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REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING



FENTANYL

Can the War on Drugs Be Won?

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An employee at Carole's Country Cupboard in Nicholson, Georgia, is ready to greet customers (May 31, 2023).

JEFFREY GREENBERG/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES

7 Keys for Building Gen Z's Work Ethic

Parents, here are the Bible principles needed to prepare your teenage kids for the workforce.
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Front Cover: A man prepares to inject heroin laced with fentanyl at a safe house in Mexicali, Mexico (June 7, 2023).

CAROLYN COLE/LOS ANGELES TIMES VIA GETTY IMAGES

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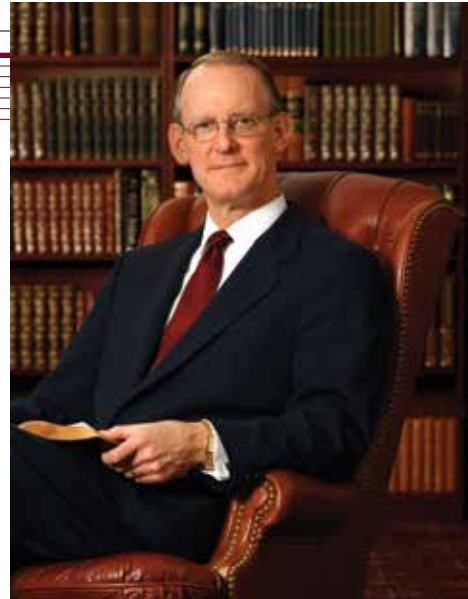
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PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



Why Is a Savior Necessary?

IT IS the most central tenet of Christianity: Jesus Christ died for the sins of mankind, was buried in a tomb, and was resurrected three days later (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Of the more than two billion people who profess to be Christian, most agree with this biblical teaching.

In fact, most churches focus entirely on the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, and that He is the Savior of the world. Of course, these points are true. Ministers preach incessantly about Jesus' shed blood for our sins. They tell the masses to "give their hearts to Jesus" and to accept Him as their personal Savior. This, they say, is the only way to avoid roasting forever in hellfire. Once a person accepts Jesus, they believe he or she is guaranteed a place in heaven.

There is constant talk about God's mercy and of His "free gift" of salvation through the death of Jesus to anyone who will accept it. To these preachers, no form of obedience is necessary—only that one accepts Jesus into his heart. After all, God is full of grace and mercy. Surely, He will endlessly forgive all of my sins, the thinking goes.

Lost in all of this is the *real* reason Jesus died. Most simply do not understand the tremendous price that was paid, why it was necessary that someone pay it, and the intended goal.

Made Into Flesh

First, some review. The book of John begins, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God" (1:1-2). These verses reveal that two Beings existed "in the beginning." One is the Word; the other is God. Just this background strips away certain myths in revealing the origin of the true Jesus Christ.

Further, we see that the Word was also God, meaning that the Word is an eternal Being, since He is God. But He (the Word) is separate from God, meaning the Father. He existed in the beginning *with* God the Father. Thus, two eternal Beings—not one "triune" being, as most assume—are mentioned here. "The Word was *with* God" clearly shows this fact.

The Word has neither beginning of days nor end of life. Life is inherent within Him, as seen in verse 4:

“In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.”

Alongside God the Father, the Word was instrumental in re-creating the Earth nearly 6,000 years ago. Verse 3 of John 1 reveals that He was the Being who created not just the Earth, but *all things*, including the immense universe with its trillions of stars and planets: “All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made.”

Yet, long ago, it was determined that the Word must die (Rev. 13:8). For this to happen, He had to divest Himself of His eternal life and become a flesh-and-blood human being, born of a woman.

This brings us to John 1:14: “And the Word was *made flesh*, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” This verse has perplexed millions throughout the ages. Many wonder, *How could God become a human being?*

But there it is in plain English: “the Word was made flesh,” or *became* flesh. All one must do is believe it. Exactly *how* God was converted from Spirit into flesh is beyond human comprehension, but that He became a literal human being is not.

When He became flesh, the Word was named Jesus: “And she [Mary] shall bring forth a son, and you shall call His name JESUS” (Matt. 1:21).

The Greek word for Jesus comes from the Hebrew word *yehoshua*, which means “he will save” or “YHVH is salvation.” This name was not given by accident. It reveals that Jesus, formerly known as the Word, was born for a particular purpose: to save. We see this in the second part of verse 21: “He shall *save* His people from their sins.” Jesus was born for the purpose of saving human beings.

Yes, Jesus was a human being. When He was changed into flesh, the life that kept Him alive resided in the blood, as is the case with all human beings (Lev. 17:11). When a person inhales, oxygen eventually enters the bloodstream and oxygenates the blood, thus making life

possible. Like all fleshly humans and other creatures, Jesus relied on His blood for life. He no longer had eternal life residing within Himself. Without blood, Jesus would not have been able to exist. When He was crucified, Jesus’ life went out of Him in His blood. He shed *blood*, not *spirit*.

Jesus was also fully God—He was human (born of a woman) *and* divine (begotten by the Father). He was “God with us” (Matt. 1:23) in the flesh. The Word did not merely enter into a fleshly body and become God inside of, and separate from, His human body. He was God “manifest in the flesh” (I Tim. 3:16). Hebrews adds, “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same” (2:14).

In other words, Jesus was flesh and blood, just like any other human being! Why? For the purpose of being subject to death! So “that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil...For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham [became flesh and blood]. Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like *unto His brethren*...to make reconciliation [through death] for the sins of the people” (vs. 14, 16-17).

At His birth, Jesus took on the nature of a human being (though He possessed the Holy Spirit without measure). He was tempted in all points just as we are (Heb. 4:15), and He suffered throughout His life, as we do. Jesus was forced to endure and resist the pulls of the flesh. God became man so that He could live a perfect, sinless life and die. His shed blood—His sacrifice—would free us from eternal death (the penalty for sinning—Rom. 6:23) and allow the possibility of our receiving eternal life.

Without Jesus’ death, there would be no hope for mankind beyond the grave—everyone would die in his sins and remain dead for eternity.

Dead, or Alive Somewhere Else?

Many believe that when Jesus was in the grave for three days and three

nights (Matt. 12:40), He was not truly dead. They contend that Jesus was actually alive, that only His physical body was dead.

Yet the Scriptures plainly reveal that Jesus died and was buried in the grave, and was not conscious. When Jesus rose three days and three nights later, He did not rise from *life*! He rose from death! Notice Romans 14:9: “For to this end Christ both *died*, and *rose*, and *revived*, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living.”

Two important points emerge from this scripture: (1) Through His death and resurrection, Jesus became Lord (Greek: “to rule, have dominion over, exercise lordship over”) of the living and the dead. He paid the penalty for our past sins and opened the door for both the dead and the living to receive eternal life; (2) Jesus rose from a state of unconsciousness (death).

Most overlook the word “revived” in this passage. But its meaning clearly shows that Jesus rose from *death*, not *life*. The Greek word translated revived is *anazao*, and it means to “recover life, live again, revive.” When Jesus rose, His life was recovered from death—He lived again! He did not *continue* living, as He was previously dead—in a state of physical and mental inactivity! Ecclesiastes 9:5 applied to Jesus, just like all dead human beings: “For the living know that they shall die: *but the dead know not any thing* [because they are not conscious], neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.” (Also see verse 10.)

Why then do so many oppose the Word of God and believe that Jesus died only physically, that He continued living as a spirit somewhere else? Some even assert that Jesus preached to “spirits in prison” while His physical body was in the grave for three days and three nights, a wrong interpretation of I Peter 3:19.

If this were the case, then we have no Savior, and the penalty of *your* sins is still in effect! You are still under the

Please see **PERSONAL**, page 27

HELD CAPTIVE and Completely Unaware!



There are forces at work that have held sway over civilization since the dawn of mankind. Humanity has believed the soothing words of a captor, thinking themselves better off under this subtle but powerful influence. Yet deliverance is coming soon!

Read the fascinating story that has been hidden from all generations. Claim your free copy of *A World in Captivity* today at rcg.org/awic.

IRAN'S **AXIS** OF RESISTANCE





Will conflicts
between America
and Iran-backed
militias explode
into a larger
Mideast war?

Left, demonstrators burn a U.S. flag during a rally commemorating Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution in Tehran, Iran (Feb. 11, 2024). Top, armed supporters of Yemen's Houthi movement take part in a pro-Palestinian rally in Sanaa (Feb. 8, 2024).

LEFT, VAHID SALEMI/AP PHOTO; TOP, MOHAMMED HUWAIIS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

ON SUNDAY, February 11, Iran marked the 45th anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution amid tensions gripping the wider Middle East over Israel's continued war with Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The Islamic Revolution began with widespread unrest in Iran over the rule of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The shah, terminally and secretly ill with cancer, fled the country in January 1979. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini then returned from exile and the government fell on February 11, 1979, after days of mass demonstrations and confrontations between protesters and security forces.

In the anniversary celebrations, thousands of Iranians marched through major streets and squares decorated with flags, balloons and banners with revolutionary and religious sayings. In Tehran, crowds waved Iranian flags, chanted slogans and carried placards with the traditional "Death to America" and "Death to Israel" written on them. Some burned U.S. and Israeli flags, a common practice in pro-government rallies.

Processions started out from several points, converging at Azadi Square in the capital. State TV showed crowds in many cities and towns, claiming that "millions participated in the rallies" across the country. The military displayed a range of its missiles, including the Qassem Soleimani and Sejil ballistic missiles, the Simorgh satellite carrier and drones at the square where people took selfies with them. During the celebrations, a paratrooper jumped from a plane while displaying a Palestinian flag.

Many high-ranking Iranian officials attended the celebrations in Tehran, including hardline President Ebrahim Raisi. He addressed the crowds in Azadi Square and called on the United Nations—in a speech broadcast by state TV—to expel "the Zionist regime," as the crowds chanted: "Death to Israel." Mr. Raisi also said, "The bombing of Gaza has to be stopped as soon as possible."

Yet contrary to the spectacle of these celebrations, Iran's involvement in the Mideast conflict has so far been indirect. The involvement of the Persian nation has so far largely been through proxies, which consist of a number of militia groups in various regions. As America and its allies combat these groups, the specter of a larger Middle East war looms large.

Militias in Action

The proxy groups backed by Iran have been waging attacks on Israeli and U.S. targets since war erupted between Iran's Palestinian ally Hamas and Israel on October 7. The campaign has prompted U.S. counterstrikes and fueled fears of a wider escalation. These groups have been called Iran's "Axis of Resistance."

In early January, a drone attack killed three U.S. troops in Jordan, which an umbrella group for Iran-backed factions known as the Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed. The U.S. said it held Tehran responsible. Iran threatened to "decisively respond" to any U.S. attack on the Islamic Republic. Washington then responded with airstrikes against Iranian-linked targets in Syria and Iraq. There are several key groups involved.

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq is an umbrella group of hardline Shiite Muslim armed groups close to Iran. This group claimed an attack near the Syrian-Jordanian border around the same time U.S. officials said their troops were targeted. They have claimed more than 150 attacks on bases housing U.S. forces in Syria and Iraq since October, leading to dozens of mostly minor injuries and drawing several rounds of U.S. strikes in response.

Iranian-backed Shiite groups emerged as powerful players in Iraq after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, with tens of thousands of fighters.

While members of these armed groups receive state salaries and are technically under the authority of the prime minister, they often operate outside the chain of command.



Top, a van with transfer cases is closed during the dignified transfer ceremony of the remains of three U.S. service members killed in a drone attack on the U.S. military outpost in Jordan, at Dover Air Force Base in Dover, Delaware (Feb. 2, 2024). Bottom, people, rescuers and security forces gather around a vehicle hit by a drone strike in Baghdad (Feb. 7, 2024).

TOP, ROBERTO SCHMIDT/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM, MURTAJA LATEEF/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Those targeting U.S. forces in recent months include Kataib Hezbollah and the Nujaba group, both of which are closely linked to Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards. Their arsenal includes explosive drones, rockets and ballistic missiles.

Their statements have declared the operations as part of an effort to “resist American occupation forces in Iraq and the region,” and carried out in “response to the massacres” committed by Israel against Palestinians in Gaza. The groups are designated terrorist organizations by the United States.

The Houthi movement, which controls large parts of Yemen, announced it had entered the conflict on October 31, firing drones and missiles at Israel more than a thousand miles from their seat of power in Sanaa.

In November, the Houthis expanded their role by attacking shipping in the southern Red Sea, saying they were targeting vessels belonging to Israelis or heading to Israeli ports—though some of the targeted ships had no known Israeli links.

The campaign prompted the United States and Britain to launch air strikes against Houthi targets in Yemen in January. The Houthis declared all U.S. and British ships and warships taking part in “the aggression” would be targets for the group.

The attacks have disrupted international commerce on the shortest shipping route between Europe and Asia, leading some shipping companies to reroute their vessels.

The United States believes Iran's Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) have been helping to plan and carry out the Houthi missile and drone attacks. Iran denies involvement. Sources told *Reuters* in January that commanders from the IRGC and Hezbollah are on the ground in Yemen helping to direct and oversee Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping. The Houthis have denied any Hezbollah or Iranian involvement.

The United States returned the Houthis to its list of designated ter-

Iran's Proxies

• Iran-backed militia as of October 2023

Main Area/Militia	Estimated Size
BAHRAIN Al-Ashtar Brigades	Unknown
IRAQ Kata'ib Hezbollah Badr Organization Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq	20,000-30,000 10,000-30,000 5,000-15,000
LEBANON Hezbollah	30,000-45,000
PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES Hamas Palestinian Islamic Jihad	30,000-40,000 1,000-15,000
SYRIA Fatemiyoun Brigade Zainabiyoun Brigade Quwat al-Ridha Baqir Brigade	10,000-15,000 2,000-5,000 3,000-3,500 3,000
YEMEN Houthi Movement	10,000-30,000



Sources: Financial Times, International Institute for Strategic Studies, Council on Foreign Relations

Graphic by Darnitra D. Jackson

rorist groups in response to the shipping attacks.

The heavily armed Lebanese group Hezbollah has been mounting near-daily attacks on Israeli targets at the Lebanese-Israeli border since October 8, prompting the heaviest exchanges of fire between the enemies since they waged full-scale war in 2006.

Hezbollah says its attacks have helped to stretch the Israeli army while also uprooting tens of thousands of Israelis who have fled homes

near the border. Israeli air and artillery strikes have also forced tens of thousands of Lebanese to flee.

More than 150 Hezbollah fighters and at least 25 Lebanese civilians have been killed, in addition to at least nine Israeli soldiers and a civilian. A U.S. envoy has been engaged in efforts to prevent the violence from spiraling into an even bigger conflict.

Founded by Iran's Revolutionary Guards in 1982, Hezbollah has served as a model for other Tehran-backed

groups across the region and has also advised or trained some of them.

Hezbollah is widely regarded as more powerful than the Lebanese state and shares Iran's Shiite Islamist ideology. The United States designates Hezbollah as a terrorist organization.

America's Warning

After retaliatory strikes, the United States warned Iran and the militias it arms and funds that it will conduct more attacks if American forces in the

Mideast continue to be targeted, but that it does not want an “open-ended military campaign” across the region.

“We are prepared to deal with anything that any group or any country tries to come at us with,” said Jake Sullivan, President Joe Biden’s national security adviser. Mr. Sullivan said Iran should expect “a swift and forceful response” if it—and not one of its proxies—“chose to respond directly” against the U.S.

“We cannot rule out that there will be future attacks from Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Syria or from the Houthis,” Mr. Sullivan said. He said the president has told his commanders that “they need to be positioned to respond to further attacks as well.”

Mr. Biden “is not looking for a wider war,” Mr. Sullivan said, when questioned about the potential for strikes inside Iran that would expand the conflict in the volatile region. But when asked about the possibility of direct escalation by the Iranians, he said: “If they chose to respond directly to the United States, they would be met with a swift and forceful response from us.”

While pledging to respond in a “sustained way” to new assaults on Americans, Mr. Sullivan said he “would not describe it as some open-ended military campaign.”

Still, he said, “We intend to take additional strikes and additional action to continue to send a clear message that the United States will respond when our forces are attacked or our people are killed.”

There will be more steps taken, he said. “Some of those steps will be seen. Some may not be seen.”

January’s attack by the U.S. on dozens of sites in Iraq and Syria hit more than 85 targets at seven locations. These included command and control headquarters, intelligence centers, rockets and missiles, drone and ammunition storage sites and other facilities that were connected to the militias or the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps’ Quds Force, the expeditionary unit that handles Tehran’s relationship with, and arming of, regional militias.

The Biden administration has so far appeared to stop short of directly targeting Iran or senior leaders of the Quds Force within its borders.

The U.S. military did not have any confirmation of civilian casualties from those strikes, Mr. Sullivan said. “What we do know is that the targets we hit were absolutely valid targets from the point of view of containing the weaponry and the personnel that were attacking American forces. So, we are confident in the targets that we struck.”

“The Houthis have made clear that they have no intention of scaling back their campaign despite a new international force to protect vessels in the vital waterway.”

Some of the militias have been a threat to U.S. bases for years, but the groups intensified their assaults in the wake of Israel’s war with Hamas following the October 7 attack. The Houthis have made clear that they have no intention of scaling back their campaign despite a new international force to protect vessels in the vital waterway.

U.S. strikes in January struck across six provinces of Yemen held by the Houthi rebels, including in Sanaa, the capital. The Houthis gave no assessment of the damage, but the U.S. described hitting underground missile arsenals, launch sites and helicopters used by the rebels.

“These attacks will not discourage Yemeni forces and the nation from maintaining their support for Palestinians in the face of the Zionist occupation and crimes,” Houthi military spokesman Brigadier General Yahya Saree stated.

“The aggressors’ airstrikes will not go unanswered,” he said.

Meanwhile, Iran warned the U.S. over potentially targeting two cargo ships in the Mideast long suspected of serving as forwarding operating bases for Iranian commandos. The statement from Iran on the Behshad and Saviz ships appeared to signal Tehran’s growing unease over the U.S. strikes across the region.

The ships are registered as commercial cargo ships with a Tehran-based company the U.S. Treasury has sanctioned as a front for the state-run Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines. The Saviz, then later the Behshad, have loitered for years in the Red Sea off Yemen, suspected of serving as spy positions for Iran’s Revolutionary Guard.

In a video statement by Iran’s regular army, a narrator describes the vessels as “floating armories.” The narrator describes the Behshad as aiding an Iranian mission to “counteract piracy in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.” But Iran is not officially known to have taken part in any of the recent campaigns against rising Somali piracy in the region off the back of the Houthi attacks.

Just before the new campaign of U.S. airstrikes began, the Behshad traveled south into the Gulf of Aden. It docked in Djibouti in East Africa just off the coast from a Chinese military base in the country.

The statement ends with a warning overlaid with a montage of footage of U.S. warships and an American flag.

“Those engaging in terrorist activities against Behshad or similar vessels jeopardize international maritime routes, security and assume global responsibility for potential future international risks,” the video said.

As these proxy groups continue to cause trouble and America strives to show a measured response, keep your eye on what is happening. Time will tell whether the conflict between the U.S. and these proxy groups will explode into a larger war involving Iran itself. □

Bible Readers Give

MORE

Generously

Statistics show those who read God's Word give more freely. Yet few know what it truly says about generosity.

BY JAMES E. HABBOUSH

CHRISTIANS WHO regularly read the Bible are significantly more generous than the average American—so says new survey data from the American Bible Society.

The numbers show it is not even close: About 92 percent of Christians who read the Bible regularly give to charity, compared to 54 percent of believers who do not. Among all Americans who donate, regular Bible readers give *twice* as much.

For people who keep their noses in God's Word, such a stat likely comes as no shock. They know giving produces real blessings, believing Jesus Christ's words: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

The study also looked at churchgoers. About 91 percent of this group gives to charity, compared to 52 percent

of those who do not attend. Regular parishioners give 42 percent more on average. This includes both regular tithes and offerings, as well as donations to Christian and secular nonprofits.

Of those who "strongly agree" with the statement "I believe God is actively involved in my life," 84 percent give to charity, the study found.

While such statistics may be unsurprising to regular Bible readers, they are exciting because they offer proof that God's Way works.

But even though a person may desire a deep relationship with God, following through can be difficult. The survey explored this as well, stating that 52 percent of Americans desired to read Scripture more. Despite this, just 14 percent succeeded in increasing their Bible reading in 2023.

"Only a quarter of the U.S. population (25 percent) reads the Bible weekly on their own, apart from a church service," the study found.

So even though people are reading their Bibles and growing in their ability to give, most would like to do more—knowing that drawing closer to God by studying His words unlocks great benefits.

These instincts are correct!

We should be "searching the scriptures daily," like the Bereans in Acts 17:11. This will reveal the Bible has *much more* to say about generosity—and the incredible blessings that flow from it.

Christ's Plain Words

The relationship between giving and reading the Bible is clear from a statisti-

cal standpoint. And Jesus not only said it was important—He also explained WHY a mindset of giving is so crucial. How a person uses his or her money says a lot about who they are.

After warning against accumulating “for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust...corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal,” Jesus urged His listeners to instead “lay up for yourselves *treasures in heaven*, where neither moth nor rust...corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (Matt. 6:19-20).

Christ continued with this statement: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (vs. 21). In other words, *investment* is a window into *character*. Excessive accumulation—focus on self—reflects one’s heart. Contrast this to wisely helping others, and the point is impossible to miss.

In the same setting, Jesus Christ explained that giving should be done with the right attitude. It can be easy to give with the intent to impress others. But this carries unseen and unintended consequences.

Notice: “Take heed that you do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise you have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

25%

of the United States population reads the Bible weekly on their own, apart from a church service.

Therefore when you do your alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, *They have their reward*” (Matt. 6:1-3).

In other words, giving to gain praise from others results in just that—praise from other human beings—not rewards from God!

Jesus showed that giving should remain private: “But when you do alms, let not your left hand know what your right hand does” (vs. 4). Secrecy is vital.

Doing so will ensure that “your Father which sees [you give] in secret Himself shall *reward* you openly” (vs. 4).

Giving produces real blessings: “Give, and it shall be given unto you;

good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you mete [give] withal it shall be measured to you again” (Luke 6:38).

Yet generosity has an even greater importance. Mankind was created in God’s “image” and “likeness” (Gen. 1:26). This means human beings were *designed* to give, as God wants everyone to be more like Him: “For God so loved the world, that He *gave* His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

God’s Way can be summed up like this: learning to practice the GIVE way of life!

Part of the blessing of giving is that helping others feels good. But the benefits experienced by the giver do not end there. Those who make generosity a lifestyle can attest to this. Their giving is not limited to where their *monetary* “treasure is,” remembering Christ’s words. They give of their time and energy in ways that can be as simple as taking an extra moment to say hello to someone who looks lonely. And they are regularly “rewarded openly” in ways that must be experienced to be understood!

2023 Charitable Donations by Scriptural Engagement

54%
of Bible Disengaged Gave

Avg. Donated: \$2,822

76%
of Infrequent Readers Gave

Avg. Donated: \$4,805

92%
of Scripture Engaged Gave

Avg. Donated: \$6,230

SOURCE: AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY/GRAPHIC BY KYLE M. HOLCOMBE

Reaping Rewards

Jesus Christ's instructions do not solely revolve around giving. He also said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (Luke 4:4). The reader should be ready to follow what the Book says. Such obedience strengthens a person's relationship with God so that "whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:22).

This principle is easy to see at work in families. If children obey and please their parents, there are real benefits. Similarly, yielding to God, our spiritual Father, allows us to confidently go to Him in prayer. Of course, "whatsoever we ask" must align with God's will on a matter.

At its core, keeping the commandments is an expression of love (vs. 23). This fact is clearly seen when Jesus answered this question, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" (Matt. 22:36).

Christ's response: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." He then explained: "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

In other words, far from doing away with the Law, Christ explained that *keeping* the Ten Commandments expresses love toward God and other human beings.

There are impossible-to-miss benefits to keeping each of the Ten Commandments. Those who do—whether they realize it—reap certain rewards. Easy examples to understand are honoring your father and mother (the fifth commandment), not killing people (the sixth), and guarding against adultery (the seventh). These require no explanation.

The eighth commandment—"You shall not steal"—is also universally accepted and understood, regardless of culture or creed. Even thieves who

steal things belonging to others do not want to be stolen from! Thievery comes in many obvious forms, but most are shocked to learn it is possible to unwittingly steal *from God*.

In Malachi 3, God asks the reader a rhetorical question: "Will a man rob God?" He continues, "Yet you have robbed Me. But you say, Wherein have we robbed You?"

God's answer is plain: "In tithes and offerings" (vs. 8).

He then issues a challenge, promising tremendous benefits: "Bring you all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the

The 8TH

*Commandment—
"you shall not steal"—
carries a little-known
blessing to those who
fully understand it.*

windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (vs. 9-10).

Obedying God's instruction to pay Him a tithe—meaning a tenth—of our increase allows us to claim this amazing promise. Read our booklet *End All Your Financial Worries* at rcg.org/eayfw to learn much more about God's tithing command.

Giving carries real blessings!

A Life of Great Abundance

God's challenge goes far beyond just giving. He knows living His way of life is the only path to true happiness. In John 10:10, Christ said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they

might have it *more abundantly*." The things He taught were not burdensome, but freeing.

Jesus taught a life of reliance on God and promised that those who "seek...first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness" will have "all these things...added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). The context shows that "all these things" includes all the physical needs we have in life.

Obedying God on *any* matter, including living the GIVE way, automatically yields blessings. To understand all these benefits, you must dig through God's Word. It reveals exactly how you can lead the fulfilling life Jesus promised.

Our Editor-in-Chief David C. Pack expanded on this in his article "You Can Live the Abundant Life!" He wrote: "Paul wrote to the Thessalonians to 'rejoice evermore' (1 Thes. 5:16). This is one of the only two verses in the Bible that contains two words, making it hard to forget. Yet it is a command from God to all those begotten of His Spirit. It is why a thousand years earlier, the Psalmist approached each day by saying, "This is the day which the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Psa. 118:24). In the very next verse, he asked God to 'send now prosperity.'

"These are not vague, nebulous scriptures. They are clear, direct and plain—and vital instruction for you and me. John added, 'truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ...that your joy may be full' (1 John 1:3-4).

"Your joy can be full, beyond your wildest dreams, if you walk and fellowship with God and Christ as a constant way of life that overarches your every word and deed.

"Yes, you can live the rich, radiant, full, happy, joyful, abundant life. All you must do is be willing to leave the old way of life behind—go to the SOURCE—and begin!"

Read the rest at rcg.org/yctal. Regardless of your current level of giving, if you immerse yourself in God's abundant way of life, you will receive incredible blessings. □



FENTANYL

CAN THE WAR ON DRUGS BE WON?

America has been fighting the spread of drugs for over 50 years.
Has it become a lost cause?

BY JUSTIN M. FRAZIER

THE UNITED States officially began its war on drugs on June 17, 1971, when President Richard Nixon declared drug abuse “public enemy number one.” He increased funding for drug enforcement and treatment, with most funds allocated to disrupting the supply of illegal drugs. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) was founded two years later.

In the years since, the U.S. has destroyed domestically grown marijuana fields, seized drugs being smuggled in and arrested millions of people in attempts to stem the flow of illicit substances. But America, with less than 5 percent of the global population, still uses more drugs than any other market in the world.

This thorny issue demonstrates a fundamental truth about human beings: We cannot govern ourselves. Jeremiah 10:23 says, “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps.”

Society knows drugs are a problem yet appears powerless to truly address the issue.

Even though the U.S. has waged the war on drugs for over half a century, the main problems have not changed. During a June 17, 1971, message to Congress, Mr. Nixon said: “We are taking steps under the Comprehensive Drug Act to deal with the supply side of the equation and I am recommending additional steps to be taken now. But we must also deal with demand. We must rehabilitate the drug user if we are to eliminate drug abuse and all the antisocial activities that flow from drug abuse.”

This statement laid out the foundation of American drug policy: Enforcement, treatment and prevention. Despite all the money, time and effort poured into these strategies, their success in the U.S. and the world is questionable. And as fentanyl and other designer drugs have come on the scene, many Americans are dying from overdosing on these exceedingly powerful substances.

Is there any hope for a permanent solution?

Reducing Supply Through Enforcement

Basic economic theory suggests that as supply decreases, price increases. The ongoing war on drugs aims to stop illicit substances from entering the nation by disrupting their production, import and distribution. Ideally, this would render the cost of drugs prohibitively too high for most individuals.

However, despite efforts by the DEA, critics argue that the war on drugs has failed. For example, Hannah Cooper wrote in the journal *Substance Use & Misuse* in 2015 that despite massive, news-making drug busts, availability remains high and prices low.

The proliferation of fentanyl provided a new twist in this narrative. *The Associated Press* reported that a significant quantity of illicit fentanyl originated from Wuhan, China, before it became the epicenter of the COVID-19 outbreak. The lockdowns initially disrupted its production and supply.

Adapting to the circumstances, Chinese laboratories shifted focus from finished product to raw materials. They began shipping the necessary chemicals to Mexico, where drug cartels would process them. The pandemic-induced closure of the U.S.-Mexico border further incentivized cartels to engage in fentanyl trafficking due to its portability, high potency and profitability.

Remarkably, a small suitcase full of fentanyl possesses the same potency as a trunkful of heroin, making it significantly higher value to the cartels. Moreover, fentanyl mules—the transporters—are often harder to spot. According to the Brookings Institute, Mexican cartels increasingly rely on U.S. citizens to smuggle fentanyl since they raise fewer suspicions with U.S. Border and Customs agents. In 2022, Americans accounted for a staggering 88 percent of fentanyl trafficking convictions.

Consider this striking trend in the state of Arizona: In 2018, authorities seized a total of 380,000 fentanyl pills across the entire state. Only two years later, 2020 saw a significant escalation: just three major drug busts accounted for 681,000 pills. This figure does not account for any other drug-related actions throughout the year.

The DEA was established to enforce the nation’s laws regarding illegal drugs. But the problem of drug trafficking has grown so large that there are insufficient resources—funding and personnel—to effectively police the border.

The Bible shows enforcing laws is important to God. This even applies to laws made by man. Paul wrote, “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which is from God...For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad...For he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not carry the sword in vain. He is God’s servant, an agent of retribution to the wrongdoer” (Rom. 13:1, 3-4, Berean Standard Bible).

God expects people to obey the law or else face the consequences. Yet the Bible also explains why it is so difficult for people to do this: “The carnal mind is enmity [hostile] against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (8:7). Human nature is anti-law. This explains why mankind struggles to keep any form of law—God’s Law or its own.

We must ask a sobering question: Is preventing drugs from entering the U.S. futile?

America has sought assistance from other countries in addressing her drug problem. From the coca forests in Bolivia and Peru to the poppy fields of Afghanistan, efforts to address the source of drugs entering the country have yielded only limited success.

However, tackling the laboratories responsible for producing fentanyl necessitates cooperation from Mexico. Yet Mexico’s army appears to be raiding only a handful of active drug labs every month, despite U.S. pressure to

crack down on fentanyl trafficking. According to defense ministry figures obtained by *Reuters*, facilities that were already out of use accounted for 95 percent of seizures in 2023.

New data obtained by *Reuters* in August 2023 from the Mexican Defense Ministry (SEDENA) after a freedom of information request showed that out of the 527 labs raided by Mexico's army in the first seven months of 2023, only 24 laboratories, or less than 5 percent, were "active" labs.

That data also revealed a similar pattern in the first four-and-a-half years of Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's administration, with inactive labs accounting for 89 percent of 1,658 raids carried out by the army from December 2018 to August 2023. The data did not specify how long those labs had been out of use.

Nearly all labs listed on the dataset were labeled meth facilities, with no

fentanyl labs reported, in line with Mexico's statements until recently that no fentanyl was being synthesized on its soil—a claim widely dismissed by Washington and traffickers. Mexico had asserted the synthetic drug was brought over by drug cartels from Asia.

This recent data contradicted a video presented by SEDENA in a government press conference in April that said officials had located 37 sites where final-stage precursors were converted into finished fentanyl and pressed into pills.

A SEDENA official who spoke on the condition of anonymity said criminal organizations often leave laboratories inactive between rounds of drug synthesis, which means that a laboratory classified as "inactive" in the August dataset might have been used to produce drugs again had it not been raided by SEDENA.

The U.S. State Department said it was working with Mexico to "strengthen the effectiveness of our security cooperation" and that it recognizes Mexico's challenges in seizing and dismantling labs.

A White House spokesperson said Mexico and the United States were working side-by-side to address fentanyl trafficking, and "we are grateful for the commitment Lopez Obrador has made to confront this challenge through domestic efforts" and with foreign partners.

However, another U.S. government official claimed that Mexico does not inform the United States how many SEDENA lab raids were conducted on functioning labs versus raids on deserted facilities.

Vanda Felbab-Brown, a researcher at the non-partisan think tank Brookings Institute, offered a critical perspective. She believes that the data manipulation serves to appease the U.S. without genuinely tackling fentanyl production and trafficking.

Her view was echoed by Senator Chuck Grassley, co-chairman of the Senate's International Narcotics Control Caucus. He said the figures suggest that Mexico is "fighting an imaginary war on drugs designed to score political points rather than save lives."

Can America rely on Mexico or other nations for help when it goes against their own best interests?

The Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, estimated that the federal government has spent about \$1 trillion in the fight against drugs. Each year, the government allocates about \$47 billion to sustain this battle.

With such a substantial investment, one might expect an end in sight. Yet the major resources dedicated to stopping drug trafficking have not stemmed the flow.

A 2020 article in *Therapeutic Advances in Psychopharmacology* highlighted a critical flaw in the current approach to the war on drugs. Rather than focus on the effects of the drugs, laws are written against specific



A person smokes fentanyl through a glass pipe along East Hastings Street in Vancouver, British Columbia (May 3, 2022).

GARY CORONADO/LOS ANGELES TIMES VIA GETTY IMAGES



Parents hold pictures of their sons, who died of fentanyl poisoning from pills purchased on Snapchat, as they attend the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing titled “Big Tech and the Online Child Sexual Exploitation Crisis” (Jan. 31, 2024).

TOM WILLIAMS/CQ-ROLL CALL, INC VIA GETTY IMAGES

chemical structures. This exactness in the law allows chemists to create new psychoactive substances with slightly altered chemical compositions that remain legal.

The emergence of nitazenes, a new type of designer drug, proves such drugs are coming. Nitazenes are 1,000 times stronger than morphine, while fentanyl is merely 100 times more potent. The U.S. Congress *still* has not passed laws sufficient to address the fentanyl crisis, while another crisis looms on the horizon.

Faced with these challenges, legislating an end to illicit drugs appears hopeless.

Reducing Demand?

In America’s Pacific Northwest, the battle against fentanyl is intensifying, with efforts spanning schools, jails and city streets. State officials in

Oregon and Washington have named it a top issue as overdose deaths rise.

A surge in fentanyl deaths, including among children, has marked the latest iteration of the years-long opioid crisis. The most recent provisional figures from the federal U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that more than 78,000 people died from overdoses involving synthetic opioids in the 12 months ending June 2023, accounting for 92 percent of all opioid overdose deaths during that period.

Oregon’s state health department said it plans to offer free opioid overdose reversal kits to middle and high schools. A bill filed ahead of Washington’s short legislative session, which started in January 2024, would require all school districts to make such medication available in its high schools. Current law only requires

districts with at least 2,000 students to do so.

Native Americans and Alaska Natives in Washington have been especially affected, dying from opioid overdoses at four times the state average, according to the proposed budget. Washington state Governor Jay Inslee wants some funds to go to a campaign to spread awareness in tribes about opioids.

At least 315 homeless people died in 2022 in just the Portland, Oregon, area, according to an annual report released in December 2023. Nearly 40 percent of those fatalities were from drug overdoses. Methamphetamine contributed to 81 percent of overdose deaths, and fentanyl contributed to 74 percent.

The report stated there were no deaths from fentanyl in 2016 and 2020 had four. By 2021, there were 36. The number for 2023 shot up to 91 fentanyl deaths.

Remember, these numbers are just for Portland!

Such figures show the increased risk of death facing drug users, many of whom are homeless. Homelessness in the U.S. jumped a dramatic 12 percent in 2023 to its highest reported level—further complicating the nation’s drug problem.

The mortality risk for homeless people compared with the general county population was nearly six times higher for all causes of death, the report found. For drug overdoses and homicide, it was 37 times higher and 32 times higher, respectively.

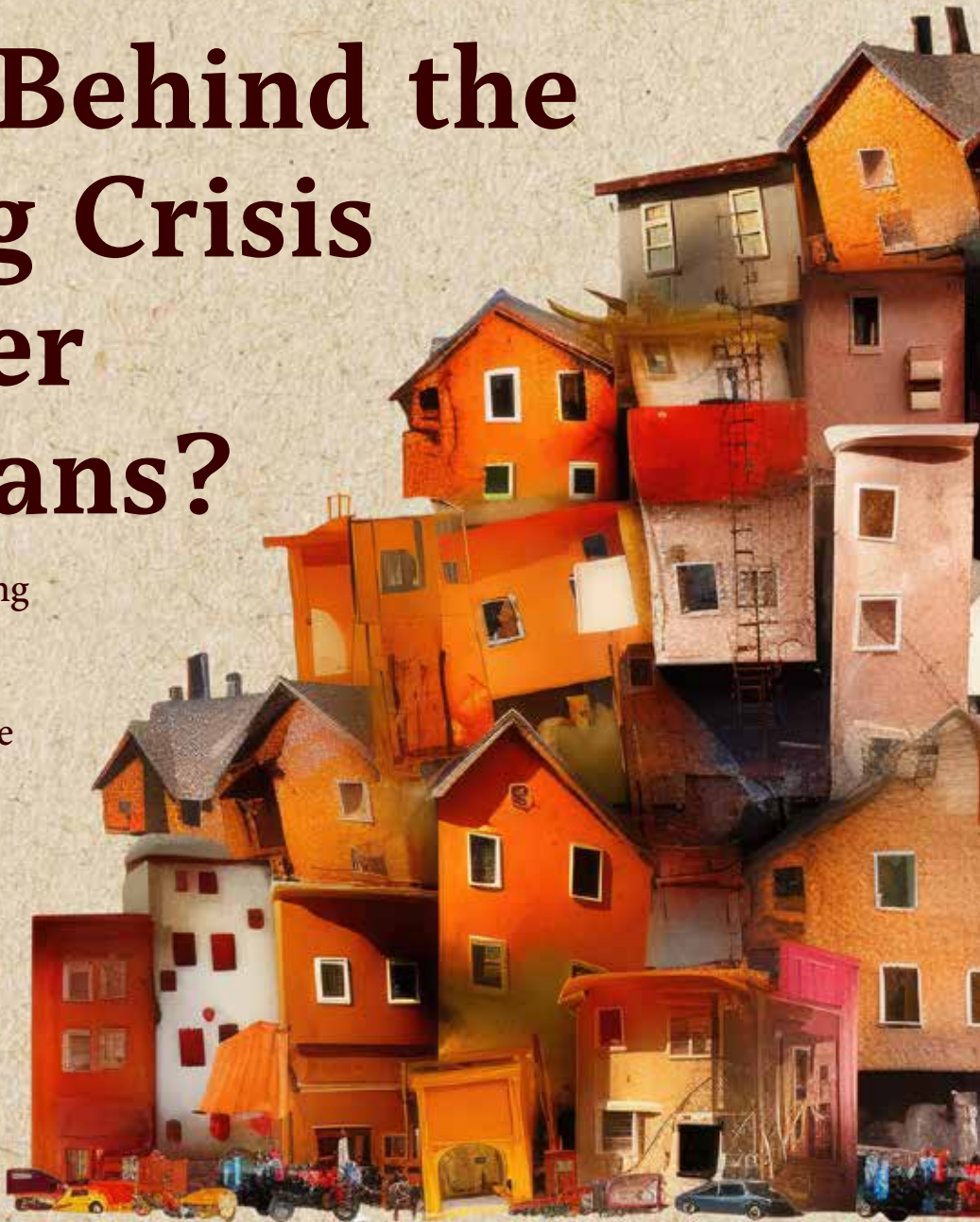
These last numbers are particularly concerning. While addiction does not always lead to homelessness, a strong correlation exists between the two. Addiction—especially to drugs such as fentanyl—often leads to poor decision-making. Additionally, it diverts money from a person’s essentials, such as food, clothing and shelter, to their addiction. The problem often grows as a person watches their life fall apart and feels he is powerless to stop it.

Please see **FENTANYL**, page 29

What's Behind the Housing Crisis for Older Americans?

Older adults are struggling to keep a place to live. While politicians battle over the best solution, the underlying cause is not that complicated.

BY GARRICK R. OXLEY



CALAMITY CAN strike in an instant. In early 2023, a car slammed into the rear of Michael Genaldi's motorcycle, crushing three of his ribs and leaving him in a coma for over a month. This was the beginning of his road to homelessness.

The 58-year-old lost his job as a machine operator, then his home, and he was living in his truck when he was diagnosed with Stage 2 lung cancer.

Too young to get Social Security, Mr. Genaldi began living temporarily in a shelter for people 55 and older in Phoenix, Arizona, while he navigated the process of qualifying for disability payments.

His story illustrates a sad truth: When an older American falls on hard times, there is often no one there to support them, and no adequate system to help them get back on their feet.

The nation is rapidly aging and ill-prepared to adequately house and care for the growing number of older people, according to a recent report released by Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies.

The data found that a record-high 22.4 million renter households—or half of renters nationwide—were spending more than 30 percent of their income on rent in 2022. The number of affordable units—with



rents under \$600—also dropped to 7.2 million that year, 2.1 million fewer than a decade earlier.

These conditions are difficult for people of all ages but uniquely impact those later in life. Without enough government help, “many older adults will have to forgo needed care or rely on family and friends for assistance,” warned Jennifer Molinsky, project director of the center’s Housing and Aging Society Program. Thankfully,

some older Americans do have friends and family who can step in to take care of them. But others, as with Mr. Genaldi, become homeless.

Ms. Molinsky said more governmental assistance could better help the upsurge of older Americans who are baby boomers born after World War II.

The Harvard report stated that in 2021, federal housing assistance like Section 8 or Section 202—which provides housing with supportive services

such as cleaning, cooking and transportation for older people—was only sufficient for a little more than a third of the 5.9 million renters ages 62 and over who were eligible. And despite positive signs from other economic indicators, many continue to feel the pinch of inflation and cost of living.

Over the next decade, the U.S. population over the age of 75 will increase by 45 percent, growing from 17 million to nearly 25 million. And many of those people are expected to struggle financially. The report notes that in 2021, nearly 11.2 million older adults were “cost burdened,” which means they spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing.

This data begs tough questions: Why is America so unprepared to care for its elderly? Can the crisis be attributed to simply a lack of government solutions? Or can it be explained at a much more fundamental level?

Scarce Options

As people reach old age, they often want to retire and enjoy a slower pace of life. These adults may also wish to live closer to their extended family or spend time in a warmer climate. Yet the cost and availability of housing, whether renting or buying, is increasingly prohibitive for older Americans to find housing in many places, let alone their top choice.

Some of the highest cost-burdened rates for renters 65 and older were in Sunbelt areas traditionally popular for retirement: Las Vegas, San Diego, Raleigh, North Carolina, Miami and Daytona Beach, Florida.

For homeowners, the Harvard report stated that mortgage debt among older adults is rising, with the median mortgage debt for homeowners 65 to 79 shooting up over 400 percent from \$21,000 in 1989 to \$110,000 in 2022 as people increasingly need to access cash for basic needs and care.

Even if a senior does find housing, it may be in poor condition. A 2023 *Bloomberg* article titled “The Other Housing Crisis: Too Many Sick, Aging Homes” examined the impact of the poor condition of homes in America.



It stated: “With fewer discretionary funds, low-income homeowners often struggle to keep their properties up. In St. Louis, for example, the average bill for repairs among older homeowners...was more than \$13,000, according to Todd Swanstrom, a public policy professor at the University of Missouri-St. Louis...”

“Low-income renters have it even worse,” the article continued. “Older mom-and-pop landlords often don’t have the appetite or the budget to invest in upgrades. If a private landlord does pay, the split-incentive problem comes into play; improved housing means higher rents and threats of displacement. That’s why most weatherization and upgrade programs have strict affordability requirements.”

Another factor impacting the ability of older adults to find housing is their other financial burdens. Many need additional services as they age. The costs of long-term care average over \$100 a day. And older people who live alone are more likely to be cost-burdened than married or partnered couples: 47 percent versus 21 percent of couples.

In Phoenix, Angelita Saldana, 56, became homeless after her marriage fell apart. The granddaughter of Mexican immigrants, Ms. Saldana initially lived in her truck with her pet dog, Gaspar, but they now live at the same 60-bed shelter where Mr. Genaldi stays with his pet dog, Chico.

Ms. Saldana said her \$941 monthly disability check is not enough to pay for even a studio apartment in the area, where average rents start at around \$1,200. A caseworker is trying to help her find something she can afford. In the meantime, she has a motel room to herself with a private bathroom.

“Here, I can sleep good,” she said, unlike the months she spent at the state’s largest shelter in downtown Phoenix, which has 10 times as many beds.

Lisa Glow, the CEO of Central Arizona Shelter Services, which operates both facilities, said older people do much better in a shelter designed with their needs in mind—including more space, limited stairs and wider doorways for wheelchairs.

Ms. Glow spoke of an 82-year-old man with dementia who struggled to

sleep on a bunk bed at the downtown shelter before he was transferred. Staff members tracked down his family and got him transferred to a skilled nursing facility for more personalized care.

“The downtown shelter is not a good place for an aging adult with chronic conditions,” said Ms. Glow. “We see a lot of people there in their 70s and 80s.”

“I’ve been shocked to see so many seniors on the street,” she added. “People with wheelchairs. People with walkers.”

Grasping for Progress

Congress is working on a bill to expand a federal program that awards tax credits to housing developers who agree to set aside units for low-income tenants. Supporters say that could lead to the construction of 200,000 more affordable homes. Some lawmakers are also calling for more rental assistance, including a significant increase in funding for housing vouchers.

“A larger commitment from the federal government is required,” said Chris Herbert, managing director of



Left, a 69-year-old man who has been homeless for two years takes an afternoon nap in his car parked along Sepulveda Boulevard in West Los Angeles (Oct. 11, 2023). Middle, a man pours ice into a bucket outside his tent in a homeless encampment called “The Zone” in downtown Phoenix, Arizona (July 14, 2023). Right, a woman reflects on her homeless days when she lived in her truck, in Phoenix (Jan. 24, 2022).

LEFT, GENARO MOLINA/LOS ANGELES TIMES VIA GETTY IMAGES; MIDDLE, MATT YORK/AP PHOTO; RIGHT, ROSS D. FRANKLIN/AP PHOTO



the Harvard center. “Only then will the nation finally make a meaningful dent in the housing affordability crisis making life so difficult for millions of people.”

At the state level, Colorado lawmakers have proposed a bill to limit the reasons a landlord can evict a tenant. Other bills would scrap the filing fee for tenants in an eviction case and roll back local rules prohibiting homeowners from renting out a separate unit on their property.

“If we don’t act now,” said Colorado Governor Jared Polis in his recent State of the State speech, largely focused on housing, “we will soon face a spiraling point of no return.”

Other states are also grappling with the problem.

In Washington state, a bill would require 10 percent of new housing around transit hubs to be affordable for low-income residents. Another would bar landlords from increasing rent by more than 5 percent annually during a rental agreement term.

In Massachusetts, a bill would invest over \$4 billion toward building

and shoring up affordable housing in response to the state’s estimate that more than 200,000 additional homes will be needed by 2030. It would be the largest housing investment in state history.

Time will tell whether such initiatives can be successfully implemented and to what degree they help seniors.

Long-Term Trend

If America does not act, the crisis will only worsen over time. This was powerfully illustrated by a 2018 report from the U.S. Census Bureau titled “The Graying of America: More Older Adults Than Kids by 2035.”

The report states: “In less than two decades, the graying of America will be inescapable: Older adults are projected to outnumber kids for the first time in U.S. history. Already, the middle-aged outnumber children, but the country will reach a new milestone in 2034.”

“This demographic transformation caused by a rapidly aging population is new for the United States but not for other countries...America has been different, until now.

It continued: “Higher fertility and more international migration have helped stave off an aging population and the country has remained younger as a result. But those trends are changing. Americans are having fewer children and the baby boom of the 1950s and 1960s has yet to be repeated. Fewer babies, coupled with longer life expectancy equals a country that ages faster.”

People are already calling the lack of housing a crisis today. How bad will things be in 2034?

Creative ideas are especially needed now to house people with fixed or dwindling incomes and with insufficient savings, the Harvard report said. These could include house or apartment sharing to cut back on costs rather than living alone, accessory dwelling units or ADUs known as casitas, granny flats and in-law units. There are also cohousing communities where individual homes—sometimes even tiny homes—are arranged around a building with a communal space such as a dining room.

But if trends hold, more older adults will be out on the streets. While efforts

are being made to address issues surrounding rent and housing in a general way, most are silent about the problem's impacts on the elderly.

Many Americans are simply unaware of the challenges facing older adults. They may recognize that prices are high in supermarkets and that homelessness is a problem, but the average person has likely never seen the data highlighted in the Harvard report.

Older people do not seem to be a major priority for politicians. Look at the 2024 presidential race. Is the issue of taking care of the elderly a focus of the campaign? Even though the two frontrunners are themselves senior citizens, very little is said about how to address housing for that demographic. What about mainstream news? Are they casting a spotlight on the issue? The obvious answers help point to the foundation of the problem.

The Value of the Elderly

Decades ago, older people were afforded more honor and respect. Now, the aged among us are increasingly treated with apathy. We can observe this in the general lack of urgency and solutions to their housing crisis, but also in other areas.

The foundational problem facing older Americans is not really about housing. At its core, the problem has much more to do with respect.

Think of children who send their aging parents to assisted living homes to receive subpar or poor care and then forget about them. Consider that one in 10 elderly Americans will experience at least one form of elder abuse each year, and statistics show their abusers are most often members of their own family. Also think of the many forms of financial abuse older people suffer—identity theft, telemarketing scams, phishing scams, abuse of power of attorney, and more. According to the Nursing Home Abuse Center, seniors lose at least \$2.6 billion annually to financial abuse.

Why do so few speak out about these issues?

As society drifts further from God, the Bible book of II Timothy illustrates the natural result: “Men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (vs. 2-4).

Many of these character traits help explain why the elderly are not a priority for most. The more a person loves his or her own self, the harder it is to show love and respect for others—especially those with whom you do not have much in common.

“God intended younger generations to seek advice and guidance from the older and reap the benefits.”

If one is disobedient to their parents, they will not care for them in old age. A lack of affection is a major roadblock for a person to show compassion for someone less fortunate.

Think: If the public embraced a mindset of venerating older citizens, it would be very difficult to see people on the streets with wheelchairs and walkers. Support and intervention on a local level and progress in federal legislative solutions would naturally flow from widespread love and respect for older generations.

How God describes Himself is another indicator of how the elderly should be treated. Daniel 7 refers to Him as the “Ancient of Days” (vs. 9, 13, 22). Throughout Scripture, we find proof that God has always existed: “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God...For a

thousand years in Your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night” (Psa. 90:2, 4).

Put another way, these verses show that God is *old*.

This knowledge prepares us to examine other verses detailing how precious elderly people are to God. Leviticus commands, “You shall rise up [stand] before the hoary [white] head, and honor the face of the old man, and fear your God: I am the LORD” (19:32).

God intended younger generations to seek advice and guidance from the older and reap the benefits. Job 12:12-13 says, “With the ancient is wisdom; and in length of days understanding. With him is wisdom and strength, he has counsel and understanding.”

A wholesale shift in mindset toward the elderly is unlikely today. However, if you read and believe these verses, you can decide to begin showing more concern for the elderly in your own life, whether family members or those in your local community. As the saying goes, “Be the change you wish to see in the world.”

Understanding the chasm between the biblical view of the elderly and the view of most today can feel discouraging. But the Bible also gives us hope for a fantastic future for older people.

God promises: “Even to your old age, I am He, and even to gray hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you” (Isa. 46:4, New King James Version).

In His coming Kingdom, God “will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain...There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age” (Zec. 8:3-4).

Although things look bleak now, take comfort in these guarantees in God's Word. A time is coming when all older people will be provided for, and everyone will respect and cherish them. □



7 Keys for Building Gen Z's Work Ethic

Parents, here are the Bible principles needed to prepare your teenage kids for the workforce.

BY EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

EMPLOYERS ARE becoming increasingly worried as Generation Z enters the workforce. A recent survey by ResumeBuilder revealed that 74 percent of hiring managers face difficulties acclimating to this generation. They report that those between the ages of 12 and 27 struggle with using technology at work and lack motivation and focus.

Also, this age group is experiencing unprecedented levels of stress and burnout compared to previous genera-

tions. According to business consulting firm Deloitte, 36 percent battle exhaustion and 34 percent are antagonistic toward work. Why is this happening?

It turns out that Gen Z views society, education, hard work and self-care much differently from generations past. In many ways, their world is far removed from the world of their parents and grandparents.

For instance, one out of every five Gen Z members does not think traditional education adequately prepares

them for the modern work environment. Today's youth view our current education system with greater skepticism, feeling that colleges and universities are too expensive, out-of-touch and inaccessible to many students.

These are just some of the many reasons we as parents need to prepare our youth for the workforce. Because we know our children's capabilities and interests best, we have the power to guide them toward a bright and fulfilling career.

An essential foundation is to set the right example. Simply lecturing them about developing good work habits is not enough. Our kids model the behavior they see on a regular basis.

“Children often learn by observing their parents,” says Kim Homan, LMFT and Clinical Director at Tennessee Behavioral Health.

“If they see you working hard but also taking time for self-care and family activities, they are more likely to emulate this behavior. Explain to them why you work and how it contributes to the family,” she explained.

In addition, you should proactively pass along lessons that prepare your child for future success. An immensely helpful and often overlooked source for guidance is the Bible. Despite being an ancient text, it remains the best-selling book of all time, with principles that are relevant today.

We will explore seven biblical principles you can use to instill a strong work ethic in your Gen Z children. Each point draws inspiration from Proverbs 22:6, which tells parents this: “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” To get the most out of this article, read it with an open Bible on your lap or phone. You may even consider studying it with your youngster.

Get ready to discover a fresh approach to building and fortifying your child’s work ethic.

1. Value Gen Z’s Perspective

Though it can be easy to forget, we were all young once. Now that we are older, we better understand that our days of youth were meant to be enjoyed and not taken for granted. While we all want our children to be responsible and make the right decisions, we should not try to make them grow up too fast. Let them enjoy their younger days exploring and discovering themselves and the world around them.

Ecclesiastes 11:9 offers sage advice: “Rejoice, O young man, in your youth;

and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth, and walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes: but know you, that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.”

This verse perfectly encapsulates the essence of youth—to seek joy and pursue passions while also being mindful of the future.

Gen Z has grown up in a digital world of constant connection and rapid change. They are used to having instant access to an overwhelming amount of information and choices. Moms and dads, use this verse to inspire your children to explore life with enthusiasm and curiosity. At the same time, emphasize the importance of making wise decisions and being responsible for the consequences of their actions.

This generation, shaped by events such as the Great Recession and global uncertainties, values pragmatism and believes a career goes beyond just making money. They seek joy in their work while considering its broader impact on society. I Timothy 4:12 encourages young people to set an example in their speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, which resonates with Gen Z’s desire for genuine relationships and authenticity.

Psalm 119:9 highlights the importance of young people living the way God wants: “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Your word.”

This approach encourages parents to discuss with children how to make choices that honor God and align with proper values. Excelling at a current or future job is a result of this guidance.

2. Teach Diligence

The principle of diligence is taught in Colossians 3:23, which says, “Whatsoever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.”

This verse emphasizes that hard work should be treated as an act of devotion and service to God rather than just a means to an end. Teaching young people to focus on someone beyond

themselves can be a tremendous motivator.

Help your children by matching their home and school tasks with their natural interests and abilities. For instance, if your child is creative, give them opportunities to cook or help rearrange or decorate a room. You can give them certain budgeting responsibilities if they are good with numbers. The principle from Luke 12:48, “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more,” explains the importance of recognizing and growing the gifts and talents God gave us.

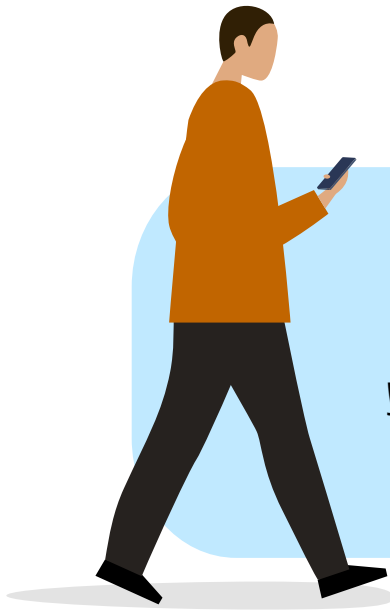
In Proverbs 6:6-8, the example of an ant teaches us the importance of diligent effort and contribution at home, school and work. Teaching lessons from the natural world can help your teens better understand responsibility and stewardship.

Recognizing effort over perfection and encouraging perseverance through challenges is important in building diligence. Scriptures like Romans 5:3-4 tell us that through hardships and endurance, we develop character and hope for the future.

II Thessalonians 3:10 records God’s requirement for people to work. It says, “If any would not work, neither should he eat.” This emphasizes the importance of taking initiative and maintaining or seeking employment—not relying on others to care for you. It also helps instill the satisfaction that comes with personal achievement. When parents model diligence, they become living examples of this value.

3. Instill Integrity and Responsibility

At the core of fostering integrity and responsibility among Gen Z is a principle encapsulated in Luke 16:10: “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.” Teach your child the importance of integrity in even the most minor tasks as a foundation for gaining greater responsibilities.



“By integrating biblical wisdom into modern parenting practices, you can raise sons and daughters who value hard work.”

Proverbs 12:22 teaches the importance of truthfulness: “Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are His delight.” Telling the truth is foundational for building character. Teach your children the importance of honesty in all situations, emphasizing that it is valued by God and others, including employers, even when it is challenging.

The concept of accountability, taught in Galatians 6:5, helps young people understand that they are responsible for their choices. Teach your children to view their mistakes as opportunities to learn and grow rather than as sources of shame.

Respect for authority is guided by Romans 13:1-2: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resists the power, resists the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves [judgment].”

Honoring authority is linked to a deep understanding of God’s influence in the world. Teach your children to value and respect not only parental authority but all forms of governance instituted by God.

Serving is highlighted in Philippians 2:4. This verse encour-

ages kindness and humility toward others: “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”

Participating in community service or school activities can instill the happiness and satisfaction of helping others and teach empathy and social responsibility. Also, discussing real-world ethical dilemmas can teach critical thinking and help your children apply biblical wisdom to complex situations.

4. Promote Work-Life Balance

Jesus Christ emphasized the importance of rest. He said, “Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28).

This principle applies not only to physical relaxation but also spiritual rejuvenation. Everyone needs to occasionally step back from daily tasks to replenish the spirit and mind. This is especially relevant for the always-on digital generation.

The biblical precedent for rest is established in the fourth commandment: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor, and do all your work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God: in it you shall not do any work...” (Ex. 20:8-11).

This is divine proof of the value of downtime. Although Sabbath rest is not discussed as much today as in the past, modern experts do routinely acknowledge the importance of unplugging from our routines to recharge our batteries. Getting rest should not be an afterthought—a mandated period of renewal is integral to our health and productivity. (To learn more about the Sabbath, read *Saturday or Sunday – Which Is the Sabbath?* at rcg.org/tsosw.)

Explain to your children that regular breaks, weekly and otherwise, are essential to maintaining a balanced life. Resting, when done in moderation, is not synonymous with laziness. It is an important aspect of our overall well-being.

Taking time for exercise is also profitable. This is endorsed in I Timothy 4:8: “For physical training is of some value” (New International Version). Helping your children integrate regular physical activity into their routines can strengthen their bodily health and resilience. The benefits of this will flow into other areas of life, including the workplace.

Setting boundaries with technology and saying no to overcommitment are other vital skills for staying balanced. As parents, we should model these practices and principles in our own lives, setting the right example.

5. Encourage Resilience

Developing resilience when facing challenges is an essential life skill, especially in today’s complex world. James 1 says, “Count it all joy when you fall into various temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience” (vs. 2-3). This is central to building resilience. Young people should view challenges not merely as obstacles but also as opportunities for growth and character-building.

To help your children become resilient, show them how to identify problems, brainstorm solutions and take appropriate action. This promotes a problem-solving mindset and encourages kids to take responsibility

instead of running away from difficult situations.

Resilience built on a strong belief system is demonstrated by the people in Hebrews 11—commonly called the faith chapter. Abraham was willing to leave behind his life of comfort to fulfill a greater purpose. Moses chose to sacrifice personal pleasure to help deliver his people. These are just two of many helpful examples in the chapter.

By sharing stories such as these and other historical and contemporary accounts, Gen Z can learn from those who have navigated adversity. This can inspire them to draw strength from their beliefs and values during tough times, in the workplace or otherwise.

Philippians 4:13 says, “I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me.” This promotes a growth mindset while at the same time emphasizing that we cannot rely solely on ourselves for success.

Witnessing firsthand how to navigate setbacks with resilience and determination can be incredibly impactful for a child.

6. Promote Empathy

Embracing diverse views and experiences is a core value for Gen Z. This worldview aligns with the principle of unity through diversity, as highlighted in Galatians 3:28. It says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

This scripture encourages us to respect and love all individuals, regardless of their background, race or culture. Of course, this does not mean condoning harmful or sinful behavior.

Parents can promote understanding and respect for others by encouraging open discussions about the rich tapestry of cultures, backgrounds and perspectives that make up our world.

Romans 15:7 instructs, “Wherefore receive you one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.” This

emphasizes finding common ground with others. Differences strengthen community bonds and foster unity.

Proverbs 27:17 states: “Iron sharpens iron; so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.” This illustrates how different viewpoints can lead to greater understanding and innovation. Encouraging children to collaborate with peers from all backgrounds can enhance their problem-solving skills and creativity.

Challenging stereotypes and promoting empathy are essential in seeing others the way God sees them. James 2:9 warns against partiality, emphasizing the importance of looking beyond superficial differences to appreciate the inherent value in every individual.

Hebrews 13:2’s call to show hospitality even to strangers can broaden children’s horizons and enrich their understanding of the world. Learning about different cultures and traditions can also be an eye-opening experience.

7. Help Deal with Change

Navigating the continuously changing job landscape requires a mix of adaptability, continuous learning and a strong work ethic. Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” This reminds us that change is integral to life and work. The verse encourages Gen Z to approach their careers with an open mind and understand that their professional paths may shift unexpectedly.

Proverbs 18:15 advocates for lifelong learning: “The heart of the prudent gets knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.” This is crucial for staying relevant in a dynamic job market. Instilling a mindset of curiosity and a hunger for new skills can help young people adapt to changes and seize opportunities.

Critical thinking and problem-solving are essen-

tial skills that can be guided by the wisdom given by God. Proverbs 2 says, “For the LORD gives wisdom: out of His mouth comes knowledge and understanding. He lays up sound wisdom for the righteous: He is a buckler to them that walk uprightly” (vs. 6-7).

By fostering digital literacy and developing technological skills wisely, Gen Z can position themselves to excel even in fields that have yet to be imagined. Yet interpersonal skills are equally if not more important than technical expertise.

The fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) embody the traits everyone should desire. Good character is integral for developing personal and professional relationships and becoming well-rounded.

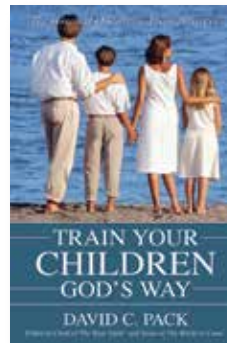
Get to Work

Parents, you play a crucial role in shaping the work ethic of the next generations. Raising children is a privilege and a profound responsibility. By integrating biblical wisdom into modern parenting practices, you can raise sons and daughters who value hard work.

Bible teachings offer a timeless foundation for instilling the virtues we looked at such as diligence, integrity, resilience, and balancing labor with rest and self-care. Scripture is not just a historical artifact—it is incredibly relevant in guiding Gen Z through the complexities of our modern world.

Take heart in the promise of Proverbs 22:6, which assures us that if we do our part to develop our children, they can thrive in their careers and lead fulfilling, honorable lives. Your efforts to instill these values in your children are seen and appreciated not only by current and future employers but also by God the Father.

To learn much more about raising children according to biblical principles, read our book *Train Your Children God’s Way* at rcg.org/tuyc. □



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North Korean leader Kim Jong Un speaks at the Supreme People's Assembly in Pyongyang, North Korea (Jan. 15, 2024).

KOREAN CENTRAL NEWS AGENCY/KOREA NEWS SERVICE VIA AP



NORTH KOREA'S

Rejection of the South Is Both a Shock and Inevitable

EVEN FOR a nation that has perfected the provocative, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's declaration that he would abandon the existential goal of reconciling with rival South Korea was a shock. But a closer look shows it is the almost inevitable culmination of years of building tension.

World powers will now be closely watching to see how one of Mr. Kim's biggest foreign policy declarations since he took power in 2011 plays out as he works to gain leverage in a region that holds both promise and danger for his small, impoverished, nuclear-armed nation.

The bombshell came at a rubber-stamp parliament meeting in early January, where Mr. Kim called for rewriting North Korea's constitution to eliminate the idea of a peaceful unification between the war-divided countries and to cement the South as an "invariable principal enemy."

It is the clearest sign yet of how far inter-Korean relations have fallen since February 2019, when Mr. Kim's nuclear diplomacy with former U.S. President Donald Trump imploded in Hanoi, Vietnam. Talks there fell apart with no joint agreement. The animosity that followed that highly public setback has been accompanied by an accelerated and unprecedented expansion of Mr. Kim's nuclear arsenal and by repeated threats of nuclear war against Washington and Seoul.

Mr. Kim, who during the recent Supreme People's Assembly meeting described South Korea as "top-class stoog-

es” of America, may be attempting to diminish South Korea’s regional power while moving toward direct U.S.-North Korean nuclear talks.

Mr. Kim’s new approach to the South comes as he tries to break out of diplomatic isolation and strengthen his footing regionally. He is playing off deepening U.S. tensions with Moscow and Beijing over Russia’s war in Ukraine and China’s assertive foreign policy.

North Korea’s recent efforts to boost ties with Russia and China and join a united front against Washington in what Mr. Kim calls a “new Cold War” were highlighted by his September visit to Russia for a summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

North Korea has been recalibrating its regional approach since the collapse of the 2019 Hanoi summit, said Ankit Panda, an expert with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

“But now, with advanced nuclear and missile capabilities and the support of Russia and China, Kim feels confident enough to make these changes, which amount to his most consequential proclamations on external affairs since taking power in North Korea,” Mr. Panda said.

From Partners to Adversaries

North Korea no longer sees Seoul as a useful middleman to extract concessions from Washington. Instead, its rival is now seen as an obstacle to the North’s efforts to carve out a more assertive presence in global affairs, said Hong Min, an analyst at South Korea’s Institute for National Unification.

Pyongyang has viciously criticized South Korea’s conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol, who, since taking office in 2022, has expanded military cooperation with Washington and Tokyo while seeking stronger U.S. assurances that it would swiftly and decisively use its nuclear capabilities to defend its ally in the event of a North Korean nuclear attack.

In eliminating the idea of a shared sense of statehood between the Koreans, Mr. Kim could be reinforcing North

Korea’s older approach of ignoring South Korea and attempting direct dealings with Washington. The old reasoning in Pyongyang, according to Mr. Hong, was that the South was not a direct party to the armistice that ended the bloodshed of the 1950-53 Korean War. That ceasefire was signed between the U.S.-led UN Command, North Korea and China, which sent troops to fight for the North.

Declaring the South as a permanent adversary, not as a potential partner for reconciliation, could also be aimed at improving the credibility of Mr. Kim’s escalatory nuclear doctrine, which authorizes the military to launch preemptive nuclear attacks against adversaries if the leadership is under threat, Mr. Hong said.

An intensifying campaign to eliminate South Korean cultural influences and to reinforce the North’s separate identity may be aimed at strengthening the Kim family’s dynastic rule.

At the assembly, Mr. Kim ordered his country to remove past symbols of inter-Korean reconciliation, including a cross-border railway section and a unification monument in Pyongyang he described as an “eyesore,” and to “completely eliminate such concepts as ‘reunification,’ ‘reconciliation’ and ‘fellow countrymen’ from the national history of our republic.”

“North Korea is aiming to destroy the illusions of unification, inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation that remain in the minds of its people,” said Lim Eul-chul, a professor at Seoul’s Kyungnam University’s Institute for Far Eastern Studies.

This is the reverse of Mr. Kim’s approach in 2018 when he initiated diplomacy with South Korea’s former liberal president, Moon Jae-in. He later used Seoul as a bridge to engage with Mr. Trump, part of an ambitious effort to leverage his nukes for badly needed economic benefits.

After the failure in Hanoi, North Korea halted all cooperation with the South and blew up an empty inter-Korean liaison office in 2020 to display its displeasure toward Seoul.

Long-Term Focus

In recent months, Mr. Kim has used Russia’s war on Ukraine as a distraction to dial up weapons tests to a record pace. The alignment between North Korea and Russia has raised worries about arms cooperation, in which the North apparently provides Russia with artillery shells and missiles to help prolong its warfighting capabilities, possibly in exchange for economic and military assistance.

Both Moscow and Pyongyang have denied U.S. and South Korean accusations of North Korean arms transfers to Russia.

“Russia is in need of North Korean weapons, and that has naturally boosted the North’s munitions industry and injected some vitality into its economy, and in return, North Korea [likely] receives energy, food and technology assistance,” said Koh Yu-hwan, a scholar at Seoul’s Dongguk University and former president of the Institute of National Unification.

Mr. Kim’s long-term focus is to force Washington into accepting the idea of North Korea as a nuclear power, and he may be intent on driving up tensions in a U.S. election year with a view to eventual talks with whoever wins the November election, according to Park Won Gon, a professor at Seoul’s Ewha University.

North Korea for years has mastered the art of manufacturing tensions with weapons demonstrations and threats before eventually offering negotiations aimed at extracting concessions.

Mr. Yoon’s government also faces crucial parliamentary elections in April.

While some analysts argue that Mr. Kim may have made a strategic decision to wage war with the South, others downplay the possibility.

“The risks of an inter-Korean clash cannot be ruled out, but North Korea may choose to test South Korea’s thresholds below the threshold of all-out conflict,” Mr. Panda said. “Political moments in both South Korea and the United States also make this an appealing approach for Kim.” □

death penalty—without hope of eternal life, “for the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Only the death—not life somewhere else!—of a perfect, sinless human being could pay this debt. Only God in the flesh could save mankind. Since He created all human beings, Jesus’ life was worth more than all of our lives combined.

You will not find anywhere in Scripture that Jesus was alive and active while in the grave, or that He re-entered His physical body when He was resurrected. Those who conclude this err in their reading of God’s Word.

Rather, the Father—who was still in heaven ruling the universe—raised Jesus from the dead. It was not possible for a dead Jesus to raise Himself. Life cannot come from dead matter; it can only come from other life. The Father had life inherent within Him, and thus was able to resurrect Jesus to eternal life.

In turn, Jesus is now able to impart eternal life to mankind: “For as the Father raises up the dead, and quickens them; even so the Son quickens [Greek: “to make alive, give life”] whom He will...For as the Father has life in Himself; so has He given to the Son to have life in Himself” (John 5:21, 26).

Sin Equals Debt

Some might wonder: Couldn’t God have just forgiven man’s sin? Was Christ’s death really necessary? After all, Jesus had much to say about forgiveness.

For example, in the book of Luke, Jesus told the story of a creditor who had two debtors: “There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both” (7:41-42).

Could God not forgive sin in like manner?

Also consider the parable of the prodigal son, found in Luke 15, who wasted his entire inheritance on riot-

ous living. In time, he realized what a foolish mistake he had made and decided to return to his father. The result? “When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” (vs. 20). His father immediately forgave him and even held a feast in his honor (vs. 23)!

Why could God not forgive us as did the father of the prodigal son?

Many believe that forgiveness of any sort is free. Since one cannot earn forgiveness, then it must be free, is the thinking. Yet this is not the case. While it is certainly true that it cannot be earned, forgiveness is *not* free, in the strictest sense.

“The vast universe is governed by fixed physical laws, which have definite results, and if ignored, they exact a penalty. God designed it this way.”

Consider this phrase: “Free as the air we breathe.” This is not entirely true. Although it is an involuntary action, it takes some amount of work to inhale the air that surrounds us. Even items that are advertised as “free” come at a price. Although you may not pay for it, someone, somewhere, in some way, did!

Forgiveness is the same. Though it is given to us as a free gift, it cost a tremendous price: the death of a God Being! Millions focus on the “free” aspect of forgiveness and miss the purpose of Jesus’ death.

When one sins, he breaks the Law of God (I John 3:4), which all of us have done, as the apostle Paul stated in the book of Romans: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (3:23). To sin is to come short of attaining God’s perfect character.

Because of sin, everyone owes God a debt—a price for that sin—which we saw earlier is the death penalty. The only way for us to personally satisfy it is to die—for all eternity! There is no other way for human beings to pay this penalty.

Thankfully, however, Jesus paid in full the debt for us. We need not suffer eternal death. Jesus met the ransom price for all human beings: “All come short of the glory of God, but they are justified for nothing by His grace through the *ransom* provided in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:23-24, Moffatt translation). His death freed mankind from its captor—Satan the devil, who, through sin, previously held power over death.

Yes, forgiveness is “free” in that we can do nothing to earn it—but it is not free in that Jesus needed to die to pay *our* debt. It is free to us, but not free to God.

Universe of Laws

The vast universe is governed by fixed physical laws, which have definite results, and if ignored, they exact a penalty. God designed it this way.

Think of the law of gravity. If you break this law by jumping from a five-story building, the penalty will be broken bones, and likely death. What about the sun’s rays? If you are outside on a scorching summer day without covering, will you not get sunburned? On the flip side, if you stand outside in temperatures of 50 degrees below zero Fahrenheit, will you not receive frostbite and eventually die? What about the orbit of the Earth around the sun and orbit of the moon around the Earth? If these were not fixed, life would not exist here.

God’s spiritual laws are no different. They are fixed and govern human beings spiritually. To produce peace, happiness and order, these laws must be kept. True happiness cannot be achieved any other way, no matter what our human nature may believe. Those who break God’s laws are “broken” spiritually.

God is love (I John 4:8, 16), and His law reveals how to love Him and fellow

human beings—how to show outgoing concern for others and treat them as you would wish to be treated. “Jesus said unto him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. *On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets*” (Matt. 22:37-40).

In other words, the Law reveals how to love God and other human beings. Many ideas exist about what love is, but the Bible states that keeping the Law of God is love: “For this is the love of God, that we *keep His commandments*: and His commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3).

When a person breaks God’s laws, he will eventually arrive at the final destination: death! It is automatic, like breaking the law of gravity. God does not intervene and sentence us to death. Death—the penalty of sin—is automatic!

Consider. If you board a plane from Britain to the United States, you will eventually arrive in the U.S. If you travel down the road of unhappiness, misery and despair, you will ultimately arrive at your final destination—death.

Someone Must Pay

Because of His perfect character and supreme wisdom, God has determined that all debt must be reconciled, one way or another. For us to be offered eternal life, someone had to “balance the books.” Someone had to pay the penalty. A Savior of mankind was needed!

Let’s remember the story of the creditor who forgave those who were indebted to him. Did someone pay for this debt? Yes! The creditor paid the price. To the debtors it was “free,” but it cost the creditor whatever amount of money they owed.

What about the parable of the prodigal son, who was forgiven by his father for throwing away his inheritance? Who paid the price? The father did. There was no longer an inheritance to sustain the son. That money was gone—wasted.

Now the father had to provide for his son with other means.

It is the same with sin. It always exacts a price—and whoever forgives must pay that price. God the Father and Jesus were willing to pay our “sin debt” in full. They were willing to cancel our debt. God’s perfect character simply would not allow sin to just be “shrugged off.” He would not compromise His Law! Jesus needed to die in order for the Father’s mercy—and eternal life—to be available to us. Sin is too serious not to be punished.

Jesus willingly took the sins of the world upon Himself and became our Savior. There was no other way.

Forgiveness for a Purpose

Do you comprehend what an incredible price was paid for you to be released from the penalty of your sins? The Word—He who was in the beginning with God, and very God Himself—divested Himself of all His glory and became flesh for the purpose of *dying for your sins!* Jesus suffered, was tempted, persecuted, despised, rejected by creation (John 1:11) and crucified for *you*.

Jesus spent three days and three nights in the grave. A Being who had never tasted death—who had been alive for all eternity—who had never been separated from the Father—was dead for 72 hours! This occurred so you and I would be freed from the penalty of eternal death.

The Father allowed His Son to be put to death for a grand purpose, for He “so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not *perish*, but have *everlasting life*” (John 3:16). It took the death of Jesus for the death penalty to be lifted—so human beings would not perish for their sins, but would have the opportunity of receiving eternal life.

Therefore, true Christians belong to Him! They have been bought with a price.

Interestingly, John 3:16 is perhaps the most oft-quoted verse in the world of traditional Christianity, yet few rec-

ognize that Jesus’ death saved us from eternal death and opened the door to eternal life. In other words, human beings *do not* possess an immortal soul that goes to either “heaven” or “hell” upon death. As we saw earlier, the “dead know not anything.”

Jesus is the only way to salvation. As He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Christians are to allow Him to live His life in them, to help them overcome the pulls of the flesh—temptation to sin and break God’s perfect law of liberty (Jms. 1:25; 2:12).

What does God expect of true Christians? “[Become] you therefore *perfect*, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). God is perfect, and expects His people to aspire to the same standard. Though perfection cannot be achieved in this life, Christians are to strive for it each and every day, through Jesus living His sinless life in them.

Think of God’s mercy as an investment in future growth. Through the death of Jesus, human beings may now receive God’s grace—unmerited pardon. Through Jesus’ resurrection and His life (Rom. 5:10), Christians may overcome sin and build God’s holy, righteous character, which is *vital* for entering the Kingdom of God.

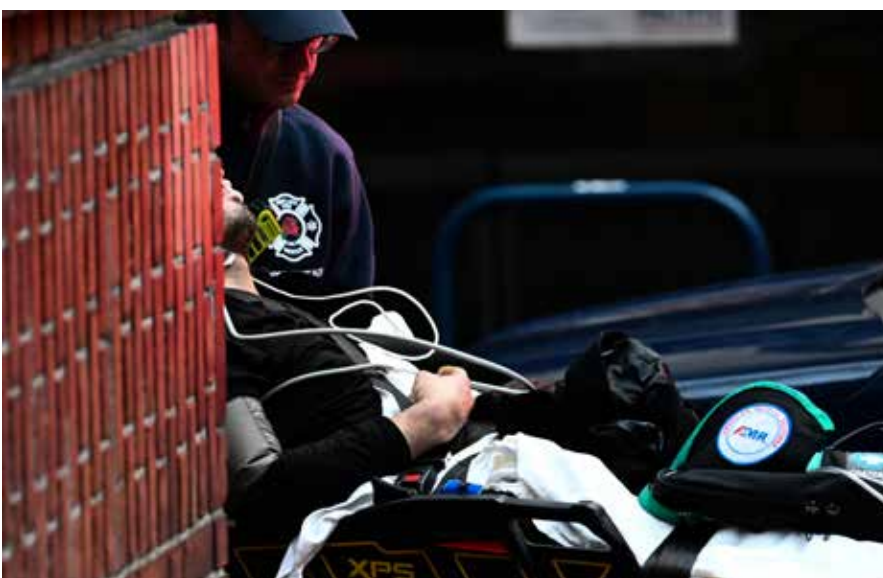
Unlike what most think, God’s mercy does not allow one to continue in sin (Rom. 6:1-2). After all, He commands His followers to be perfect. One cannot be perfect and break God’s laws! Christians are commanded to grow, and overcome sin (Rev. 2:26)—not continue in it! Obeying God and overcoming sin produces righteous character.

Jesus Christ and the Father paid a tremendous price. Without their sacrifice, *no one* would have any hope of entering the Kingdom of God. Mankind would have no Savior. All would be traveling with a one-way ticket to eternal death.

To learn more about who Jesus Christ is, what He accomplished during His earthly ministry, and what He is doing today, read my free book *The True Jesus Christ – Unknown to Christianity* at rcg.org/ttjc. □

FENTANYL

Continued from page 15



Top, a man prepares an injection of fentanyl at Overdose Prevention Society in the Downtown Eastside neighborhood of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada (May 3, 2022). Middle, a man at the entrance of the Penn-North Metro Station in Baltimore, Maryland, allegedly snorts fentanyl from a credit card (April 11, 2019). Bottom, a member of the Fire and Rescue Community Health Assess & Treat team pushes a patient into an ambulance for medical care after they were administered Narcan brand Naloxone nasal spray for a suspected fentanyl drug overdose in Portland, Oregon (Jan. 25, 2024).

TOP, GARY CORONADO/LOS ANGELES TIMES; MIDDLE, SALWAN GEORGES/THE WASHINGTON POST; BOTTOM, PATRICK T. FALLON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Escape then becomes much more difficult. The Bible aptly sums up addiction's downward spiral. King Solomon wrote, "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?" (Prov. 18:14). So long as a person can hope for a better future, they can bear up under hardship. But, once their spirit is wounded, depression, cynicism, loneliness, past trauma, anxiety and other issues come to the fore.

Soon, addicts feel utterly hopeless.

The more a person's mind works against them, the greater the allure of illicit drugs to provide an escape from the misery of their situation, albeit an illusory and temporary one. While this is occurring, other problems grow worse.

The intersection of homelessness, addiction and mental health presents a complex challenge. While some organizations strive to enhance access to substance abuse and mental health treatment, there are legal limitations on forcing individuals to participate in these programs.

The U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) 2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health found that 89.7 percent of Americans with a substance use disorder did not receive any treatment. This includes hospitals, rehab facilities, mental health centers, emergency rooms, private doctor's offices, self-help groups and even prisons.

When someone realizes that they need help, treatment can be effective for some. However, treatment is complex and involves changing deeply rooted ideas and behaviors. Addiction is powerful, temptation is pervasive and the detox process can be excruciating. Of those who voluntarily seek treatment, about half will return to using drugs.

Eliminating addiction and reducing demand seems impossible.

What About Prevention?

Another approach to decreasing demand involves coordinated boycotts. When someone aims to send a message to a company or industry, the most effective strategy targets its finances. Governments employ various measures against foreign entities, such as sanctions, tariffs and excise taxes. Similarly, people can boycott companies, industries and even nations.

Some boycotts have been successful. The Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1965 ended racial segregation on public transportation in the city. A 35-year-long boycott of South African-made products contributed to the dismantling of apartheid in 1994. Since the fur trade boycott began in 1985, several nations have banned fur farms, while Israel and California have placed bans on the sale of fur.

However, sustaining and coordinating the will of the people to force change often fails. The *BBC* reported that boycotts often do not succeed because people struggle to maintain the anger needed to make personal choices that detract from their ease of life.

Effective boycotts rely on the targeted group caring about its customer base, and the impact negative press has on its bottom line. The people who produce fentanyl do not care who their product hurts or even kills. Any boycotting efforts—whatever that would look like—are sure to fail.

Also, an increasing number of individuals believe the government should refrain from interfering in people's private affairs within their homes. "Live and let live," the thinking goes.

Educational programs face many of the same challenges. The "Just Say No" campaign, initiated by First Lady Nancy Reagan, began with this memorable slogan. Drug use dipped *slightly* in the 80s during the height of the campaign.

The Just Say No campaign oversimplified a complex topic, used fear-mongering and stigmatization of drug users as criminals and was not as easy to agree with. Perhaps its greatest

weakness was that it relied solely on individual willpower. The campaign eventually fizzled out and died.

The Drug Abuse Resistance Education's "D.A.R.E. to resist drugs and violence" campaign came later, targeted at schools and school-aged children. It used many of the same methods as the prior campaign and was criticized for using outdated information and scare tactics—primarily from having police officers deliver the information. It also failed to have any significant impact on drug use.

Modern educational programs use social-emotional learning, peer support, skill-building and access to resources to help with the socioeconomic and racial complexities of drug use. Despite these updated tactics, the SAMHSA report shows either steady or increasing drug use for nearly all drugs by all age ranges. Even the number of pregnant women using drugs is rising.

The shift toward legalizing marijuana has raised questions about the severity of other drugs. The mixed messaging—where tobacco, alcohol and marijuana are legal, while fentanyl and cocaine are not—can lead people to disregard educational efforts.

Reducing drug demand through education and marketing faces too many challenges to be a real solution.

A Reason for Hope

President Nixon also stated this in his 1971 message to Congress: "If we cannot destroy the drug menace in America, then it will surely in time destroy us." This statement, made half a century ago, remains eerily relevant today. As America continues to grapple with the drug crisis, is there any hope for a solution?

Yes, but it requires a complete transformation of our world.

The Bible paints a vivid picture of a future time when suffering will cease, because "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

When the Kingdom of God comes, the world will be full of abundance and peace. The prophet Micah recorded that "they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken it" (4:4). Zechariah repeats this promise in his book (3:10).

These conditions are nothing like the horrific drug crisis in America today. Imagine a world where the needs of people and communities are met, suffering vanishes and all pain, sorrow, anxiety and hopelessness disappear. Not just gone, but "the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind" (Isa. 65:17).

The scourge of drug addiction will be utterly forgotten. No one will feel driven to pursue escapism in a society full of life, happiness and joy!

Another biblical promise says that people "shall not hurt nor destroy in all My [God's] holy mountain" (Isa. 11:9). An industry that destroys people's lives through the production and use of drugs will simply not exist in a world where no one hurts or destroys others.

Understanding God's Plan will blossom into a "hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast" (Heb. 6:19). Just as an anchor steadies a boat when the tide rises or falls, this hope can keep you steady during life's ups and downs.

Those who would turn to drugs when facing life's stresses will know who to turn to, and how. Consider what David said in Psalm 43:5: "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

A society that obeys God is the *only* winning strategy in the war on drugs. That world will materialize when God's Kingdom finally comes to Earth.

Read our booklet *What Is the Kingdom of God?* at rcg.org/witkog to learn more about this Kingdom and how you can prepare for it now. There is hope for the entire world. □

What a New President in Taiwan Means for the Island, China, the U.S. and the World



Taiwanese Vice President Lai Ching-te, also known as William Lai, center, celebrates his victory with running mate Bi-khim Hsiao, right, and supporters in Taipei, Taiwan (Jan. 13, 2024).

AP/CHIANG YING-YING

Taipei, Taiwan (AP) – Taiwan’s incoming president is promising more of the same. The question is what that will bring, not only for Taiwan but also for its relations with China, the United States and others with an interest in the island of 23 million people that supplies many of the advanced semiconductors that keep the world running.

Lai Ching-te, the winner of the recent presidential race, has pledged to continue the policies of his predecessor Tsai Ing-wen, who built up the military and strengthened ties with the United States and other sympathetic countries.

The candidate that China demonized during the campaign—a Chinese spokesperson called Mr. Lai a “destroyer of peace”—won. So, what does China do now?

Analysts expect some kind of show of displeasure but say the strongest signal may not come until May, when Mr. Lai takes office. It could be military exercises around the island, restrictions on imports from Taiwan, or both.

China’s stated preference is what it calls “peaceful reunification.” That outcome appears increasingly unlikely as Taiwanese reject the idea of becoming part of China, particularly after the curbs on democracy and freedoms that China imposed following massive protests in Hong Kong.

A former U.S. government official said that China’s urge to punish Taiwan will be blunted by two considerations.

“One is that Beijing wants to restrain President-elect Lai, not provoke him,” said Danny Russel, who was assistant secretary of state for East

Asia and the Pacific in the Obama administration.

“The other factor is Beijing’s reluctance to provoke Washington just as the U.S. heads into the turbulent campaign season,” he added. “Xi Jinping has invested considerable effort and credibility in tamping down tensions with the West, both to lower China’s profile in an American election year and to buy space to deal with myriad problems at home.”

Mr. Lai is likely to continue to seek partners and unofficial diplomatic ties around the world despite Beijing’s efforts to isolate Taiwan.

The incoming government is faced with a host of domestic issues, including a slowed economy since the pandemic and long-term challenges such as inequality, housing affordability and unemployment. □

No Diploma, No Problem. Navy Again Lowers Requirements as It Struggles to Meet Recruitment Goals



The USS Paul Hamilton is seen after passing through the Strait of Hormuz (May 19, 2023).
AP/JON GAMBRELL

Washington (AP) – The U.S. Navy is starting to enlist individuals who did not graduate from high school or get a GED, marking the second time in about a year that the service has opened the door to lower-performing recruits as it struggles to meet enlistment goals.

The decision follows a move in December 2022 to bring in a larger number of recruits who score very low on the Armed Services Qualification Test. Both are fairly rare steps that the other military services largely avoid or limit, even though they are all finding it increasingly difficult to attract the dwindling number of young people who can meet the military's physical, mental and moral standards.

Under the new plan, Navy recruits without an education credential will be

able to join as long as they score 50 or above on the qualification test, which is out of 99. The last time the service took individuals without education credentials was in 2000.

“We get thousands of people into our recruiting stations every year that want to join the Navy but do not have an education credential. And we just turn them away,” said Vice Admiral Rick Cheeseman, the Navy's chief of personnel, in an interview with *The Associated Press*.

He said that of the more than 2,400 who were turned away last year, as many as 500 of them could score high enough to get in. He said he has already sent an order to his recruiters to start the new expanded effort, adding, “I'm hoping all my recruiters have called all 2,442 of them in the last

72 hours, and we'll see how it goes... We'll try to get some test takers this weekend.”

In the wake of the pandemic, the services have faced significant enlistment challenges. COVID-19 forced the military to shut down recruiting stations and they were closed out of high schools and many public fairs of events where they historically found success reaching prospective candidates.

But even as things opened up, the military struggled to compete with higher-paying businesses in the tight job market, particularly as companies began to offer the types of benefits—such as college funding—that had often made the military a popular choice. Those economic problems were only exacerbated by the sharp political divide in the country and young people's fears of being killed or injured going to war.

Last fiscal year, which ended September 30, the Navy, Army and Air Force all failed to meet their recruitment goals, while the Marine Corps and the tiny Space Force met their targets. The previous fiscal year, the Army fell 15,000 short of its enlistment goal of 60,000, and the other services had to dig into the pools of delayed entry candidates to meet their recruiting numbers.

Mr. Cheeseman said he believes the biggest risk is that they do fail boot camp at higher rates, but he said the difference has not been significant so far for the low-scoring recruits brought in last year. Overall, 11.4 percent of those recruits did not finish boot camp, compared to less than 6.5 percent of the high-scoring sailors.

“We just finally decided, okay, let's go,” he said, adding that the service was looking for other ways to reach untapped talent. “My argument for accepting that risk is that we have capacity of boot camp. We're not filling the seats. So I'm willing to take a risk.” □

Global Anti-Corruption Efforts Are Faltering, Survey Finds

Berlin (AP) – Efforts to fight public sector corruption are faltering around the world, in part because of a “global decline in justice and the rule of law since 2016,” according to a corruption index released in January.

Transparency International, which compiles the annual Corruption Perceptions Index, found 23 countries at their worst level since the global ranking began almost three decades ago, including both high-ranking democracies and authoritarian states.

On the reported decline in justice, the group said that “the rise of authoritarianism in some countries contributes to this trend, and even in democratic contexts, the mechanisms that keep governments in check have weakened.”

“Corruption will continue to thrive until justice systems can punish wrongdoing and keep governments in check,” Transparency International chair Francois Valerian said in a statement. He added that “leaders should fully invest in and guarantee the independence of institutions that uphold the law and tackle corruption.”

The organization measures the perception of public sector corruption according to 13 data sources including the World Bank, the World Economic Forum and private risk and consulting companies. It ranks 180 countries and territories on a scale from a “highly corrupt” 0 to a “very clean” 100.

Among the countries hitting their lowest level were relatively high-scoring democracies such as Iceland, the Netherlands, Sweden and Britain. Authoritarian countries including Iran, Russia and Venezuela also dropped.



Department store windows display the Danish flag and the Danish crown in Copenhagen, Denmark (Jan. 13, 2024).

AP/MARTIN MEISSNER

Denmark led the index with the highest score for the sixth consecutive year, with 90. It was followed by Finland with 87 and New Zealand with 85. The others in the top 10 were Norway, Singapore, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Germany and Luxembourg.

The United States was unchanged with a score of 69, putting it in 24th place.

At the other end, Somalia again had the weakest score with 11. It was followed by South Sudan, Syria and Venezuela with 13 each; Yemen with 16; and Equatorial Guinea, Haiti, North Korea and Nicaragua with 17 each.

The global average was unchanged at 43 for the 12th consecutive year, and more than two-thirds of countries scored below 50.

The report found “little to no meaningful progress” toward curbing corruption in the Asia-Pacific region and expressed concerns about “opacity and undue influence” in justice systems in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Arab countries’ average score on the index hit an all-time low of 34, and sub-Saharan Africa remained stagnant at 33.

Even in western Europe and the European Union, the best-performing region, Transparency International

found that “weak accountability and political corruption are diminishing public trust and enabling narrow interest groups to exert excessive control over political decision-making.”

It pointed to “weaknesses in judicial systems” in Poland, with a score of 54, and Hungary with 42.

On Poland, the report noted the previous governing party’s “systematic efforts...to monopolize power at the expense of public interest.” It acknowledged the new government’s commitment to uphold the rule of law, but said the ousted governing party continues to exert “considerable influence” over the judiciary.

Ukraine, with a score of 36, continued an 11-year improvement despite Russia’s invasion by focusing on reforms of the judicial system, which are an element of its bid to join the EU. But the report said that “the existence of a significant number of high-level corruption cases remains a major concern.”

Russia’s score dropped to 26. Transparency International said that the government’s “pervasive control of public institutions facilitates the widespread abuse of power without accountability” while judicial independence is eroding. □



“WE SHALL BEAT OUR SWORDS INTO PLOWSHARES”

These words, which mark a special sculpture on the grounds of the United Nations headquarters in New York City, come from the biblical book of Isaiah. Yet even more than a lofty ideal or nice-sounding idea, this Bible verse will come to pass—and soon. Read *How World Peace Will Come!* to learn exactly how this will occur.

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