col. 3:19).

This wise treatment also applies to a husband dealing with his children.

Children are commanded to obey their parents (Eph. 6:1-2). But this instruction is attached to a special command for fathers, “And, you fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (vs. 4).

Fathers must be *balanced* in training and disciplining their children. Talk *with* your children, not down to them.

Too often, fathers deal harshly with their children. This usually results from unreasonable expectations of their little ones, forgetting they do not have the same life experience. Fathers who focus only on admonition appear to their kids as harsh and unapproachable. Consequently, this crushes children’s spirits, which usually impacts them for the rest of their lives (Col. 3:21).



Equally problematic is the man who, wanting to avoid being a “bad guy” or supposedly wanting to be “nurturing,” leaves all discipline to his wife. However, this is not fair to wives, who become pitted against their husbands in the eyes of the children.

Children become discouraged and bitter if fathers *only* punish them, but will run roughshod if fathers never do. Dads must therefore nurture *and* admonish their kids, showing compassion or firmness when the situation calls for it. Remember, God the Father is merciful and compassionate with us, yet He disciplines when necessary.

### Role as a Provider

A man who abandons his family is worthless to them and to himself (I Tim. 5:8). If he refuses to support his wife and children, whether financially or emotionally, he really has a problem with himself (Eph. 5:28-29).

Men are to cherish their families and thus themselves. This must be done with his words *and* actions.

The man is a direct representation of God over his home and must see his role that way. Men, everything happens on your watch. This is the price of being “in charge.”

It takes a lot to be the godly head of the home. The proper way to start: Ask God for wisdom and guidance (Jms. 1:5), then use this wisdom to run the family.

Reference the Bible verses throughout this article to better seek God’s wisdom on fatherhood. Apply them the next time your wife comes to you with a problem to solve or your son or daughter is struggling with a situation.

Conquer your lusts and human appetites (Col. 3:8-9; Rom. 12:21). Prioritize spending more time with your wife and children instead of hanging out with co-workers or friends. Read a book with them or designate certain times to share a meal together. Your presence and engagement means more than empty words.

Be willing to take correction from your wife or even children (Heb. 12:6-7). You may be the leader of the home, but you nor any father is perfect.

Openly discuss goals and plans with your family using God’s Word as a guide (Prov. 29:18; Psa. 119:105). Paint a vision of success and do your part to help them get there.

Fathers, *get on your knees* and ask for God’s help in loving your wife and children, and to root out selfishness.

By continuing to practice these qualities, you will inspire your wife and children. They will love you all the more as a result.

### The Future of Fathers

While reading, you may have wondered: Why did God design families in the first place? Why does He want fathers to be like Him by leading their families?

Let’s revisit why God calls Himself a Father. The reason is beyond imagination.

The Father gave human beings the family relationship to prepare all mankind to be a part of *His* Family. This is not in some distant or ethereal way. No, it is to be an *actual* child of God—to have the same kind of body, mind and power He has!

Yes, what you just read is true and your possible future.

God’s Family presently has two members, the Father and Jesus Christ. Both are “God” (John 1:1-3). Often throughout the Bible, the term God is used as a *family* name, rather than an individual name.

Note what God said during the creation of man: “Let *Us* make man in *Our* image, after *Our* likeness...” (Gen. 1:26). A couple chapters later, “the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of *Us*” (Gen. 3:22).

The reason for this is the word translated “God” in both these passages is translated from the Hebrew word

*Elohim*, which designates a collection of individuals such as a team, church or group. A family is a group made up of more than one person.

At that time, it was the Father and the One who would be born into the world as Jesus Christ who were the only two members of this God-plane relationship. Together, they formed human beings in their likeness—just physical. They also created the human family modeled after the divine Family. The roles of human father/husband, mother/wife, and children each exist to help human beings practice becoming a member of God’s Family for all eternity. The Bible referred to men long ago as “gods.” Christ reminded the religious leaders of His day of this fact when they attacked Him for calling Himself the Son of God (Psa. 82:6; John 10:34-36).

This is awesome understanding few grasp. Mankind’s future is not to roll around heaven playing harps all day and night. It is to be *divine* members of God’s Family—true children of God the Father! And, since the Father made the universe and all things in it, being a child of God entails being a “heir of all things” (Heb. 1:2).

You should now see why fatherhood, which is simply one element of God’s awesome plan, is so vital to understand. Without fathers fulfilling their proper family roles, the entire planet is in peril.

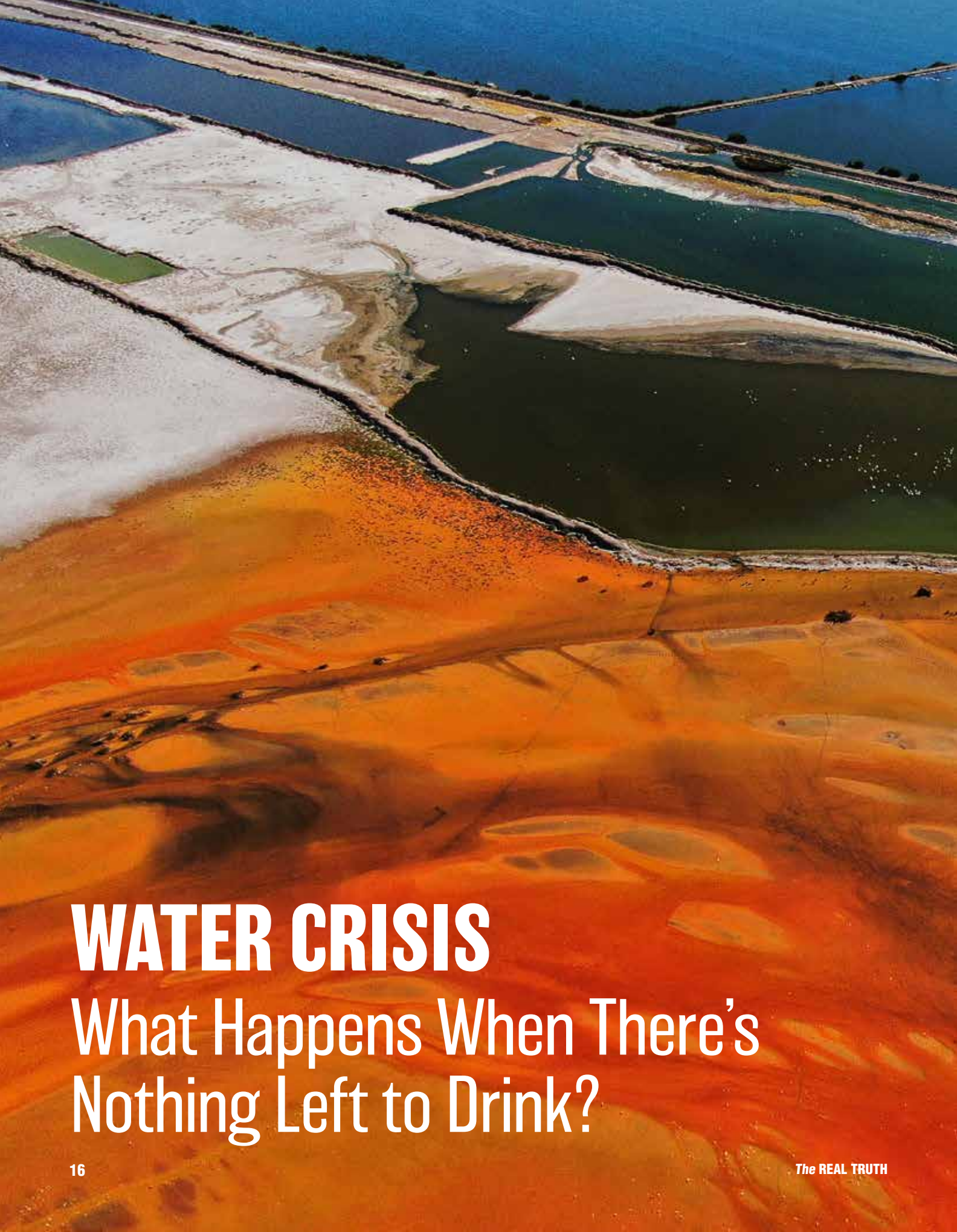
It all starts with you. Each individual father must strive to be the best

he can be by knowing his role and taking it as seriously as God does. Wives and children should also understand the father’s role as well as their own.

For more detail on mankind’s awesome potential, read David C. Pack’s book *The Awesome Potential of Man*, available for free at [reg.org/tapom](http://reg.org/tapom). You will be awestruck by all the Bible has to say about mankind’s future in God’s Family. □

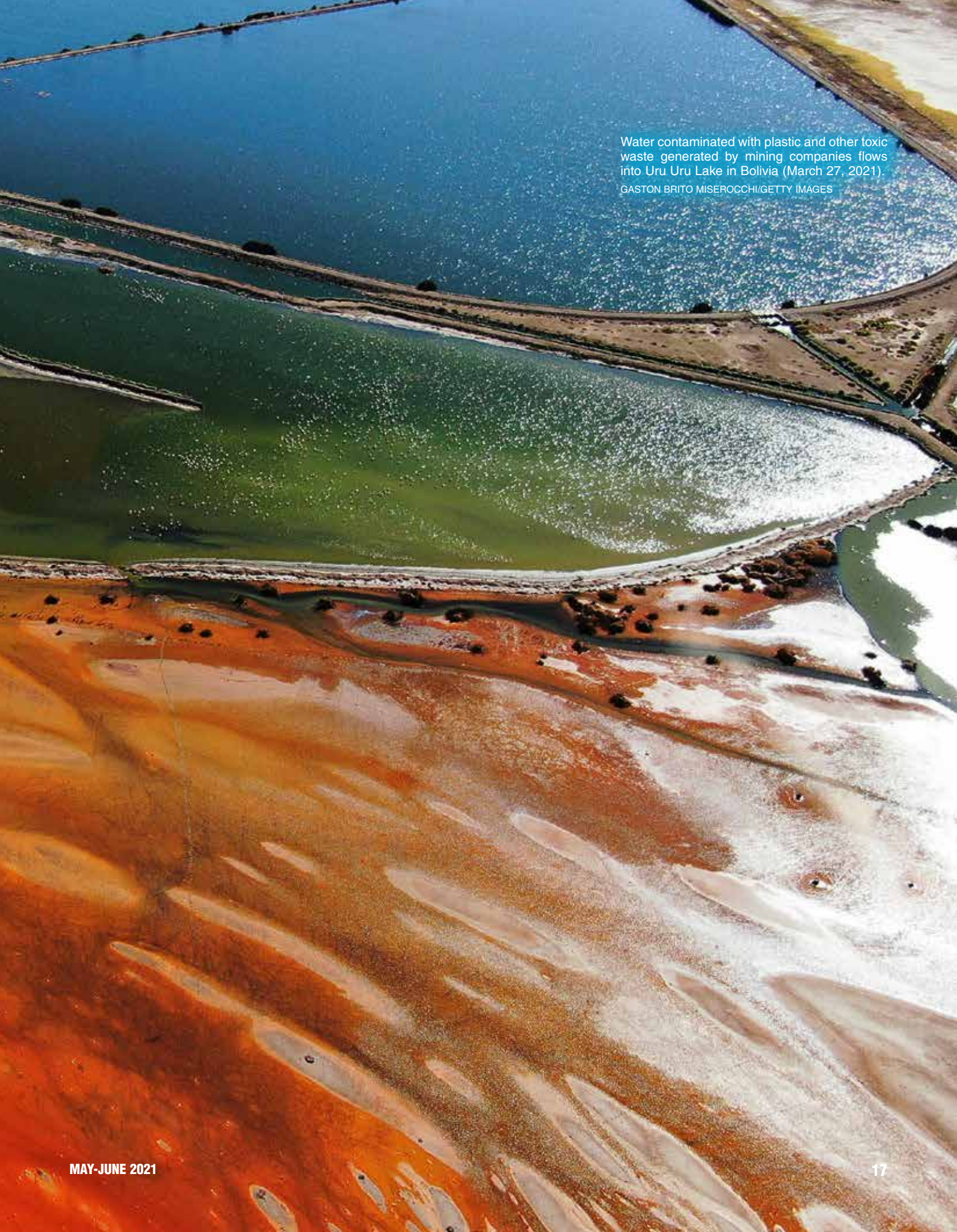


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# **WATER CRISIS**

**What Happens When There's  
Nothing Left to Drink?**



Water contaminated with plastic and other toxic waste generated by mining companies flows into Uru Uru Lake in Bolivia (March 27, 2021).  
GASTON BRITO MISEROCCHI/GETTY IMAGES

## Photographs from around the world paint the same picture: We are in the midst of a global water crisis.

**T**HE UNITED Nation's Sustainable Development Goals call for water and sanitation for all by 2030—yet water scarcity is increasing and more than half the world's population will be living in water-stressed regions by 2050.

Even though water covers 71 percent of the Earth, just 1.2 percent is available for human use. And it does not take much to taint this liquid resource. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation said: "A gallon of paint or a quart of motor oil can seep into the earth and pollute 250,000 gallons of drinking water. A spilled gallon of gasoline can pollute 750,000 gallons of water."

The sad truth in all of this is that there should be plenty to go around. The UN estimated that if Earth's available freshwater was evenly distributed among this planet's approximately 7 billion inhabitants, each person could be allotted 7.5 million gallons during his lifetime.

With that amount, each individual could consume 152 gallons per day for 136 years. Because water is a renewable resource, as long as it remains pure, it cycles through the environment perpetually without loss.

Despite this, nearly every nation struggles with H2O issues. The photographs in this article help tell that story.

### It's Complicated

Dr. Julia Brown, a human geographer specializing in environment and development at the University of Portsmouth, said many countries with water-intensive agriculture and industry lacked adequate safe drinking water.

"When we buy products and buy food and clothing we don't always appreciate that we're actually importing somebody else's water and often those countries where we're importing water from, like in avocados or our denim jeans, they're actually very water-scarce countries," she told *Reuters*.

In other words, the water needed to grow crops or for manufactured goods to be exported is used up for those processes rather than sustaining the people in that nation.

Dr. Brown added that access in some of the poorest parts of the world is often overlooked.

She said that non-profit organizations hand communities "a shiny new hand pump...then they walk away and it's handed over to communities to raise the funds to maintain these systems, to make sure that they're repaired. And if they're not?"

"The research indicates at any one time one third of hand pumps across Sub-Saharan Africa are broken."

So even when charity and government organizations step in to help communities, supporting those areas in the long run is an incredible challenge.

### Ultimate Fix

Our water crisis needs a global fix. The UN knows this. On World Water Day in late March, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a message that the "value of water is profound and complex." He noted that, to him, "water means protection."

"A well-managed water cycle—encompassing drinking water, sanitation, hygiene, wastewater, transboundary governance, the environment and more—means a defense against ill-health and indignity and a response to challenges from a changing climate and increasing global demand."

Mr. Guterres said that the world is not on track to ensure access to water and sanitation by 2030—and that UN nations would have to *quadruple* efforts to meet these goals.

The water crisis is not unlike many of the problems the UN hopes to tackle. The world can see a problem—and know what needs to be done to fix it—yet never quite achieve its goals.

Still, the nations of the world hope they can pull victory from the jaws of defeat. This optimism is embodied by a statue outside the UN headquarters in New York. It depicts a man forging a sword into a plowshare. The idea is to promote and engender peace so that the world can focus its efforts on worthwhile pursuits.

The concept of beating swords into plowshares is a Bible reference to the books of Isaiah and Micah. The UN knows that, without world peace, we cannot truly tackle our worst problems.

Faced with the seemingly insurmountable odds of the multifaceted, worsening global water crisis, the world can hope for another Bible passage to come to pass.

The scripture is found in Zechariah: "His [God's] feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley...and it shall be in that day, that living [Hebrew: alive, fresh] waters shall go out from Jerusalem..." (14:4, 8).

Ezekiel adds to this picture by stating that the waters of the Earth "shall be healed."

Chapter 47 states: "And it shall come to pass, that everything that lives, which moves, wheresoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come there: for they shall be healed; and everything shall live where the river comes" (vs. 9).

Religion aside, EVERYONE wishes these scriptures would come to pass. The Bible says a lot more about clean water, world peace—and how it will come soon.

Read *Tomorrow's Wonderful World – An Inside View!* ([rcg.org/tww](http://rcg.org/tww)) to learn more. □



A man scoops oil leaked from a vessel that ran aground near Blue Bay Marine Park off the coast of southeast Mauritius (Aug. 8, 2020).  
JEAN AURELIO PRUDENCE/L'EXPRESS MAURICE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



A man stands in foamy discharge caused by pollutants mixing with surf water in Chennai, India (Dec. 1, 2019).  
ARUN SANKAR/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



A swan sits in a nest made of waste materials in a lake near Queen Louise's Bridge in Copenhagen, Denmark (April 17, 2018).  
MADS CLAUS RASMUSSEN/RITZAU SCANPIX/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



Children swim in a dirty river in Agats, Indonesia's easternmost Papua province (Jan. 26, 2018).  
BAY ISMOYO/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



A garbage-filled creek in Manila, Philippines (May 12, 2018).  
NOEL CELIS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

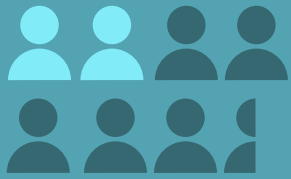


Fishermen collect dead fish in Gandhi Lake, India (Oct. 6, 2017).  
NOAH SEELAM/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

# Water Crisis

**4** billion people experience severe water shortages for at least one month a year

**2** billion of the global population lack access to improved sanitation



**785**

million people lack access to safe water

## Diseases

The third leading cause of child death is diarrhea

**200** million hours women and girls spend every day collecting water

**1** million people die each year from water, sanitation and hygiene-related diseases

**\$18.5 B**

Universal access to basic water and sanitation would result in \$18.5 billion in economic benefits each year from avoided deaths alone.



**1/3** schools lack access to basic water and sanitation

**2 Min**

Every 2 minutes, a child dies from a water-related disease

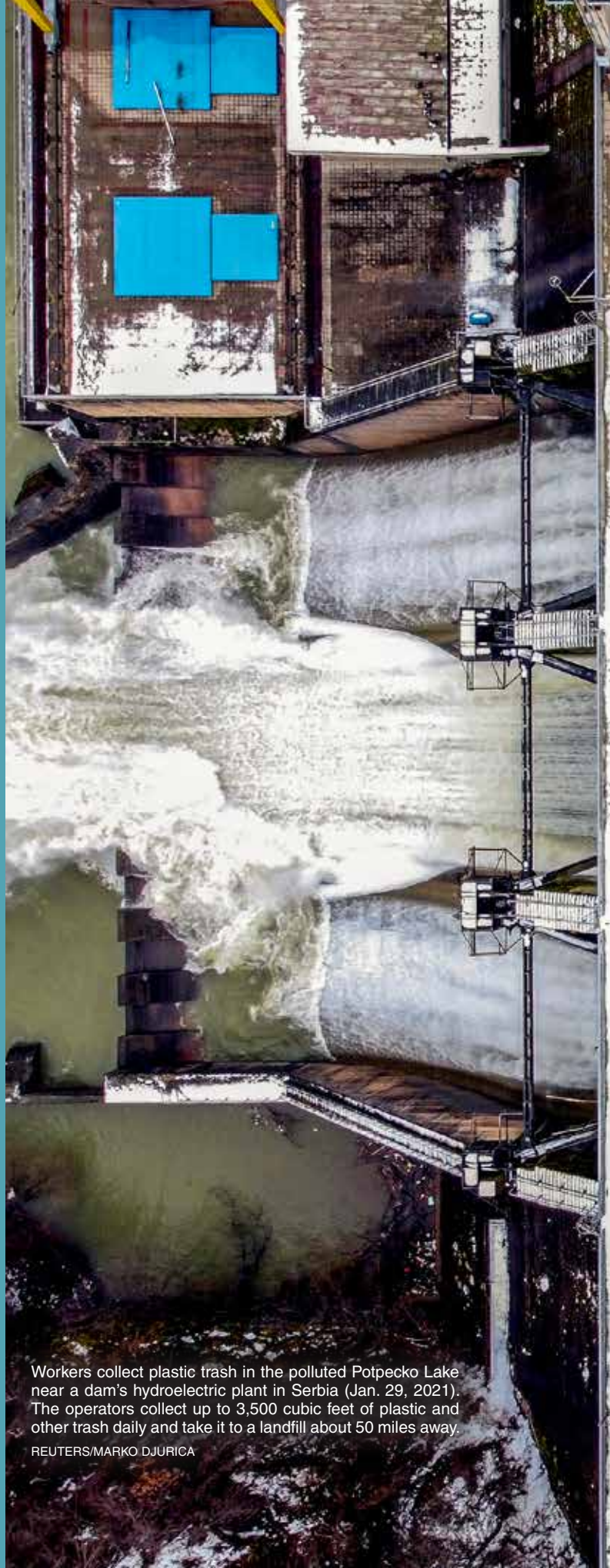
**\$260 B**

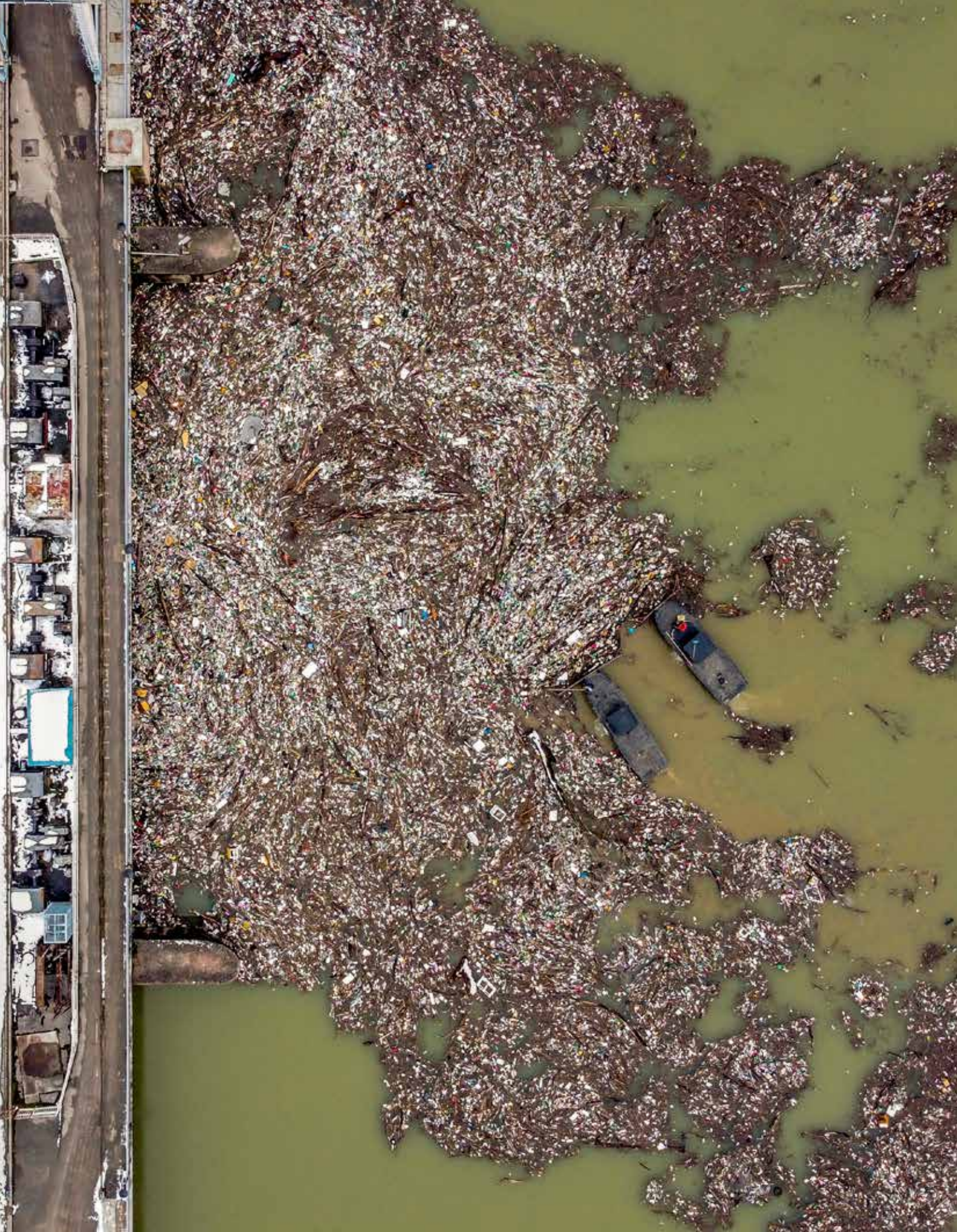
Billions are lost globally each year due to lack of basic water and sanitation

Source: Water.org  
Graphic: Sarah O. Vidal

Workers collect plastic trash in the polluted Potpecko Lake near a dam's hydroelectric plant in Serbia (Jan. 29, 2021). The operators collect up to 3,500 cubic feet of plastic and other trash daily and take it to a landfill about 50 miles away.

REUTERS/MARKO DJURICA







Top, a child wading through trash-filled waters of a river beside his home in Manila, Philippines (Sept. 29, 2019). Bottom, waste floats on the stream of the Citarum River in Bandung, Indonesia (March 15, 2021). The government has pledged to clean the river, considered among the world's most polluted, and make its water drinkable by 2025, but household and industrial waste have continued to flow in its stream.

MARIA TAN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES (TOP); REUTERS/WILLY KURNIAWAN (BOTTOM)

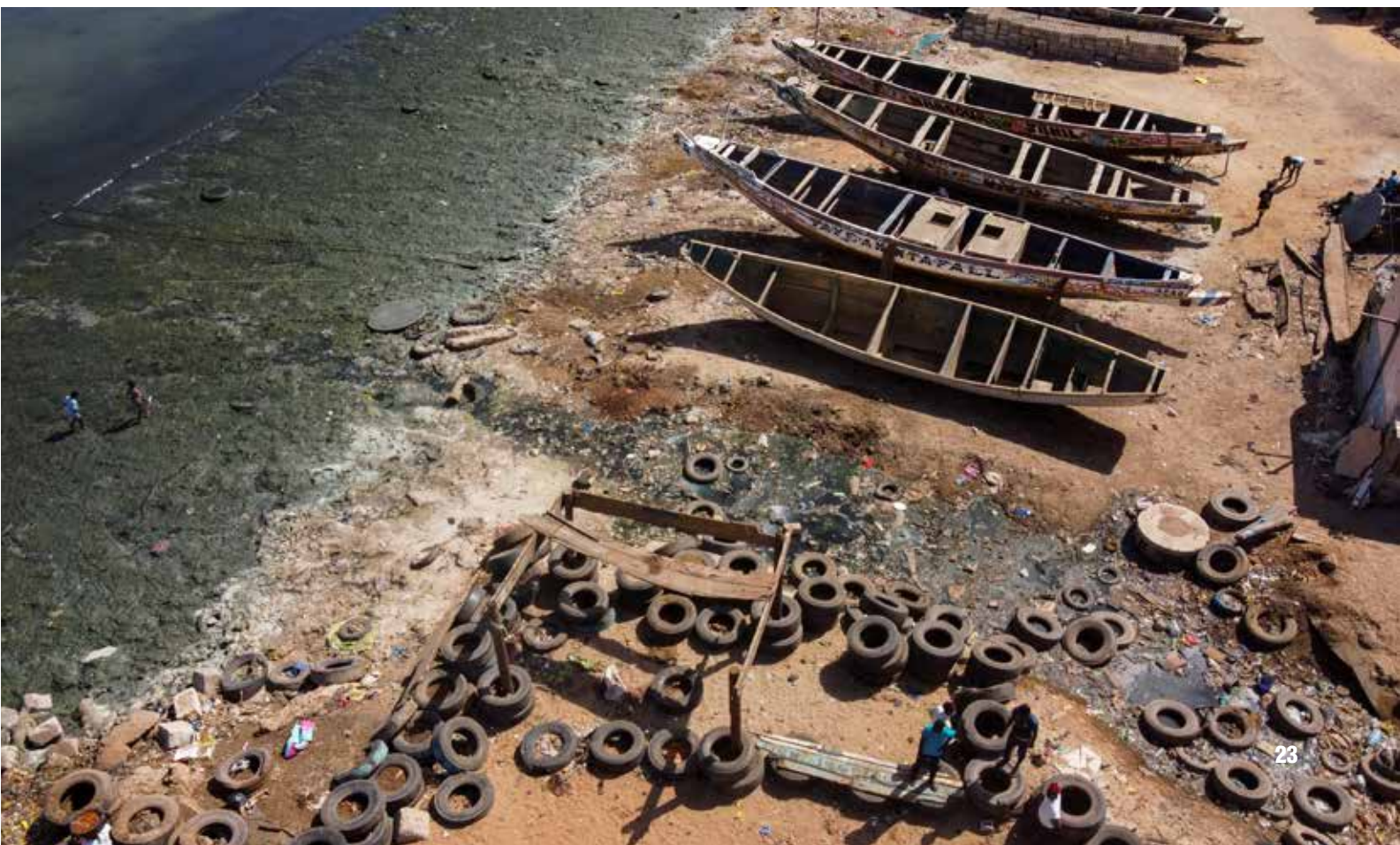






Top, rotten trees in a toxic lake near Yatagan, Turkey (Feb. 24, 2021). The lake, known as an ash dam, is a mix of waste water and polluted ash produced at Yatagan's power station. Bottom, water contaminated with raw sewage flows via open channels into the ocean at Hann Bay, causing a shoreline discolored by stagnant algae, in Dakar, Senegal (March 17, 2021). Large amounts of untreated solid and liquid waste are released into the bay year-round as a result of inadequate sewer infrastructure in the adjacent neighborhoods of Hann-Bel-air and Mbao.

REUTERS/UMIT BEKTAS (TOP); REUTERS/ZOHRA BENSEMRA (BOTTOM)





# Making Sense of an Earth Filled with VIOLENCE

Mass shootings. Terror attacks. Gruesome murders. Why do such horrific acts fill today's headlines?

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER

**S**PRAWLED ON the couch, Dad watches a knife plunge into the stomach of a gang member who coughs up blood as he dies. The father dozes in and out of sleep, bathed in the flickering light of the television.

Upstairs, his son clenches a video game controller. He navigates a Navy SEAL to stealthily dispatch a guard by snapping his neck. His younger brother watches.

The next morning, Mom leans toward the bathroom mirror, applying eyeliner. Her clock radio reports the news: *Single mother of three killed in burglary... children put in foster care.* For a fleeting moment, her heart goes out to the children left parentless by such a meaningless act, but she quickly finishes applying the makeup to stay on schedule.

She descends the stairs and crouches to tie the laces of her daughter's shoes. By the time the girl finishes elementary school, she will have seen about 8,000 TV murders.

A bed-headed Dad sits at the kitchen table, reading the daily newspaper over a bowl of cereal. He browses the headlines—"Couple Slay 14 in Murderous Rampage," "Man Arrested for University Rape and Kidnapping," "African Terror Group Has Killed 20,000 Since 2009"—then turns to the sports section.

Even for such a family, violence is commonplace, though removed from the everyday. For much of the global population, however, violent acts play out daily:

■ A California teen beats a 72-year-old man with an aluminum bat—after the elderly man tripped and hit the

18-year-old's car in a gas station parking lot.

■ A Mexican gang raids a car dealership, kills five and decapitates some. Afterward, two boys—ages 16 and 17—are forced to eat human flesh from one of the bodies as initiation into the gang.

■ A preteen girl, bound and gagged, suffered repeated rape at the hands of members of the Islamic State terror group. She was in captivity for 11 months.

Tragically, every nation in the world is plagued with unbridled violence. The unending barrage of brutality and bloodshed can be numbing for everyone, whether they live in war-torn Syria or Suburbia, U.S.A.

From time to time, events shake the collective consciousness—Columbine, September 11, clashes between protesters and police during Black Lives



■ In this May 5, 1981, photo, British troops clash with demonstrators in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Renewed violence on the streets of Northern Ireland stirred memories of decades of Catholic-Protestant conflict known as “The Troubles.”

AP

Matter protests, terror attacks across Europe. Such tragic occurrences elicit the question: Why is the Earth *filled* with violence?

These events are often followed by a period of self-reflection. Then, amid the continuing onslaught of cruelty and viciousness, society again slowly becomes callous toward these acts and unwittingly falls into the jaded thinking that violence is a natural part of life.

Constant exposure to violence makes us less sensitive to it and can even lull us into thinking conditions are better than they really are.

Yet to truly make sense of a world saturated with violence, we must shake ourselves awake from this slumber and take a hard look at world conditions.

### Animal Instinct?

In an attempt to explain the phenomena of violence, scientists draw the conclusion that aggression is an innate characteristic. Charles Darwin felt it was born out of an instinctual animal trait needed for self-preservation. Sigmund Freud took it further, claiming aggression is one of two basic urges of mankind, along with sex, and that many of the urges occur at an unconscious level.

These ideas have seeped into public thinking. They are found in popular novels and feature films of today, which almost always rely on the tired themes of sex and violence. Newspapers have long known that stories with violence attract the most attention, and even

formulated the maxim, “If it bleeds it leads”—the story with the highest body count will make the front page.

Religionists also buy into the thinking that violence is intrinsic to the human condition, though in a different way. Many churchgoers believe that deep down all people are essentially good and would obey God if given the chance. The thinking generally goes that mankind has been infected by sin, which often leads to violence.

To suppress what are seen as animalistic urges or actions of a body infected by sin, mankind has set up an intricate network of laws. In the West, much of this legislation is based on a Judeo-Christian code of morality: “Thou shalt not kill,” “Thou shalt not steal,” etc. From these simple statements come countless anti-violence laws on child abuse, rape, battery and disorderly conduct, with a law for every type of murder—first degree, second degree, manslaughter and wrongful death.

While much of this moral code is apparently pulled from the Bible, it ignores what the Book actually states about the inner workings of mankind.

Unknown to most, the Bible contains a complete map of human nature, and explains how and why widespread violence persists today. These verses, when put together, reveal the true picture of mankind.

Chapter 17 of the book of Jeremiah states, “The heart is *deceitful* above all things, and *desperately wicked*: who can know it?” (vs. 9). Take this verse at face value. Each person’s heart is *deceitful above all things*—with all things meaning all things!—and each person is *desperately wicked*.

The epistle of James begins to explain the motivations behind widespread violence: “From whence come *wars* and *fightings* among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? You lust, and have not: you kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: you fight and war, yet you have not...” (4:1-2).

Human beings are driven by their lusts—what they want. They attempt to satiate their lusts by whatever means,

even if it means violence. In the end, however, their lives are left empty.

These verses paint a bleak picture, and leave little hope for mankind's future. Ask: Is it really a surprise that Earth is filled with violence when deep down each person is *desperately* wicked?

### “Only Evil Continually”

It can be difficult to take an honest look at mankind because the track record is never pretty. It is a tale of murder, rape, war and vicious brutality.

There have been peaks of violence of the worst sort—ash clouds pluming from Nazi concentration camp smokestacks—conqueror Genghis Khan stating that the “greatest pleasure” in life is to chase and kill an enemy, then rape his wife—execution pyres crackling with the bodies of “heretics” during the Middle Ages.

One of the most violent times in history is described in the Old Testament of the Bible.

Most know the story of Noah. He built an ark and entered it, along with his family and pairs of animals. Then, it rained 40 days and 40 nights...

Yet this common retelling misses a crucial element. During that time, mankind reached one of its worst periods of violence. The book of Genesis records that before the flood, “God saw that the *wickedness* of man was great in the earth, and that *every* imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was only evil continually*” (6:5). Verse 11 states, “The earth also was corrupt before God, and *the earth was filled with violence.*”

In the days before Noah entered the ark, the entire Earth was filled with violence, with evil having free rein over the land. Yet life continued “business as usual.”

Matthew 24 describes this time: “For as in the days that were before the flood they were *eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage...*” (vs. 38-39).

With a world *overrun* with violence, how could no one think anything was wrong? People began to view violence as a fact of life and believed conditions were better than they actually were.

Sound familiar?

### Hidden Violence

Definitions of violence include exertion of physical force to injure—violent treatment—intense and furious destructive action—vehement expression. All these *fill* today's world.

Yet the dictionary definition misses a huge element of violence and hides how truly pervasive it is.

The Bible alone completely defines this word. The Sixth Commandment states, “Thou shalt not kill.” But this command is amplified by the words of Jesus in the New Testament: “You have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be liable to the hell of fire” (Matt. 5:21-22, Revised Standard Version).

In other words, anger toward another person without proper cause, even when it is unspoken, is a form of murder. With this added to the definition, the picture of an “earth filled with violence” comes into panoramic view.

Think. With this expanded definition, how many *unreported* murders occur every day? Husband against wife, brother against brother, neighbor against neighbor—all in a world where people fly off the handle without notice!

### What the World Misses

This is an age of paradoxes. A suicide bomber explodes himself to kill and maim in the name of religion, and across the world a groom kisses his bride for the first time. A hotheaded brother dukes it out with his sibling over a girl, and elsewhere a father teaches his daughter to drive. A man harbors a bitter grudge against his neighbor for decades, and a 20-something tosses his graduation cap into the air at a nearby university.

*Why* is the world this way?

Societies have attempted for millennia to solve the problems of violence—not realizing the “way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in

their goings...” (Isa. 59:8). Man will continue fruitlessly trying to manufacture peace, only to bring even worse hatred and cruelty.

How can violence end? It starts with individuals realizing the extent that violence pervades their lives, and beginning to understand there is another way to live.

Notice Christ's words in Matthew 5: “You have heard that it has been said, You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (vs. 43-44).

Yet this cannot be done on human steam, because “the carnal mind is enmity [hostile] against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7).

This violent, hopeless age naturally lulls people to sleep—unable to see that mankind is incredibly off-track.

God puts forth a simple instruction for those alive today: “Awake you that sleep...” (Eph. 5:14). Do not think that escape from a violence-filled Earth will come with the wave of a magic wand. It requires action!

You must admit that you are naturally hostile toward God, and can only navigate this pitch-black age through following His Law.

Notice Proverbs 6: “For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life” (vs. 23).

Do not let the day-in-day-out barrage of brutality numb you to the realities of this world. Stay alert, watch world events, and begin to “sigh and cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof” (Ezek. 9:4).

Also, “See then that you walk circumspectly [live carefully], not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15-16).

The world was never meant to be filled with violence—and you can take comfort that it soon will not be. To understand how God will ultimately bring peace to this violence-filled Earth, read *How World Peace Will Come!* ([reg.org/hwpwc](http://reg.org/hwpwc)). □

# EAT YOUR VEGGIES!



We all know vegetables are crucial for a healthy diet, but it is an easy food group to neglect. Yet there are simple ways to incorporate them into your meals.

**A**FTER CREATING everything else, God made man. For five days, God prepared a place for His finest creation by ensuring that Adam and Eve would have *everything* they needed.

God put much thought into what He provided for us, and He did not create anything in vain or without purpose (Isa. 45:18). This included the food needed to sustain us: “And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat [or food]” (Gen. 1:29).

Our Creator went above and beyond on everything He made. For some vegetables, He even left clues on what they benefit.

For example, when you slice into a carrot, the radiating lines resemble the appearance of the human eye. These orange roots are rich in beta carotene, which is converted into vitamin A. This nutrient is essential for forming the light-sensitive eye cells that aid in night vision. Carrots also contain antioxidants that help fight free radicals that can lead to macular degeneration.

Or look at the kidney bean. This common legume is high in soluble and insoluble fiber, which are essential for stabilizing blood pressure

# VEGETABLE GROUPS

Vegetables are organized into five groups based on their nutrient content: dark green vegetables, red-orange vegetables, beans and legumes, starchy vegetables, and others. You should aim to regularly consume produce from all five groups.

## DARK GREENS

Includes arugula, broccoli, collard greens, endive, escarole, kale, mixed greens, mustard greens, romaine, spinach, swiss chard, turnip greens, and watercress. Foods in this vegetable subgroup provide nutrients such as fiber for digestive and heart health, folate for cell division and blood health, carotenoids for antioxidant functions, vitamin C for immune health, and vitamin K for blood clotting.

## STARCHES

Includes corn, green lima beans, green peas, parsnips and potatoes. While this group provides various nutrients such as potassium, antioxidants, folate, vitamin C and vitamin E, these vegetables are also higher in calories than vegetables in other food groups. They are particularly high in carbohydrate calories and therefore must be consumed in moderate amounts.

## RED-ORANGE

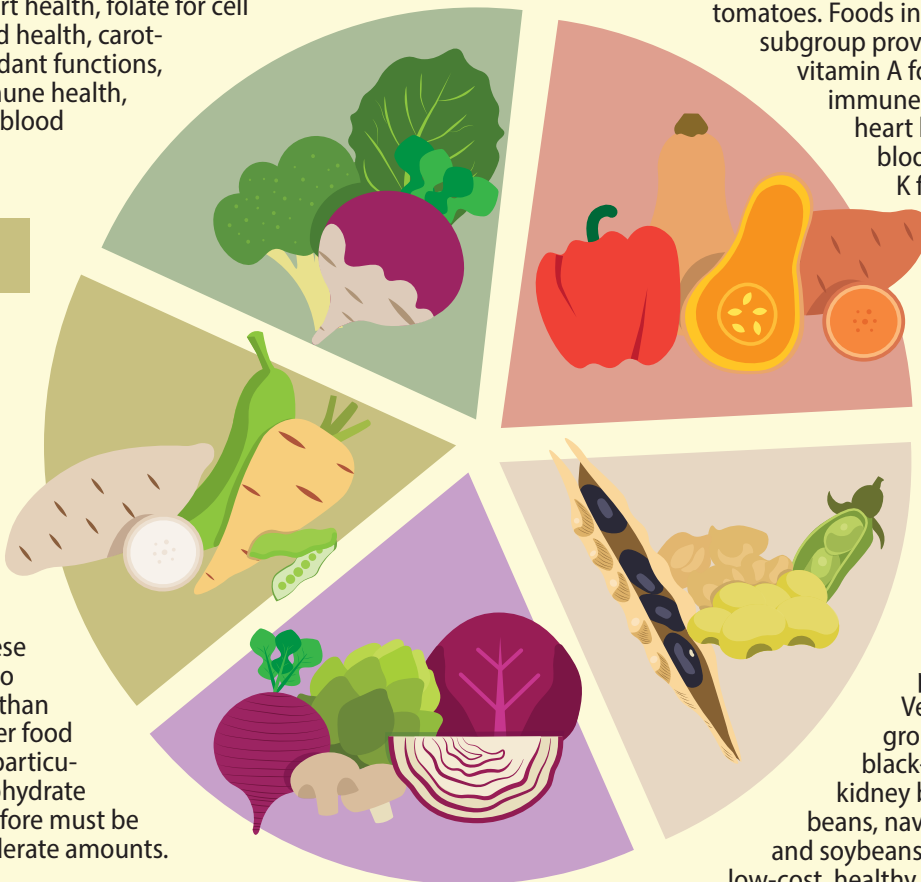
The red-orange vegetable group includes bell peppers, carrots, sweet potatoes, squash, and tomatoes. Foods in this vegetable subgroup provide nutrients such as vitamin A for vision, vitamin C for immune health, potassium for heart health and healthy blood pressure, and vitamin K for blood clotting.

## BEANS & LEGUMES

A unique group that contain excellent sources of proteins, iron, zinc, folate, potassium and fiber. Vegetables found in this group include black beans, black-eyed peas, chickpeas, kidney beans, lentils, lima beans, navy beans, pinto beans and soybeans. These are generally low-cost, healthy protein sources and provide satiety with meals.

## OTHERS

Includes artichokes, asparagus, avocados, bean sprouts, beets, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, celery, cucumbers, eggplants, green beans, green peppers, iceberg lettuce, mushrooms, okra, onions, radicchio, radishes, snow peas, tomatillos, turnips, wax beans, yellow squash, and zucchini. Foods in this vegetable subgroup provide important nutrients such as magnesium and manganese which play a role in bone health, copper for blood health, selenium for its role as an antioxidant, as well as fiber, folate and vitamin K.



and glucose levels as well as reducing cholesterol. Our kidneys filter excess water and toxins from our blood, and high blood pressure or blood sugars can lead to damaging effects to this organ. Therefore, fiber is vital to supplementing the performance of our kidneys and the kidney bean provides a wealth of this nutrient in addition to magnesium, potassium and a wide range of amino acids.

Then there is the lowly onion. When sliced in half, the layers resemble the appearance of body cells, the basic building block of the human body. Onions are dense with nutrients, such as vitamin C, potassium, B vitamins and antioxidants, all of which support cell function as well as protect against cellular damage from the oxidation of free radicals.

While not all vegetables have similar telling appearances, these nutritional powerhouses offer a wide range of health-boosting benefits that should not be overlooked. However, sometimes this food group can be neglected because it is not as appealing as a juicy steak or slice of warm, fresh-baked bread. So what are some creative ways to include them in our diet?

### **Crucial Benefits**

Understanding *why* vegetables are so important will help build the motivation necessary to create and maintain a healthy diet.

Our bodies run 24/7 producing, repairing and strengthening skin, muscle, bone and other tissues. It sends out electrical instructions to organs and carries vital nutrients and oxygen to billions of cells. To do all this, our bodies rely on us to provide the proper fuel.

This includes at minimum 30 vitamins, minerals and other dietary components. While you can receive these micronutrients from various supplements, Dr. Clifford Lo, an associate professor of nutrition at the Harvard School of Public Health, told the *Harvard Health Letter* that these nutrients are most effective when coming from food: "They are accom-

panied by many nonessential but beneficial nutrients, such as hundreds of carotenoids, flavonoids, minerals, and antioxidants that aren't in most supplements."

The following are seven scientifically proven and tangible benefits that come from eating vegetables.

**(1) Happiness and Improved Mental Health:** Consuming plant-based foods has been linked to enhancing and stabilizing our moods as well as helping us feel happier and more fulfilled. A study produced by the University of Leeds showed "a positive association between the quantity of fruit and vegetables consumed and people's self-reported mental well-being.

"Specifically, the findings indicate that eating just one extra portion of fruits and vegetables a day could have an equivalent effect on mental well-being as around 8 extra days of walking a month (for at least 10 minutes at a time)."

Another report in the scientific journal *Frontiers in Psychology* cited several studies that showed the correlation between high consumption of vegetables and improved mental and emotional well-being.

The report explains: "Fruits and vegetables contain a variety of micronutrients critical to physical and mental function. Antioxidants such as vitamin C and carotenoids are said to play a pivotal role in protecting the body against oxidative stress, which is responsible for the causation and progression of neurodegenerative diseases, chronic inflammatory disease, atherosclerosis, some cancers, and some forms of depression."

"There is now good evidence that higher [vegetable intake] is related to better mental health. Research has established that people who eat more fruits and vegetables have a lower incidence of mental disorders, including lower rates of depression, perceived stress, and negative mood.

"People who eat more fruits and vegetables also have a higher likelihood of optimal mental states, such as greater happiness, positive mood,

life satisfaction, and socio-emotional flourishing, which captures feelings of meaning, purpose, and fulfillment in life."

Additional neurological studies have also shown that a consistent diet of vegetables is linked to slower rates of cognitive decline such as memory loss.

**(2) Better Quality Sleep:** In a report by the *Journal of Occupational Health*, researchers found that those whose eating habits were low in vegetables and high in carbohydrates experienced consistent poor-quality sleep.

Vegetables, such as kale and other leafy greens with high concentrations of calcium, are used by the brain to help manufacture melatonin (the hormone that regulates sleep). Including these foods in your meals can help you develop a more stable sleep pattern for better quality rest.

**(3) More Energy:** The high concentrations of iron, folate and other B vitamins in vegetables support your metabolism and thereby boost your energy levels. They are also great sources of fiber that slow down digestion and provide longer-lasting energy, as opposed to simple carbohydrates that deliver a quick spurt of energy but leave you feeling sluggish after your blood sugar drops.

**(4) Higher Concentration and Productivity:** A study published in the journal *Neurology* showed that, out of 3,700 participants, those who ate two servings of vegetables a day demonstrated the higher mental focus of people five years younger. This is because nutrients such as potassium increase neural connectivity, making our brains more responsive. Additional studies have revealed that leafy vegetables contain an abundance of lutein that has been linked to enhanced memory and brain function.

**(5) Weight Loss:** One of the easiest ways to start shedding pounds is by increasing your vegetable intake. For the same reasons listed above, fiber from plant foods gives you lasting energy and helps you feel fuller longer. But they are also the lowest

calorie-dense food, meaning that they have less calories per weight than proteins, grains or other carbohydrates. Therefore, you can reduce the total caloric intake for a day without decreasing the amount of food you eat by replacing other foods such as breads or pastas with vegetables.

**(6) Improved Digestive Health:** Fiber not only helps balance your blood sugar levels, it also supports the good bacteria in the lining of your digestive tract. Insufficient fiber can lead to bloating, constipation and many other digestive issues such as the inability to effectively assimilate other nutrients. Additionally, a specific sugar found in leafy greens has been shown to aid digestion by feeding the good bacteria lining the digestive tract and impairing certain of the harmful bacteria that lead to illness.

**(7) Protection Against Disease:** One great nutritional benefit of vegetables not seen on a nutrition label are phytochemicals, which are active substances that can protect against some diseases. There are over 5,000 different phytochemicals and there is still much to learn about their benefits to health.

For example, an article published by the Harvard Medical School explains that “carotenoids in red, orange, yellow, and green plants (cooked tomatoes, carrots, squash, and broccoli) may inhibit cancer growth and cardiovascular disease, and boost immunity. Flavonoids in berries, apples, citrus, onions, soybeans, and coffee may fight inflammation and tumor growth.”

A 2013 study published in the scientific journal *Advances in Nutrition* reported on increasing evidence that “suggests that a healthy eating strategy with increased consumption of plant-based foods plays important roles in the prevention of chronic diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, Alzheimer’s disease, cataracts, and age-related function decline. It is estimated that one third of all cancer deaths in the United States could be prevented through dietary modification.”

### Practical Tips

With all the monumental benefits of vegetables, why do we not eat them as often as we should? A big part is easy-to-prepare processed foods tend to be light on plant-based food. Yet there are easy ways to get them into your daily routine—and even *hide* them in your meals.

**Make a Goal:** The United States dietary guidelines recommend at least two to three cups of vegetables daily, depending on your age, gender and level of physical activity. This is not very much! Start with a goal of adding a cup of vegetables to each meal of the day. This could be a handful of spinach tossed in with the leftovers you are reheating. Or a snack of baby carrots with hummus or celery with a little peanut butter.

However, variety is important since not all veggies provide the same nutrients. In fact, they can be broken into five subgroups based on their nutritional content: starchy vegetables, dark-green vegetables, red and orange vegetables, beans and peas, and “other.” The U.S. Department of Agriculture has a table on its website with recommended servings of each subgroup per week. Reviewing this can help you make a goal of what to include in your meal plan.

Remember that fresh is best and will have the highest concentration of nutrients, but frozen works just as well in a pinch and can help you stock up so you always have some on hand.

**Start at Breakfast:** Studies have shown that starting the day off with a nutritious meal leads to better weight management and higher energy levels for the hours to follow. This can be as simple as baking an egg casserole stocked with zucchini, kale, tomatoes, garlic, onions and mushrooms that you can reheat throughout the week. Top it with some cheese and you have a tasty breakfast in just a couple of minutes each day!

**All-You-Can-Eat Soup:** Soup is an excellent meal to throw in those extra cups of vegetables for the day. Not only is it easy to prepare, but soup

is lower in calories and the broth will fill you up quickly. A few changes in ingredients and seasonings and you have a different meal each time! Make a big pot of soup on Sunday for lunch each day and you will be sure to meet your daily vegetable goals.

**Pasta Night:** Sneak vegetables into your pasta night by adding some chopped collard greens and carrots to your special sauce. Or replace the pasta noodles with spiralized zucchini or spaghetti squash for a low-calorie meal.

**Turn Them into Chips:** Everyone loves the crunchy, salty satisfaction of a bag of chips for a snack. But instead of filling up on unprofitable potato chips from the store, make some fresh at home. Bake kale or thinly sliced beets and sweet potatoes with some salt and bag it up for the next time you want to nibble.

**Layer It on Your Pizza:** Sometimes you just need a break from cooking and pizza is a go-to comfort food. Spruce it up by layering on some fresh vegetables and broil it for a few minutes to add some nutrition to your night off.

### Start Now!

It can be easy to fall into the thinking that you can eat whatever you want because there can seem to be no immediate penalty or consequences from consuming nutritionless foods.

This could not be more wrong!

For every effect—good or bad—there is a cause. If you have poor eating habits now, you will pay a price later. That price will be the breakdown of your body’s basic functions, which can lead to a lack of energy, poor sleep, depression, sickness and disease.

While eating “comfort foods” on occasion is not wrong, making a practice of consuming nutrient-dense foods is vital to investing in your long-term health and productivity. Revisit all the immense benefits of eating plant-based foods to help you stay motivated and make use of these tips to start incorporating vegetables in your healthy, balanced diet today! □



## PERSONAL

Continued from page 2

stood. As you listen to sermons and Bible studies, something is quietly happening within you.

### Let's understand!

Notice what Paul wrote to the Romans: "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear *without a preacher?*" (Rom. 10:14). Yes, ministers are required so that people can be properly led within the truth.

Yet members also have responsibilities toward the Church.

In Acts 8:31, the Ethiopian eunuch answers the deacon Philip's question, "Understand you what you read?" with his own question: "How can I, except some man should *guide me?*" In this question he sought help. It took humility to admit that he did not "know it all." Yet the context shows that he was familiar with Isaiah's writings and must have had his own personal copy. Like the eunuch, you must be willing to let God's Church teach you.

Paul continues in Romans, "And how shall they preach, except they be *sent?*" (10:15). God's ministers are always sent by His faithful headquarters. They never come of their own authority, in rebellion to God's chosen leadership.

Paul continues further, "...as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah said, Lord, who has believed our report? *So then faith comes by hearing*, and hearing by the WORD OF GOD" (Rom. 10:15-17).

Listening to God's instruction through His true servants is a faith-building exercise. Have you realized this before?

God's Word is living—dynamic! It is not sterile or useless to those who hear it. When sitting in Sabbath services, you are not simply "marking

time," you are *growing in faith*—if you are actively engaged in every word that is being spoken.

The biggest reason we are to assemble on God's Sabbath is to be spiritually *nourished with* the pure word of truth and "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27, NKJV). This is one of the most important ways that your faith is strengthened.

The next time you approach Sabbath services, remember this vital principle and how it works within the mind of a converted person!

### To Praise God

The second reason God's people must assemble together is perhaps best summarized by three verses in Psalms: "Let them exalt Him also in the *congregation of the people*" (107:32), "Sing unto the LORD a new song, and His praise in the *congregation of saints*" (149:1), and "God is greatly to be feared in the *assembly of the saints*, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him" (89:7).

These scriptures show that we come together to sing praises to God as we learn to fear and reverence Him—and we are to do this with other brethren, assembled as the Church.

Do you strive to "make a joyful noise" to God during Sabbath singing? Take a moment to read three places that emphasize how important this is to God. In fact, He *commands* you to sing (Psa. 81:1; 95:1-2; 98:4!)

We must never sing less than wholeheartedly before God. Daydreaming, mumbling or not participating at all violates these verses. They show neither reverence nor honor for God on the day that is intended to be a "sign" between Him and His people (Ezek. 20:12-13).

### True Fellowship

The third purpose for attending Sabbath services is to enjoy right, godly fellowship. It is a weekly opportunity for those who fear God to speak "often one to another" (Mal. 3:16).

This is one reason the New Testament records so many accounts of the brethren being "together" (I Cor. 5:4; 11:18; Acts 20:1-6).

What about your little congregation? Are you still at the stage where you feel that you are like Archippus, "the Church in your [or someone's] house" (Phm. 2), or as Paul wrote to the Romans of Priscilla and Aquila, "the Church that is in their house" (Rom. 16:5)?

Treasure your group—no matter its size. Love, serve and pray for those in it, and take advantage of opportunities to fellowship with other brethren when available.

Understand the following: You cannot go it alone. If any limb of the body is severed (arm, leg, hand, finger), it will still live for a little while—but *only* for a little while. It will die, unless it is successfully grafted back onto the body: "I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman...Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can you, except you abide in Me" (John 15:1, 4).

This passage speaks to any who might try to have a "just you and me, God" attitude. (See I Corinthians 12:12-20.)

### Assemble Together

God commands us to have a "holy convocation," where possible, on His Sabbath and Holy Days (Lev. 23:3). There are times when, due to illness, great distances, or other factors, you will be unable to assemble with brethren of like mind. But you must never "forsake the assembling of yourselves together" when it is possible (Heb. 10:25).

Just a few verses later, God gives insight—and powerful instruction—through Paul, regarding how He views those who waver, cease to hold fast and pull back from faithfulness: "But if any man *draw back*, My soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul" (Heb. 10:38-39).

Remember that the people of the true Church of God will always continue steadfastly "in the apostles' *doctrine* AND FELLOWSHIP"! □

## AFRICA

## For Locust-weary Africans, a Dry Spell Brings Hope

**B**araka, Kenya (AP) – In a convoy of pickup trucks fitted with spray guns, soldiers zoom through Baraka’s hills leaving a trail of dust and bemused villagers in its wake.

The vehicles brake when the soldiers see the enemy: billions of invading desert locusts that have landed in a twitching swarm where a forested area meets farmland.

The deployment of soldiers among the usual agriculture officials is a testament to the seriousness of the threat as East Africa’s locust outbreak continues well into a second year. The young locusts arrive in waves from breeding grounds in Somalia, where insecurity hampers the response.

It is the beginning of the planting season in Kenya, but the delayed rains have brought a small amount of optimism in the fight against the locusts, though farmers still worry about their crops.



■ The 12-year-old son of a farmer chases away a swarm of locusts on his farm as he returns home from school at Elburgon, Kenya (March 17, 2021).

AP/BRIAN INGANGA

The United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization says the locust swarms have been spotted in the Rift Valley—which produces Kenya’s staple foods of maize, wheat and potatoes.

But the FAO says that as a result of the poor rains in Kenya and neighboring Ethiopia, the swarms in both countries are remaining immature. Their numbers also continue to decline due to ongoing control operations.

Without rainfall, the swarms will not breed, severely limiting the scale and extent of their threat, the FAO says in a recent update.

“For this reason, there is cautious optimism that the current upsurge is winding down in the Horn of Africa, especially if poor rains limit breeding this spring in northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia, followed by equally poor rains during the summer in north-east Ethiopia.”

Last year, authorities managed to contain what was seen as the biggest locust infestation in Kenya in 70 years, largely through coordinated aerial spraying which covered vast territories quickly.

Many of those swarms were in uninhabited areas. This year the swarms have presented a different challenge by landing in more inhabited areas. That means spraying is out of the question because it could adversely affect people and livestock, says Ambrose Nyatich, a livelihood recovery expert with the FAO.

So the delayed rains are a benefit—in part.

Desert locusts pose an unprecedented risk to agriculture-based livelihoods and food security in the already fragile Horn of Africa region amid economic crises, drought and conflict, FAO says.

A typical desert locust swarm can contain up to 150 million locusts per square kilometer, according to the East African regional body, the Intergovernmental Authority on

Development. “An average swarm can destroy as much food crops in a day as is sufficient to feed 2,500 people.”

Farmers like Hannah Nyokabi in the community of Baraka—which means “blessing” in Swahili—find themselves in a difficult situation. Poor rains might lessen the locust threat but will almost certainly mean a poor harvest.

“Things have gone very bad. If you look at the farm there is nothing,” she said. “We have children who are in school, and we were depending on the farm for their fees.”

Another farmer, Anne Wa Mago, 60, called a poor harvest better than nothing.

“We are lucky [the locusts] arrived when we had not planted, otherwise they would have wiped out our produce,” she said, motioning at thousands of the voracious insects crowding a tree branch.

Groups of school children, some still in uniforms, ran around the farms snatching the locusts from the air or the ground.

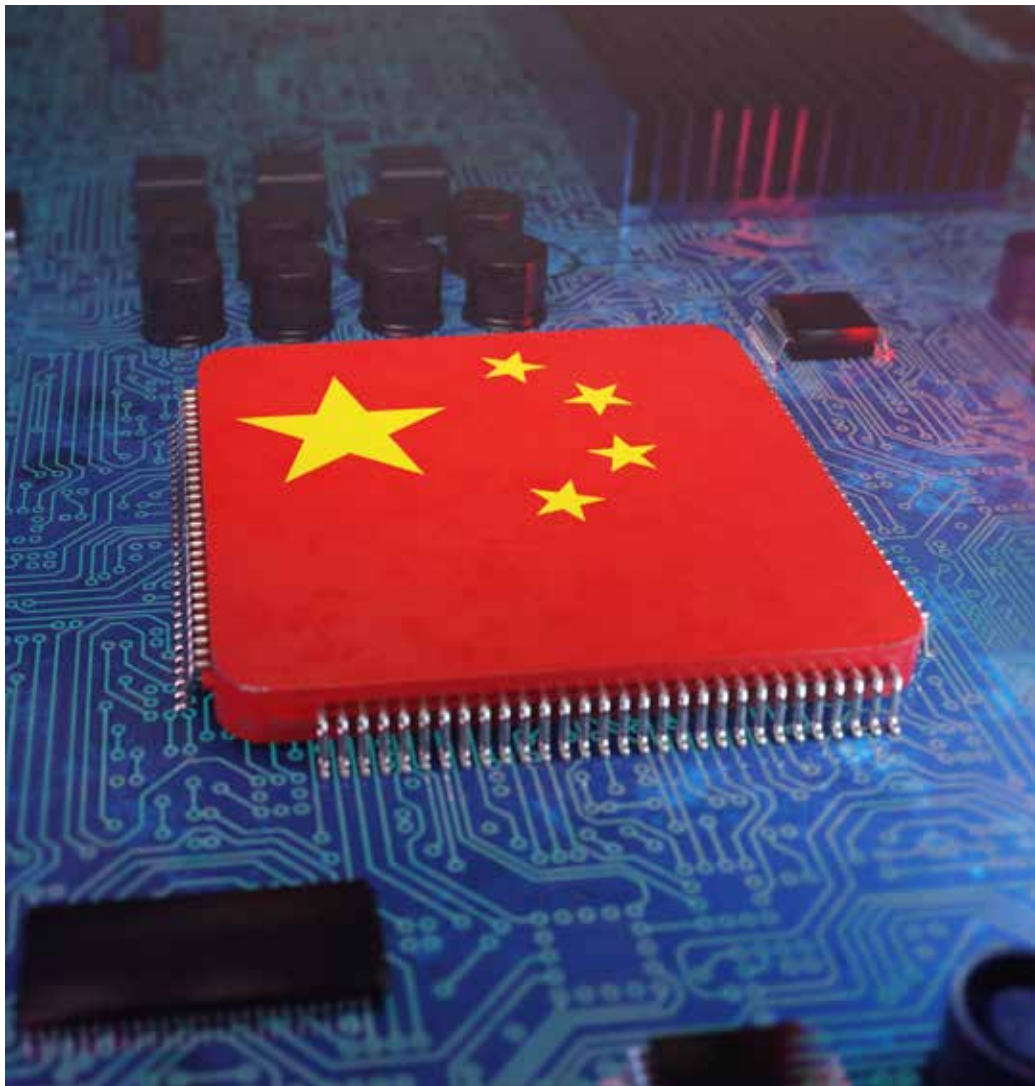
To them, the swarm that recently arrived, almost blighting the sun, is a windfall like no other. Two pounds of locusts fetches money from a non-governmental organization that wants to turn the insects into livestock food.

“This is money that has come to our doorstep,” said 16-year-old John Mbithi. Anne Wangari, 12, said she had collected 77 pounds before leaving for school.

But Mr. Nyatich with the FAO warned against using locusts for food because they could have been sprayed with insecticide.

“The initiatives that were being conducted by some organizations to try and use locusts for fish feeds or animal feeds is something that should be looked into in terms of how can we regulate it going forward maybe in the future,” Mr. Nyatich said. □

## U.S. Trade War Pushing China to Steal Technology and Talent, Taiwan Says



Taipei (Reuters) – The China-U.S. trade war is pushing Beijing to step up its efforts to steal technology and poach talent from Taiwan to boost China’s semiconductor industry’s self-sufficiency, the government of the tech-powerhouse island said.

Washington has taken aim at China’s tech industry during the bitter trade dispute, putting sanctions on firms including telecoms equipment giant Huawei Technologies Ltd, saying they are a threat to national security, angering Beijing.

Chinese-claimed Taiwan is home to a thriving and world-leading chip industry, and the government has long worried about China’s efforts to copy that success, through fair means or foul.

Speaking at a parliamentary committee meeting on how to respond to the “red supply chain”—a reference to the color of China’s ruling Communist Party—Taiwan Economy Minister Wang Mei-hua said the trade war had created new risks.

“Affected by the U.S.-China technology war, the development of

mainland China’s semiconductor industry has been obstructed, but they are still committed to the industry’s development,” she said.

“In order to achieve self-sufficiency in the supply chain, poaching and infiltration are the quickest way for mainland China to do this,” Ms. Wang added.

Taiwan’s chip workers have deep experience and speak the same language, meaning they are a “natural target for poaching China has latched onto,” she added.

Hu Mu-yuan, deputy head of Taiwan’s National Security Bureau, said China’s efforts were a threat to not just Taiwan, but also Japan and South Korea, threatening global trade and fair competition.

“Moreover, the Chinese communists are stealing other countries intellectual property to boost their own power,” he added.

Taiwan has strict laws to try and prevent this from happening, but officials have warned China tries to skirt them by setting up front companies on the island, using Taiwanese headhunters and other methods.

“Preventing Taiwan’s key technology and high-tech personnel from being infiltrated by the ‘red supply chain’ has become an important task to protect our industry’s competitiveness and ensure our economic security,” Mr. Hu said. □



# WARS. RUMORS OF WARS. COMMOTIONS.

Millions worldwide are terrified by worsening war, political instability, terrorist attacks, and other violent threats. Such trends are listed in Jesus Christ's Olivet prophecy found in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. Matthew states: "And you shall hear of WARS and RUMORS OF WARS...For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in diverse places" (vs. 6-7). Luke 21 adds, "But when you shall hear of wars and COMMOTIONS, be not terrified..." (vs. 9). This vital prophecy can help you make sense of this world. You need not be terrified! To learn what is coming next in world affairs, read *The Real Truth* online.

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