

# T<sup>GCI</sup>oday

GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA  
AUTUMN 2014

A  
COMMUNITY IN  
ACTION

*The  
Lasting Supper*

SEP 2014  
**DISCOVERY**

## WELCOME



John McLean

## DISCOVERY

**T**HE NEW YEAR began wonderfully well with the Summer Education Program (SEP) camp at Morisset in NSW. The camp was a great occasion of fun, friendship, learning and discovery. Thanks to Camp Director Al Kurzawa, and to Carissa Warren and the National Youth Ministry Team for their hard work in planning and running such a successful camp.

SEP is an important part of the ministry of our fellowship. We are very grateful for God's grace and rich blessing on the camp. Thank you all for your prayers and for your support of the camp and the campers who attended. We couldn't do it without your generous contributions, or the contributions of the amazing staff who volunteered their time, talent and resources to serve our young people at the camp.

The SEP community is intimately connected to the community of the church, and the rich history of serving our youth through past SEPs.

We celebrate the camp in this issue of *GCI Today*. We also continue celebrating the various ways GCI is involved in mission around the world. We are a small fellowship, but in the grace of God our network and reach exceed our size. Our organisational structure is designed to reflect our theological transformations, while facilitating the relationships and networks that exist around the world.

In this issue, as we also reflect on the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus through this Easter season, we pray you will discover even more of the goodness and grace of God expressed to us in Christ. During this season of celebration of the hope, transformation and life of the gospel, we hope you will find much encouragement for prayer, joy and thanks.

"Discovery" was the theme of SEP this year. Discovery is itself a joyful experience. And there can be no greater discovery than finding out who God is. There is no greater joy than discovering the God revealed in Jesus, who is a God of love and grace. Our response to this can only be heartfelt thanks and gratitude. We express this in prayer, and in how we live – how we care for and serve one another, as we share in the privilege of being included in the life and love of the relationship between the Father and Son through the Spirit.

May your journey of joyful discovery deeper into the heart of God continue this Easter season.

*John McLean is Mission and National Director, Australia*

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## MISSION STATEMENT

GCI Today is published by Grace Communion International to celebrate and share the good news of God's love in ways that express practical **help, hope and encouragement**



SEP 2014

# Sharing the journey for 11 special days

by Al Kurzawa

**Rain!** The first full day of scheduled camp activities and it was raining. The campers were clustered into the worship hall singing as we started our day with our normal worship service.

**W**E HAD 30 minutes of discussion after the worship service and another 15 minutes before the first outdoor activity so there was time for the rain to stop. But with grey clouds on the horizon the drizzle didn't look like it would let up any time soon.

Most of the 96 campers, the most we had ever hosted at the Morisset site, had arrived on a beautiful sunny day. The 61 staff had spent three days in preparation for the campers to arrive, and their commitment was evident when the first bus load of campers (driven from Queensland by Keith and Bev McLean) arrived and were enthusiastically greeted and made to feel like they were "home away from home".

This was mirrored again the next day when the bus from the Sydney airport arrived carrying more than 50 campers who had flown in from other states. The whole camp let out loud cheers greeting the newly arrived teenagers and there were many hugs for those returning campers

renewing past SEP friendships. The look on the campers' faces was priceless when they realised this great, big, excited, and loud turnout was all for them. Staff quickly introduced themselves to the campers, offered to help carry their luggage and showed them to their dorm rooms where they would take up residence for the next eleven life changing days. There was electricity in the air as the camp was now full with campers and staff.

Too much electricity apparently! It was raining and the first time slot of outdoor activities included a basketball class and, for the first time, 9-Square In The Air. The schedule guru quickly went into action and, working with the basketball staff led by Kirk Jackson and the drama staff led by Ben Warren, a Plan B quickly developed and was implemented. From a campers' point of view, there was a barely perceptible difference. And that is the best way to summarize this camp. Though there were inevitable hiccups leading up to camp, and continual challenges and obstacles that the staff had to meet and overcome throughout camp, from a camper's perspective (based on several responses) it was the best SEP ever.

Campers participated in daily discussions around our theme of "Discovery"

using the passage from Luke 24 where the two disciples discovered that Jesus was alive and had shared in their journey back to their home in Emmaus. In addition to the normal camp activities such as basketball, waterskiing, and dance class, campers were also introduced to mud pits, 9-Square, and water balloon battleship. The campers literally had to get the mud out of their eyes, and hair, and teeth, and several other body cavities after going through the mud pits run by the camp's Outdoor Adventure staff. As one camper observed, "The mud pits is the best and worst idea ever!" Introduced at one of the US camps, 9-Square In the Air is based on the common schoolyard game four-square. On Facebook, a previous camper asked what the game was all about and staff member Mark Symonds summarised it appropriately: "You have not lived until you have played and lost the Kingship at 9 square". There was a line of 20 campers or more at times waiting for their chance to work their way into the coveted middle King square.

During the middle of the camp, we slowed things down a bit for one morning to allow the campers and staff to catch up on a little rest. The camp was allowed a bit of a sleep in as we had brunch and then a late morning celebration service. This







year we had the privilege of GCI Australia's National Director John McLean and his wife Heather visiting for several days. John and Heather have served at 20 SEPs. John gave the main message at the celebration service and talked about the journey of SEP. He reminded the campers that at the first Australia SEP there were staff members who almost 30 years later now hold positions as GCI vice president (Russell Duke) and Deputy Director of CAD in USA (Greg Williams). He encouraged them that somewhere down the road, they too could be staff at SEP and play influential roles in the future of GCI here in Australia.

That day was also an Open Day and several visitors and families joined us, participating in the celebration service and then watching as our normal activities resumed that afternoon.

This year parents were kept up to date on daily activities through the GCI Youth Facebook page. Pictures and quotes were uploaded daily and parents were able to get a feel for the activities and fun their kids were having at camp. Sarah and David Jordison (David is GCI Office Manager) put together a wonderful little video in the style of the old silent films from the 1920's on what a regular day is like for a camper. The video had more than a hundred hits





the first day it was posted.

On the eleventh day, the campers are escorted back onto their respective buses. Amongst the campers and staff new friendships have formed and older friendships strengthened. Most give me a hug goodbye, saying they will definitely see me again in two years. I know most will be back as campers and I look forward to some of them coming next time as staff.

At the end of camp, after the last camper has been safely transported to the airport for their trip back home, and all activities and support areas have been packed up and cleaned, SEP staff – exhausted and spent – could ask themselves, “why do we do it?” Why give so much of ourselves over these two weeks? Why open up and share our journey and our stories while learning and sharing the campers’ stories over those energy filled and energy sapping 11 days? Because after the last camper is back home safe and sound, the staff are ready to turn around and to do it all over again.

There is something intangible but very special in knowing that as our loving God journeys with each camper every day of their life, we are invited to join in and participate on each camper’s journey for 11 days. It’s a humbling invitation but an exhilarating and purpose-filled experience

that every staff member treasures for the rest of their life. 🌍

*Al Kurzawa was SEP camp director and pastors the Grace Christian Community church in Seaford, Vic., and the Morwell, Vic. GCI congregation.*



- 96 CAMPERS FROM AROUND AUSTRALIA
- 61 STAFF
- 11 DAYS OF ACTIVITIES
- DAILY FACEBOOK UPDATES
- DISCOVERY DISCUSSIONS
- NEW ACTIVITIES: 9-SQUARE AND DRAMA

VISIT [HTTP://WWW.GCI.ORG.AU/HOME/MINISTRIES/YOUTH/SEP/](http://www.gci.org.au/home/ministries/youth/sep/) FOR MORE STORIES AND PHOTOS ...

## 29 SEPS HIGHLIGHT THE COMMITMENT OF AN ENTIRE COMMUNITY

**SEP 2014 WAS** the 29th national SEP camp in Australia. There were more than just 61 staff members serving the campers. There was a whole community made up of contributors throughout GCI Australia who have served over the last two years to make sure SEP 2014 was a success.

SEP is only possible because of the investment that countless people make. Staff donate their vacation time, their own travel expenses, and then a lot of hard work to make SEP happen. There are also many more people across Australia who donate money to the Generations Fund on a regular basis each month or year to help fund the camp. There are individuals and congregations who sponsor campers and fundraise to make sure that teenagers – including many who are not in regular church attendance – are able to attend camp.

Thank you to all those that have supported SEP in all the different ways over the past two years to make SEP 2014 such a success.

Many of you were prayer warriors leading up to and throughout camp. I have been told by several people that they really appreciated the prayer list that went out to the different congregations before camp detailing each day of camp and listing the different staff members in their different roles. People told me they felt like they knew exactly what was going on each day at camp.

This is a very big thank you to all those who haven’t just invested in SEP, but have also invested in the future of GCI in Australia. Thank you for your support, funds, and prayers. And a big thank you to the staff who served at SEP this year. You did an amazing job giving of yourselves above and beyond what was expected. Without volunteers who are willing to serve during those two weeks of camp, there wouldn’t be an SEP.

On behalf of those who have been positively impacted by attending an SEP over the last 29 camps, thank you to everyone who has made that possible.





IT WAS TO be their last meal together before he died. They didn't know it. They thought they were eating together to celebrate great events of the past, unaware that a much greater event was unfolding before them. An event that fulfilled everything the past events and celebrations had pointed to, and much more.

It turned out to be a very strange evening. Something was up, even if they were quite unable to fathom what it was. There was quite a shock at the beginning, and after that Jesus said all kinds of strange and amazing things.

First, he washed their feet. Now, whether their feet were dirty or not, this was breathtakingly unexpected. Sure, Judea was a desperately dry and dusty place outside the rainy seasons. Dust everywhere! And you had to be careful where you stepped when you were walking down the streets of Jerusalem! Transport and haulage was of the four-legged kind who left their calling cards as they trudged along. And people threw all kinds of rubbish into the streets, too. Open-toed sandals were cool, but could collect unwanted souvenirs of travel.

Even a really devoted disciple would never conceive of washing his teacher's feet. Not even (especially?) a very pious one. But here was their teacher washing their feet! Peter would have none of it – until Jesus convinced him otherwise.

For a moment, Jesus was visibly upset as he told them he was going to be betrayed. What?

by John McLean

# The lasting Supper





By whom? Why? They weren't sure. Before they could delve further, he said something about now being glorified, and God glorified in him.

Then he said he was about to go away. Hmm ...

Then he went on, "A new command I give you: Love one another." Now they knew this was weighty. They knew about loving God with all their heart, and their neighbour as themselves. But this, Jesus said, was new. Peter was often hard to love; John wasn't called the Son of Thunder for nothing; Thomas questioned everything, even the questions; Judas kept a suspiciously tender eye on the accounts (and had he really been a member of the assassins?); and Philip sometimes seemed to be a conversation behind.

"As I have loved you, so you must love one another," he said. So our love for one another was intimately connected to his love for us ... did he mean they were to love one another with the very same love he had loved them? This seemed to be at the heart of what he was telling them. Yet there was much more, each bit as eye-popping and astounding as the last. He called them his friends, not just his servants, not just his followers.

They were expecting a meal of roast lamb, herbs, and the various toasts and prayers of remembrance of God's great saving acts in history. Sometime during the evening, he stood up and did something entirely unexpected: he broke bread, telling them this was his body broken for them. And he took wine, telling them this was the cup of the New Covenant in his blood. Ah, "covenant" they knew of – but a new covenant, in the body and blood of Jesus? That was amazing.

"If you have seen me, you have seen the Father," he told Philip. Say that again? Did they hear correctly? "I am the way, the truth and the life," he continued. Then he told them again he was going to leave them, but not as orphans. He would send "another Comforter," or Counsel-

lor or Friend to be with them, the Holy Spirit, the "Spirit of truth." "On that day, you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you," he said. This was a mystery, taxing for even the most poetically inclined fisherman.

"In," he said. Not just with, or near, or by, or alongside, but "in". Whatever the full meaning, he was making some startling claims about linking the Spirit's dwelling within Christians to the fact that the Father and Son are in each other. They were still adjusting to the shock of hearing Jesus call himself God's Son throughout his ministry; here he was saying that in the Spirit the disciples share in the relationship with the Son as the Son shares in the relationship with the Father. And this was connected to love.

The metaphor of the vineyard, vine and branches was vividly real. So, they were to "remain", "abide", "dwell" (live) in Christ, in the same way the branch remains, lives, in the vine. Jesus isn't just giving commands, or examples, but offering an intimate relationship – nothing short of dwelling, living, "in" him. So that's how we can love as he does – by sharing in his life and love with the Father!

And still, there was more. Somehow it seemed to reach its climax when Jesus said that knowing the Father and the Son was eternal life, and went on to pray for the disciples, and all those who would follow them. His prayer centred on unity, "oneness". This seemed to be the high point, the focus that he had been leading to all night.

He prayed to the Father that "they may be one, as we are one". This "oneness" was the very oneness shared in the relationship of the Son with the Father. Not just a oneness of purpose, of "being in it together" (although it included that), but a oneness of relationship, fellowship – the very communion of the life of God. **Love. Unity. Oneness.**

And then it all went sour. That very night, he was indeed betrayed, taken by a detachment

of soldiers and officials, abused, mistreated, subjected to a sham trial, and finally handed over to be whipped and crucified. The worst kind of death, reserved for common criminals. The hopes and dreams of the disciples were crushed, annihilated. Completely devastated, they retired to a safe room and locked the doors.

Only the women went to the tomb, crying, heart-broken, early on the Sunday morning. Only to find the tomb empty! And an angel asking them why they were looking for the living among the dead – "Jesus is risen," the angel said, alive, resurrected. It was too good to be true. No words could describe it. And the male disciples simply didn't believe it.

Until he miraculously appeared in their midst, the resurrected Jesus in his glorified body. "Peace" he blessed them. And breathed on them and said "receive the Holy Spirit". United with humanity through his coming as a human being (incarnation), and taking humanity's sins upon himself in death, this union with humanity remained in his new resurrected life – redeeming and taking humanity into his relationship with the Father. The resurrected and ascended Jesus offers the way for all people to share directly in fellowship with the Trinity.

"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you," he said. And, in the grace of God and the fellowship of the Spirit, these first disciples did just that. Joyfully, thankfully, prayerfully, they shared the good news of the resurrected, ascended Jesus. As they reflected on that LAST SUPPER together, they shared with others the amazing grace of God – of hope, even in the midst of the blackest suffering, of new life, resurrected life. The new life of the New Covenant, the life of dwelling "in" Christ. Of sharing through the Holy Spirit the same relationship that the Son shares with the Father. A life of love, unity, communion. Oneness with God, in fellowship with one another and the Triune God for eternity. ☉



# Community in action

by John McLean

*As our fellowship has grown in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, much of our doctrinal/theological understanding has been transformed. It has been a miraculous journey from legalism into grace, deeper and deeper into the heart of God. The more we focus on the God revealed in Jesus, the more we continue to learn and be transformed.*

AS PART OF the journey, we have prayerfully sought to transform our structures to better reflect our theology and beliefs. All living organisms have some kind of structure – there simply cannot be no structure at all. And of course we need to get the legal and compliance issues right in order to function responsibly and accountably within the increasingly complex and sophisticated legal, accounting and governmental environment.

While no structure is of itself perfect, we have prayerfully sought to reflect the communion, the *perichoresis* – that is, the **mutual indwelling of Father, Son and Spirit** – in our functioning structures. The old, very tall pyramid organisational structure had to be changed. (Again, we can't simply remove the old structure and not replace it with something. And in some organisational contexts the pyramid structure might be appropriate.) Simply inverting the pyramid, while communicating some useful intent, doesn't actually provide a solution in terms of a number of practical issues, including legal compliance and ecclesiastical supervision.

So we moved some time ago to what is perhaps best called a Network Organisational structure (sometimes called a hub and spoke structure). While maintaining accountability, this organism is relational, organic, team-based and grace-driven. A visual diagram will help explain it, and help demonstrate how we now are operating.

At the **national level** the centre (hub) is "GCI", the legal entity in Australia, administered by the Mission Developer/National Director and the National Office. These offices and functions provide ecclesiastical supervision and support, and legal, accounting and policy compliance in the

day-to-day operations of the church. Since we registered in Australia in 2001, the Grace Communion International Australia national board has operated as the national governance body. (Before this the church was registered as a foreign branch of an overseas company.)

The circles around the "rim" of the bigger circle (e.g., "GCI A", "GCI B", "GCI C") represent our congregations, which are local expressions of the national entity "GCI" and are each under the care of pastors and pastoral teams. These congregations are directly connected to the hub through pastors, pastoral teams and local councils or administration teams. At a fundamental level, this connection involves doctrinal agreement (our Statement of Beliefs), ethics, and policy compliance. But there is more, much more.

Note that the arrows point in both directions, reflecting relationship and fellowship – a desire for "mutual indwelling". The connection is both a temporal and legal one, and a spiritual one, bound in fellowship through the Spirit. The connection is one of prayer and spiritual community (gender neutral), "at one" in Christ. There are different roles, but we are "one" in Christ.

An important part of the diagram is that the congregations are also connected to one another, around the rim of the wheel. Congregations are not in competition with one another, or completely separate from one another, but brothers and sisters working together in love for the gospel. Congregations are connected to each other through the hub, and also through the spiritual bonds of our collective adoption and lives in Christ. No congregation is a separate entity, alone, but all are connected to the national administration (body) and to one another as an integral part of the whole.

Such a structure presents us with an enormous opportunity. Led by the Spirit, this functioning structure resonates to the deepest needs in our being as we have been created by our loving Father – to willingly and enthusiastically work together in love, mutual respect and grace for the good of the gospel, knowing all our endeavours are not in vain because they are all "in the Lord."

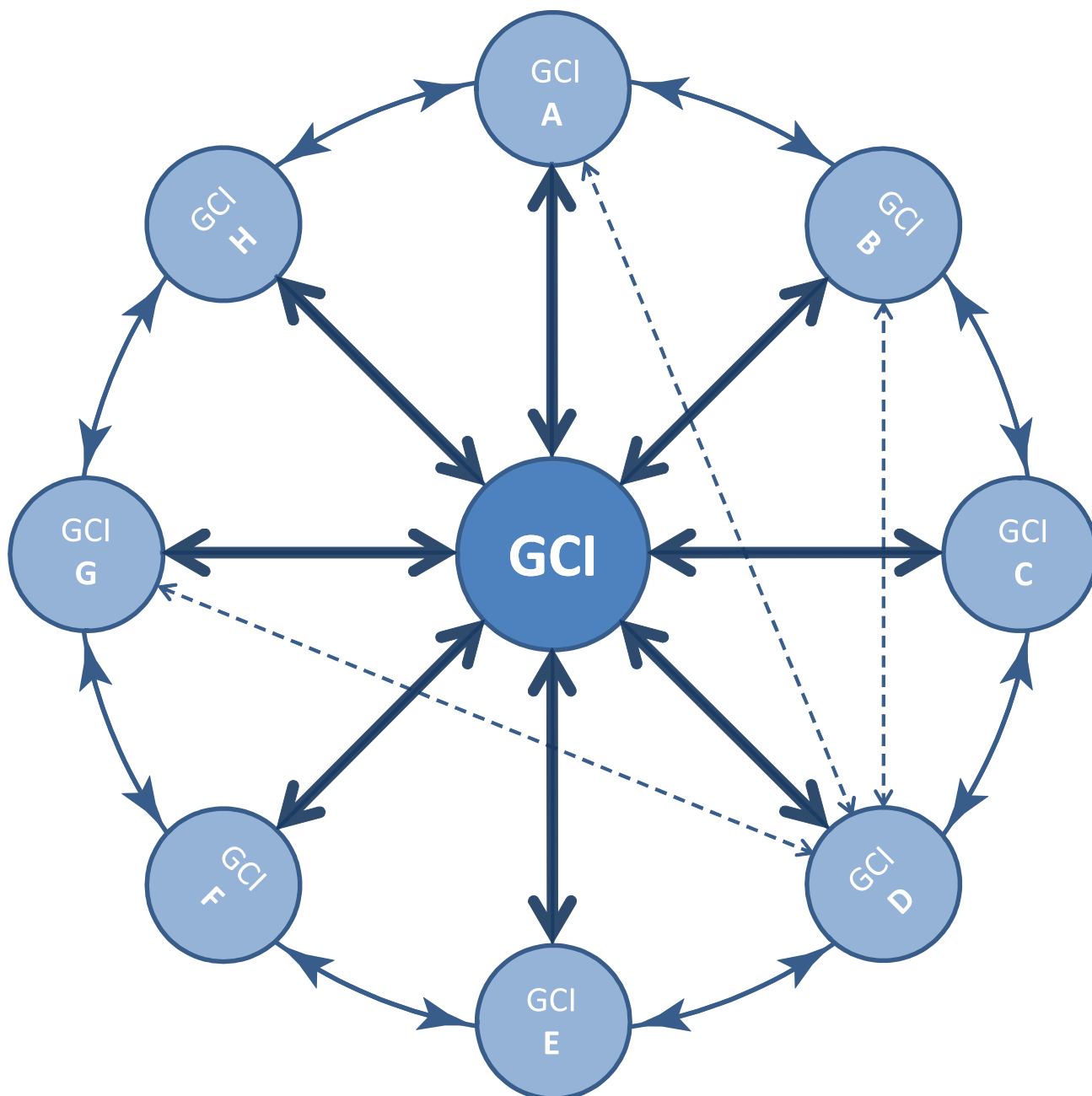
One of the beauties of this model is that while this model is depicted here at the national fellowship level it can

**We are blessed with a wonderful network of relationships around the world**

equally be applied at a **local congregational level**, with the local pastor and the various teams and ministries and at the **international level**. We are blessed with a wonderful network of relationships around the world. At the international level, we would see the central hub ("GCI") as the international headquarters in Glendora, under the leadership of our President and Pastor General, Joseph Tkach.

Internationally, the circles around the rim represent the various administrative regions and/or countries administered internationally by our denomination. For example, "GCI A" could represent Africa (where the Mission Developer is Kalengule Kaoma); "GCI B" could represent the Philippines and Northern Asia (MD/ND Eugene Guzon); and so on. FYI, in addition to these two administrative regions,





GCI includes: Canada (MD Gary Moore); Australia (MD John McLean); Latin America (MD Hector Barrero); UK and Europe (MD James Henderson); Southern Asia and the Pacific (MD Rod Matthews); Caribbean (MD Charles Fleming).

The Mission Developers (MDs) – the term used by our denomination for those responsible for administrating these various areas – are directly connected to the central hub, accountable to and reporting to the President. We are responsible to the denomination at the international level for many of the same things our pastors are accountable to the MDs for on a national level.

Again, the circles around the rim are also connected to each other. That is, the MDs also form a team, working together. The “circles” are not in competition with each other, but work together, helping

and supporting one another as possible. For example Australia contributes directly to the mission activities in Southern Asia and the Pacific, Africa, the Philippines and others.

As we become more familiar, and more comfortable, with this model the benefits will become more and more obvious. On our journey, this represents a wonderful opportunity to really live in grace, to give expression to our commitment to work together in love and fellowship. As we live together “in Christ”, our motivation is to want to participate, contribute and make this mutuality of communion function as God would have us do.

It is a model, a structure, which really works “in the real world” and it reflects an organic way of working in community. And, in God’s love, grace and fellowship, within the limitations of all structure, we

believe is one which best reflects our theology, and thereby enables us prayerfully, joyfully, thankfully and intentionally to live out the *perichoresis* of communion. 🌐





We are invited into a  
transforming life ...

# Joyful, prayerful, thankful

by John McLean

*Let's face it – for most of us, there are days when we aren't that joyful, or prayerful, or grateful. There are days when we are just plain grumpy and complaining.*

**B**UT THIS IS the apostle Paul's advice: be joyful always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances. As *The Message* puts it, "This is the way God wants you who belong to Christ Jesus to live" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-8).

Joy, prayer, thanks. Fine sounding words...but when we are tired, over-worked, rushed and stressed, they can sound more like a distant echo, and intimation of a better life that we wish for but don't experience. When the car has broken down, our child is sick, the dog has chewed the furniture, the sink is blocked (not now!), and you have been unfairly criticised (behind your back), it can all be a bit much.

The author of this advice, of course, was no stranger to pain and suffering himself. Beaten, stoned, jailed – just to name a few. So clearly this was more than some self-help talk or gratuitous advice. He's not suggesting that if you are happy, then be joyful, or if something extraordinarily good has happened, be thankful. These would well be our "natural" responses. He is suggesting that it is not the immediate circumstances themselves that are the determining factors of our condition, but our "belonging" to Christ, which creates joy and gratitude.

Further, he is saying that rather than occasionally experiencing these things from time to time, we are to become joyful, thankful and prayerful people. And these things go together – it's hard to be thankful without being joyful; it's hard to be joyful without being thankful. It's hard to do either without prayer.

The reason Paul can give this advice is because of who God is – not because of who we are. The God revealed in Jesus is a God of love – of lavish grace and fellowship. A God who shares himself with us. In Paul's letters, he sets out the deep theological truths of the gospel – that we indeed "belong" to Christ, that all our lives are "in Christ", that we are God's much loved children. Before the world began, he says, God in his love and grace always planned to adopt us as his children (Ephesians 1).

Therefore, he is saying, our response is joyful, prayerful and grateful. His own prayer for the Colossians includes that they might have endurance and patience, "joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of God" (Colossians 1:11-12). Since we have been qualified (reason for great thankful joy for anyone who has thought they had to qualify themselves!), and been brought over into the "Kingdom of the Son he loves", our prayer to the Father is joyfully thankful.

These things we celebrate in this season of the year as we reflect on Jesus' life, crucifixion, death, resurrection and ascension. In him we see the full extent of God's love, and the transforming power and hope that love creates.

We are brought into the communion of the Father and Son through the Spirit. We share in the same relationship as the Son with the Father – we too are his beloved children. So we can share, too, in the Son's communication with the Father, and the Son's joy and gratitude. We are not left on our own, to summon up these traits by our own willpower and determination; we experience these things in fellowship with God. We are invited to share in the life of God – a transforming life of grace, gratitude, joy and communion. So while Paul's encouragement is for us to be intentional

## Our "belonging" to Christ creates joy and gratitude

about joy, prayer and gratitude, we don't have to be intense. Rather, we rest in Christ, in his joy and gratitude and communion with the Father.

This is true of us individually. But Paul is writing these words to the church. He is really concerned about our life together, our life as the church. We are, together, in a relationship with the Triune God and one another for which we can only be grateful and joyful, and want to express that grateful joy in prayer. So Paul is saying God's desire is for those who belong to Christ to be a communion that always rejoices, prays continually, and is characterised by gratitude always.

A joyful church. A prayerful church. A grateful church.

That's something to joyfully pray about. And gratefully and joyfully participate in and share with others. ☺



Words spoken into my life as a child during my early elementary education set me on a specific course. When I began first grade, I was thrilled to make new friends, and the days spent playing kickball on the playground and doing pasting projects were good days. I distinctly remember my mother coming to meet the teacher and get a report on my progress. Mrs. Rogers told my mother, "Greg is a happy child." My mother was pleased about my temperament and my social skills, but years later she shared with me that she knew I couldn't read a word and Mrs. Rogers didn't seem to be concerned. The summer after first grade my mother spent many evenings with me teaching me to read the Dick and Jane books.

Second grade was a bit easier, especially since it was a split class that had both first and second graders together. Other than adding rope skipping to recess time, this year was rather uneventful.

By the time I got into third grade things picked up. I recall being assigned to do reports about the states, and I prepared reports on Michigan and Georgia. I recall that Michigan produced apples, and that was exciting because my dad grew apples. I remember that Georgia is the "Granite State," and that seemed appropriate because I had visited Stone

Mountain Park, the largest exposed granite monolith in the world. School was clicking for me, and then one day my heart stopped when the teacher called me to her desk.

Miss Pryor was a young, pretty teacher who was full of life and energy. She was also a teacher who didn't put up with misbehavior from her students. One time when the class was being disruptive she lined up all the boys and girls and gave us each two swats. She didn't mess around.

Now this spirited lady had called me to her desk. What had I done? Was I in trouble? Would my mother be coming to another meeting? Miss Pryor called me close and she pulled out her grading chart. She went through each subject one by one and showed me that I had an "A" in each area of study. Then she said, "If you keep it up you can make all A's." Wow, I, the kid who couldn't read in first grade, was able to get all A's! Her words made such an impact that not only did I make all A's for that nine weeks, but I went on to make all A's for the entire year.

The rest of the story is quite interesting. When I gave my report on Georgia, I also displayed a model C5A Galaxy jet that my uncle in Georgia worked on as an aerospace engineer with Lockheed. Miss Pryor later told me that she mused in her mind while I gave my report, "Who

cares about what Greg's uncle does in Georgia?" Long story short, I played a role in introducing Miss Pryor to my bachelor uncle, and Miss Pryor became Mrs. Garrett, my aunt.

My new aunt, Aurelia Garrett, continued to track my life and continued to encourage me and celebrate each level of education I achieved. This coming spring I expect to graduate with a Doctorate in Ministry, and the one regret I have is that Aunt Aurelia won't be at the ceremony; she died at the young age of 64. If she were there, I would hug her and thank her from the bottom of my heart for the words she spoke into my life when I was only eight years old.

The Bible has much to say about the power of the tongue. Proverbs 18:21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit" (ESV). To put it simply, our words can be used for good to build others up or for evil and tear others down. The talkative nature of people can easily produce words that have to be eaten in shame, or words that are powerfully life-giving. Aunt Aurelia spoke abundant, positive, life-giving words into me and the power of those words has resounded in my mind and heart throughout my lifetime. 🌐

# Words of life *at a* Young age

by Greg Williams







# Finding financial balance

by Craig Kuhlman

**A** PRUDENT FINANCIAL WORLDVIEW can be summed up best in one word: balance. In other words, as stewards of God's wealth, no matter how great or small our personal wealth may be, operating with a sense of balance is a best practice.

In the mid-1980s, shortly after entering the wealth management field, I had a bank trust client named Velma whose husband was gravely ill. Sitting on the edge of his bed, I helped guide his signature on a stack of stock powers to fund his trust. He died that evening.

After some time passed, Velma came to my office and proudly showed me the new diamond tennis bracelet she had just purchased for herself. As we talked, she lamented that her husband

was always worried they would need long-term medical care and medical expenses would consume their wealth. She confided that she asked him time and again to splurge a little on a trip or cruise, but his anxiety prevented it. She said, "Now I have all this money and no one to enjoy it with. If you can learn one thing from me, enjoy yourself and don't live with only tomorrow in mind." Her words of experience spoke to me personally and to my students over the years.

I spent 14 years serving on the adjunct faculty of two small universities, teaching finance, investments and other related business courses. In my investment and personal finance courses I usually began by asking,

"What is your financial philosophy?"

In other words, what is your financial worldview, or the lens through which you make financial decisions?


I gave my students three options: a) He who dies with the most toys wins; b) A penny saved is a penny earned; c) Make a lot, give a lot away. Depending on the worldview/philosophy, two individuals beginning with the same financial resources can end up in very different places.

Velma lived a life of "a penny saved" and lamented that she and her husband could have afforded to enjoy a few toys, but didn't. Years later I counseled a client who had the opposite view. He wanted to retire within five years, but he owed so much money on the toys he had purchased that he couldn't. He wouldn't be able to enjoy the freedom of an unstructured lifestyle as soon as he hoped because of debt.

Common sense tells us we need to meet our current obligations before future ones. However, if we spend every day focusing on current needs, the future will soon catch up with us. Balance is the best way to manage both.

We may not find ourselves in the same circumstances as Velma or the spendthrift executive, but we all have been given a share of God's wealth to steward appropriately. When we begin with balance, we can end up where we want to be while enjoying the ride along the way. 🌐

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# When “No thank you” is rude

by Carrie Smith

I grew up using the phrases “please,” “thank you,” “yes, sir” and “yes, ma’am.” These were the polite things to say, especially when I wanted to show respect to my elders or those in authority. These lessons are still valuable to me in adulthood, and I have tried to instill them in the children I have had the privilege to work with and mentor along the way.

I was a little surprised, though, when I found myself in a place where some of my ideas about politeness didn’t apply. My friend Kayla (Shallenberger) Elliott and I taught school at Young Ambassadors Private Primary School (YAPPS) in Malawi in southeastern Africa, and we found a much different standard of politeness there. The school’s Director, Fadrick Nihaka, who is also a church pastor, and his wife did everything in their power to make our stay comfortable. I was not used to such treatment and it felt odd to receive so much attention. Kayla and I both wanted to fit in, to live simply and to not be a burden to anyone, but we didn’t initially realize our idea of burden was different from theirs.

One of the first culture shocks was when Dorothy was hired to be our housekeeper and cook. Neither Kayla nor I had ever had someone

to help us with housework. We were the domestic staff for our parents; doing chores, keeping our rooms clean, doing our own laundry and helping out around the house. So to have someone take care of these needs for us seemed excessive. What we didn’t understand, though, is having a house caretaker is a part of Malawi culture. It is expected, and even our housekeeper had a house girl who helped care for her young son and do housework at Dorothy’s home while she was at work.

Our first reaction to Dorothy’s service was to say, “No, thank you” and try to do the work ourselves, or at least to help her with various chores. What we didn’t realize was that saying, “No, thank you” to Dorothy meant we were rejecting the provisions Pastor Nihaka and his wife made for us. In our attempt to be gracious and polite, we were actually communicating a lack of respect for them and their culture.

I am glad to say that Kayla and I learned quickly and soon began to appreciate Dorothy and all she did for us. We chose to learn from her, asking many questions about her life and culture. We continued to learn this “new” politeness at church as well. Food and drinks were served after the first church service we attended in Malawi. This is

something Kayla and I were used to, so we didn’t think much of it when we left to get our jackets; we wanted to be polite and let others go first. When we came back, though, no one had eaten yet because they were waiting for us, their guests, to go first. Oops.

The hardest place for us to learn not to say, “No, thank you,” though, was at school with the children. Every day students would try to give us part of their lunches, one of their favorite school supplies or some other item that held great value to them. Kayla and I did not want to take food from the children because they didn’t have that much to begin with. What we failed to realize was our “polite” refusal of their gifts was received as rejection. This was the last thing we wanted, yet we knew we could not take their food or limited school supplies from them. So we compromised. If a child tried to give us a package of cookies, we said we would accept only if we could share them. If they wanted to give us a sticker or bracelet, we made sure they had something to match or we would give stickers in return (Kayla was smart and brought a lot of stickers with her).

The results of no longer saying, “No, thank you” were incredible. Instead of feeling uncomfortable about being given gifts, we joined in the excitement and joy the children felt when giving. We got to see the beautifully radiant smiles of the children when we accepted a gift, and we began to see them sharing with one another as well. We reciprocated with gifts of hugs and spending time with the children during recess and after school. As we learned to accept their gifts, we began to recognize that the children themselves felt honored and accepted by us. This was important as some of the children rarely felt acceptance, a fact that still breaks my heart. Yet, even in that I praise God because he allowed Kayla and me to participate with him in showing his children they are accepted, valued and dearly loved.

God gave us a glimpse into his heart for his children and the delight he has when we accept his gifts instead of “politely” saying, “No, thank you.” Now, when I am given a gift, I am more mindful of the gift-giver’s heart and identity as a child of God rather than any temporary discomfort I may feel at the moment. I learned that receiving a gift is just as important as giving one. ☺





# The story of God's relation

*In the second century, a Christian leader named **Marcion** suggested we get rid of the Old Testament. He created his own version of the New Testament in which he had only Luke's Gospel and several of Paul's letters, but he removed all the quotes from the Old Testament, saying that the Old Testament God was inferior, simply the tribal god of the Jews.*

**M**ARCION WAS EXCOMMUNICATED for spreading this idea, and the early Christian church started to form its own canon of Scripture, including four Gospels and all the letters of Paul, including the quotes from the Old Testament. The Christian church still keeps the Old Testament as part of the Bible, believing the Old Testament gives us a context that helps us understand who Jesus was and what he did for our salvation.

Still, the Old Testament is confusing to many—so different from the New Testament. All that history and all those wars don't seem to have much to do with Jesus or with Christian life today. There are laws and regulations on one hand, and on the other there are Jesus and Paul, who seem to be talking about something quite different. We have ancient Judaism on one hand and Christianity on the other.

Some Christians emphasize the Old Testament more than others, keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, the dietary laws of the Israelites and even some Jewish annual festivals. Other Christians are more like Marcion—they never read the Old Testament. A few are even anti-Jewish. In Nazi Germany, prejudice against Jews was unfortunately supported by the church and went along with a dislike for the Old Testament.

Yet the Old Testament Scriptures speak of Jesus Christ (John 5:39; Luke 24:27), and it is good for us to hear what they have to say. Further, they share God's larger purpose with humanity, the reason that Jesus came to save us. The Old Testament, as well as the New, tells us that God wants to live with us. From the Garden of Eden to the New Jerusalem, God's goal is that we will live with him in harmony.

## In the garden

Genesis 1 describes the creation of the universe by a stupendously powerful God, who simply speaks everything into existence. God said, Let this happen, and it did. He gave the command, and it happened.

In contrast, Genesis 2 describes a God who gets his hands dirty. He enters the creation, forms a human being from dirt, plants trees in the garden, talks with the human, and fashions a companion for the man.

Neither story gives us the full picture, but together they reveal different aspects of the same God. Even though God has the power to create by command, he chose to be personally involved in the creation of humanity. He spoke to the man,

brought animals to him, and orchestrated events so the man would take delight in his new companion.

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Although Genesis 3 reports a tragic turn of events, it also reveals more about God's desire for humanity. After the first humans sinned, God was walking in the garden just like normal (3:8). The all-powerful God had become like a human, making noise as he walked in the garden. Though he could appear instantly if he wished, he chose instead to meet the man and woman on their level, at their speed. This did not seem to surprise them; God may have walked and talked with them for many days.

They had no fear before this, but now they were afraid, and they hid. Although they were shrinking away from the relationship, God did not. He could have easily left in a huff, but he did not abandon what he had made. There were no lightning bolts or displays of divine anger.

God asked the man and woman what they had done, and they answered. He then told them the consequences they would experience as a result of what they had done. He then lovingly provided clothes for them (3:21) and took steps to ensure that the humans would not live forever in their state of alienation and shame (3:22-23).

Throughout Genesis we see God interacting with Cain, Noah, Abram, Hagar, Abimelek, and others. Of special importance for us is the promise he made to Abraham: "I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant...to be your God and the God of your descendants after you" (17:1-8). He promised an ongoing relationship with his people.



# relationship with his people in the books of Moses

Far left: Apostle John (left) and Marcion of Sinope (right), from Morgan Library MS 748, 11th century

## Calling a people

Many of us know the basic story of Exodus: God called Moses, brought plagues upon Egypt, brought Israel through the Red Sea to Mt. Sinai, where he gave them the Ten Commandments. But we often overlook why God did these things.

Talking to Moses, God said: "I will take you [plural] as my own people, and I will be your God" (Exodus 6:7). God was seeking a personal relationship. In the personal covenants made in that culture, marriages were formalized with the words, "You will be my wife and I will be your husband." Adoptions (done usually for inheritance purposes) were made with the words, "You will be my son and I will be your father."

When Moses talked to Pharaoh he quoted God saying, "Israel is my firstborn son... Let my son go, so he may worship me" (4:22-23). They were his children—his family—with inheritance rights.

God offered a covenant that would give the people direct access to him (19:5-6)—but the people told Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die" (20:19). Like Adam and Eve, they were afraid.

Moses went up the mountain for more instructions from God (24:18). Then come several chapters about the tabernacle, its furniture and the worship. But amidst all this detail, we should not overlook the purpose: "Have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them" (25:8).

From the Garden of Eden, through the promises to Abraham, through the calling of a people out of slavery, and even into eternity, God wants to live with his people. The tabernacle was a place for God to live with his people, to be accessible to them. God told Moses, "I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God.... I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them" (29:45-46).

When God passed the baton of leadership to Joshua, he told Moses what to tell him: "The Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you" (Deuteronomy 31:6-8). That is a promise for us today, too (Hebrews 13:5). That is why God created humanity from the very beginning and why he sent Jesus to save us: We are his people. He wants to live with us. 🌐

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**BE JOYFUL ALWAYS; PRAY CONTINUALLY; GIVE THANKS IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES. THIS IS THE WAY GOD WANTS THOSE OF YOU WHO BELONG TO CHRIST JESUS TO LIVE.**

—1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18





*For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

*– Ephesians 3:14-21*