

Everyday

Life

CELEBRATION

Featured Articles:

Rejoicing Even in Times of Uncertainty

Living Right in a World Gone Wrong

What is all the Rave about Rhodiola Extract?

Always Hope

Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: (1 Peter 1:6)

Dear Readers:

"Rejoice in the Lord alway: *and* again I say, Rejoice."
Philippians 4:4 KJV

When we talk about rejoicing in the Lord, it means that we can be happy in Him because He is the joy giver. Though we have trials and tribulations and experience problems, those things do not have to take away from us being joyful in the presence of our God. Since God is the one who gives us joy, remember that the Holy Spirit who lives within us is the one who helps us produce that joy by the power of God.

It matters how we celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas. We have the tendency to focus on family and food for Thanksgiving and then go into the Christmas hustle and bustle.

For the last two years, it doesn't matter what part of the world you live in, what culture you are, or what religion you practice, we have been plagued and impacted by a virus that caused a pandemic shutting the entire world down. Last year, and it looks like it's the same for this year, our holidays cannot be spent with all of our family members. Our focus has been altered. Suddenly, we do not care about what we are going to cook, what we are going to wear, and who we are forced to invite that we may not even like. Instead, we are left at home with the people who actually live in that home. Regardless of who is vaccinated or isn't vaccinated, no one is immune to catching the virus. All of a sudden, the holidays that once brought some kind of joy and celebration along with some usual holiday frustrations, has suddenly flipped to sadness, anxieties, and fear.

Let me explain. We have not been given the go ahead to get together for any of these holidays by the government. We didn't get to spend holidays with our family last year, and it looks like it will be the same for this year. Some of us like myself don't get to celebrate with a family member because they have stepped to the other side. My father is now in Heaven. My brothers



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Lord alway:
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and nieces and nephews did not get to see my father last year due to the virus as I'm sure many of you can relate to. So, we have this sadness of not being able to be with our loved ones. Anxieties are at the highest they have ever been around the globe. The anxieties will not even allow some to be around a table to share meal with others. It seems as if the anxieties continue to get worse and worse, deeper and deeper. The human touch has been kept from us for over a year almost going into two years now. You can surely understand why someone would be anxious to sit next to a person at a dinner table that they have not seen in close to two years, breathing the same air as them. Now crippling fear has set in. Fear is rampant around the globe. I'm afraid that I have painted a very ugly and hopeless picture in this paragraph, but we cannot ignore what is in our face. However, hold on, I have the solution which is foolproof.

Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords, is our solution. He is the answer. Our hope is in Him. Our trust is in Him. Isn't that the reason that we as Christians celebrate the holidays? Isn't Jesus the reason for Christmas? Isn't He the reason we give thanks? Isn't He the one who protects and shields us? And most importantly, isn't He the one who leads us and takes us by the hand?

I am speaking now for those who believe Jesus Christ is the reason for the season. We have done a poor job in helping those who don't know Him or even those who might know Him, as well as explaining why we must celebrate Christmas to begin with or what the purpose of December 25 is.

It's interesting that the names of the holidays, Thanksgiving and Christmas, say exactly what we should be doing and what we should be celebrating.

Thanksgiving is a holiday, yes, but thanksgiving is something we do year-round and not just one day on the calendar. Thanksgiving is a day where we get together and remember what blessings have been bestowed upon us as God's children. We thank God year-round and we celebrate Thanksgiving by not only giving thanks but taking time to rejoice one more time.

In His Service,
Rev. Dr. Teresa Allissa Citro
Everyday Life Editor-In-Chief

CELEBRATION

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REMINDER OF GOD'S PROVISION AND CARE

BY ELLIANNA DESTINEE CITRO

In this time of trials and hardships, it is a blessing to be reminded of God's provision and care. When we look back at history, we are reminded of the years of difficulties that many men and women faced. In each occurrence, however, we see a light of celebration despite the circumstances. In many instances, it is clear to see how the hand of God providentially made a way .

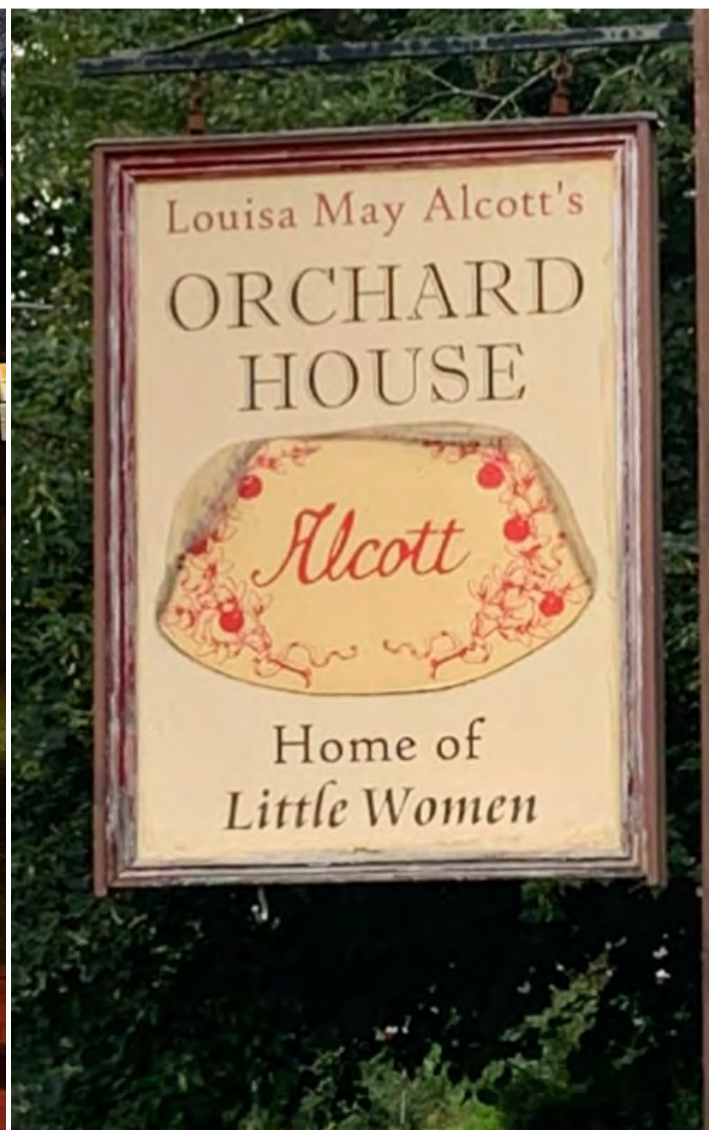
I am going to share with you small portions of three different centuries of history from my home state, and a brief sample of the story of a well-known 19th century woman who faced many difficulties but was also able to persevere despite the trials.

No matter where you're from, I pray that from this short lesson of American history you will learn that it *is* possible to celebrate in troubling times.

“This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.”

Psalm 118:24 (KJV)

I've been blessed to live in a state that is home to many historical sites, Massachusetts. Perhaps best known for the towns of Plymouth, Concord, and Lexington, among many other locations of significant historical importance. From the landing of the Pilgrims to the birth of the Revolutionary War, this New England state



is rich in vital American history. There are many statues and landmarks that are all reminders of the struggles, losses, and victories that many men and women saw in their lifetimes.

The Pilgrims landed on our shores in the December of 1620. The Battle of Lexington and Concord occurred in the April of 1775. Here we currently are in 2021.

Over the span of several centuries, all over the country, we've endured through countless hardships. The United States is an image for the whole world of a people who walked through the impossible and, *with God*, made it through, and who also still celebrated many things even during those troubling times.

The Pilgrims faced the brutal New England winters and were devastated by illnesses. Imagine the faith that it took for these men, women, and children to leave everything they had known in Europe to settle here!

Sadly, by the spring of 1621, only a few months after stepping onto American soil, half of the people had died. However, despite the circumstances, the remaining settlers decided to stay here. *That same year, they celebrated the most well-known Thanksgiving.*

The Battle of Lexington and Concord was the beginning of the Revolutionary War. No matter where you live, you've probably heard of famous names and locations from the American Revolutionary War, a vital time in history. Perhaps an image of General George Washington in prayer at Valley Forge comes to mind, or an image of the perilous fighting at the Battle of Yorktown. In Massachusetts, however, is where it all started.

I've been to both Concord and Lexington countless times. Everywhere you look, there is a piece of history. One of my favorite places to visit is Minute Man National Park, home of the North Bridge, the location of the first gunshot of the Revolution, described by 19th century author Ralph Waldo Emerson as "the shot heard round the world."

It was during the war that the Declaration of Independence was signed, that day we celebrate each year as Independence Day. Several other minor holidays were established



and celebrated during the war, they were mostly celebrations of battle victories.

A Great Jubilee Day was celebrated on May 26, 1783, finally celebrating the end of the fighting. September 3, 1783, over eight years after the initial battle, the War of Independence officially came to an end.

Fast forwarding another hundred years brings us to the 19th century, specifically the 1860s, during the American Civil War. A time when neighbors turned against each other, and hate and evil ultimately bred war. It was after this time that one of many famous authors put ink on paper and wrote stories. One of the stories she wrote was inspired by herself and her family.

Louisa May Alcott, best known for her most famous novel *Little Women*, lived in 19th century America. She was very familiar with the hardships of the Civil War, even serving for a time as a nurse. Later in life she became a successful author of many novels and short stories. Also, both an advocate for women's suffrage and an abolitionist, Louisa believed in reform.

As with any time of war, physical and emotional pain was prevalent during this time in history. With most families' patriarchs off at war, those at home had to hope and pray for their safe return, all while taking care of their own worries at home. Along with the hard times came the good times, times of celebration, especially around the holiday season.

Though many things in Louisa's novels are fictionalized, a warm scene from *Little Women* that comes to mind is from the beginning of the story as the March family (Louisa's fictionalized version of her own family, the Alcotts) prepares to celebrate Christmas. One night, Mrs. March returns home with a letter from their father who, although too old to serve as a soldier, is serving as a chaplain and couldn't come home for another year. She reads the tender letter to her four daughters, leaving them all sniffing at the kind words.

Although the war still raged that winter, and their father was a long way from home, the March family still found joy in celebrating that year's Christmas. Smiles abounded that Christmas. Though times were difficult, and they weren't wealthy, they were rich in smiles and joy. That same Christmas, the family decided to bring their breakfast to a poor, hungry family who were much less fortunate than they were. That kind deed brought them even more joy and reason to celebrate that holiday morning.

Although many moments in *Little Women* are fictionalized, the images of the true hardships and celebrations of that time are still the same.

For many years, the Alcott family lived in poverty, especially during their years living in Boston. That was the unfortunate price of being reformers. They continued living in Boston before finally returning to Concord and moving into Orchard House.



Later in the story and also in real life, one of the sisters, Elizabeth, becomes ill with scarlet fever. She contracted it while helping another poor family who was caring for their sick baby. Beth's death in 1858 took a devastating toll on Louisa. That same year, the oldest sister, Anna, became engaged to John Pratt. They married two years later in Orchard House.

In 1862, during the war, Louisa decided to serve as a nurse for the Union in Washington, D.C. She saw the brutality of war for several weeks before contracting typhoid, though thankfully she recovered.

Louisa's first book was based on a collection of letters she had written about her experience in the Union hospital. After the success of *Hospital Sketches*, she went on to write many short stories and novels. In 1868, by recommendation of her publisher to write a story for girls, Louisa began writing *Little Women*, a semi-biographical novel of her and her family. The beloved novel about the four March sisters immediately became successful with young girls.

Louisa May Alcott passed away in 1888 at the age of 55. Her literature continues to be read by many all over the world. To this day, *Little Women* remains a well known and loved story about the circumstances of young women at that time in history. It is a coming-of-age story that shows the troubles that they faced; but it also warms the reader's heart with its moments of love and celebration, such as the two Christmases that are celebrated in the story. Through her story, we are shown what it is to be joyful and light-hearted even in dark times.

Though in troubling times it may seem too difficult to find joy in ordinary things or to joyfully celebrate special events, remember that it *is* possible. Whether if it's a holiday or a birthday, or if you receive good news, or even if it's a sunny day outside, there is always a reason to celebrate, even during hardships. Like the March sisters in *Little Women*, although times were difficult and their father was absent from their home, they still found joy, peace, and love in that holiday season. Through history, God teaches us vital lessons that we can still use. Although these events took place centuries ago, the lessons are still relevant today.

One important lesson that I hope to show here is the possibility and importance of celebration.

Though we face many trials in this life, we are not meant to sit in the dark and dwell on the troubles. We are meant to be light, which includes spreading joy and positivity. Dwelling on the negativity of hard times will only spiral you into deeper sorrow and will make it harder for you to see the hope that we have.

Many significant occurrences in history show us that the Lord is and always has been in control. Just as He made a way through difficult times for those in the past, He will make a way for us.

Our ultimate reason to celebrate is because of the hope and salvation that we have in Jesus Christ. Through Him, we know that we can persevere and overcome any troubles that we face. We can always celebrate and be joyful in remembering what He did for us on the cross, and that He always provides light, endurance, and reassurance when we're traveling down long, dark roads.

Remember, at all times, we have reasons to celebrate!

“Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the LORD hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.”

Isaiah 49:13 (KJV)

Candid Conversation

AN INTERVIEW WITH REV. DR. TERESA ALLISSA CITRO

BY LINDA AGNES KNOWLES

One of the things I love about being in New England are the seasons, and now I'm enjoying my favorite season: the Fall season. It's a time where we make hot cocoa, and the aroma of apple pie wafts through the air. It's a time where the coffee shops break out into apple spice coffee and apple spice baked goods. The leaves on the trees are changing color. For me, it's just a happy time of year, and SUDDENLY, my mind comes to a crashing halt when reality breaks into this beautiful scene. The world is upside down. A virus overtook the world. The children in the neighborhood I live in stay at their houses on their own porches and in their own backyard and no longer play with the other neighborhood children. However, I have to admit it was good to hear the sound of their laughter and shrieks of glee as they ran around on their family property. And then Dr. Citro and I were on the phone having this candid conversation. Nostalgia was beginning to set in.

Linda: Dr. Citro, I find myself slightly irritated and frustrated. I'm sure I'm not the only one feeling this way. Yet even in the midst of the craziness and the everyday responsibilities, I still find joy and hope in the midst of it all. So, I have to ask the question to you, how do you celebrate God with everything that is going on especially since the theme of this issue is "Celebration"?

Dr. Citro: (laughing) Linda, you said a mouthful. (She then became very serious) You are not the only one who is feeling what you are feeling. We build ideas and thoughts around what we see in the holiday movies, and for the last two years, we haven't been

able to do that. So, depression is high as well as anxieties and fears; and nobody can be out there at parties wearing the latest fashions and attending a million parties. We have forgotten as a nation, and I would venture to say as the rest of the world, the reason we celebrate Thanksgiving in our country and the reason we celebrate Christmas, including the New Year. Linda, let me ask you a question, what is the meaning to you of Thanksgiving?

Linda: For me, Thanksgiving seemed to have its actual meaning taken away from me with all the preparations and making sure I knew where I had to be at what time. In viewing Thanksgiving, I

never looked at it as a one-day event. That one day seems to just pass away and pass away quickly. But its original meaning has been stolen by the holiday chaos and everything with it. So, how can people remember this Thanksgiving, amongst everything that tries to distract them, what it is all about and that it is not just something we do one day out of the year?

How do you celebrate God?

Dr. Citro: Well, Linda, let me tell you how we spent Thanksgiving growing up in my home. For me, Thanksgiving began with your grandmother, Agnes, preparing all of us in the church by shopping for dried fruits, nuts, hard candy, and anything that we could ship

food-related to the continent of India. When I was a little girl, I knew that Thanksgiving and Christmas were closing in as my mom and my aunt along with myself and my cousin Giovanna, went shopping to buy these items for the children in the orphanages of India. Then I remember the big party that would take place in the church with all the women gathering on Friday nights separating the items for the different orphanages and making sure the children would have food and candy to eat on Christmas morning. None of us had Thanksgiving before this particular mission's event was done. And, Linda, you remember we would ship out close to 2,000 pounds of this food to India. Then we would lay

hands on those packages (all the women and young girls) and praying for the missionaries, the orphanages, and the Indian children while the men were in the next room praying, reading God's Word, and discussing how much money for the missionaries they would send along with the food shipments. That, Linda, is the Thanksgiving that we have forgotten.

Linda: Those were the best memories I had of growing up with my Nonna (grandmother in Italian) Agnes. I always found her singing hymns of thanksgiving either at her home or in church. She was always making sure people were fed wherever they were. She just had that kind of heart. This brings back so many childhood memories. Why are you taking a stroll down memory lane?

Dr. Citro: (laughing at me) Because, Linda, we lost our way. We forgot how to really celebrate according to the Word of God. We forgot what it means to give. We forgot that in giving, there is a joy that wells up within us. I want to go back in time, and I want to reinstate what really brought joy to me as a little girl, as a teenager, and now as young woman.

Linda: I'm laughing because I knew where you were going with this. Those are the things that brought joy because I helped out in those mission events my grandmother was involved in. My Nonna Agnes had done these kinds of events even before she got married, even before Dr. Citro and I were even born. This is the legacy my grandmother left me. I followed in her steps in being the secretary for a Missions Ministry at a church I attended for years, and because of her influence, I had gone on several mission trips overseas as part of short-term mission teams.

Dr. Citro: Linda, this is true celebration. This is what God wants us to do. It is not just about sitting down and having dinner with our family and friends, attending cocktail parties and wearing the latest outfit that will make us stand out. All those things are fine to do. We all do them, and there is a place for them. However, genuine real joy comes from a heart of serving. May I give you another example?

Linda: Sure. Go ahead.

Dr. Citro: My mom and her sister, my aunt Maria, knew how to celebrate and they celebrated the holidays like no one that I know. My brothers, my cousins, and I never knew that my mom and my aunt would cook for the homeless on Thanksgiving Day and then drive to where they were and brought them food. Now, People, I'm not talking about peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. We're talking about pasta al forno, meat, sodas, a tray of cookies, and real Italian bread along with all the utensils that they needed to have the same Thanksgiving dinner we were having at our home. Thanksgiving has always been my favorite holiday and a special one because of these examples that I just gave. You see, Linda, what we do as wives and mothers is important because we showcase what it is to be thankful. When a person is thankful, they will give because they want others to experience what it is to be blessed. This, Linda, is real celebration, not the fancy table people gather around without having done anything for those who are underprivileged.

Linda: Dr. Citro, this is what I call good stuff because it is a reminder that we are all to have the heart of a servant to those who are not just believers but those who are not in the family of faith. I'm a firm believer in that since we have been given the ability to walk and talk that we should be extending ourselves to help those in need. Life is not just about us, but it is about living for God and doing what He would have us to do, to be His hands extended to those all around us. Dr. Citro?

Dr. Citro: Linda, it looks like the Holy Spirit is leading us in another direction in this interview because it is more of a candid conversation between you and me. I like this direction. Let the Spirit flow.

Linda: What would you say to someone who doesn't want to be a blessing to others as a demonstration of Thanksgiving?

Dr. Citro: I would say to them that if you want to experience real joy, it is not in the receiving, but it is in the giving. We have heard this all of our lives. Joy is in the giving, not in the receiving. Linda, God is not a killjoy. He wants us to experience real joy. That is where all of the true meaning is in the significance of the word, "celebration." Linda, what I just said above is all wrapped up in the book of Acts. All someone has to do is read the

book of Acts. It clearly states and demonstrates what the church of Jesus Christ is to look like. For example, let's look at Acts 2:46. It says, "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." You see, Linda, when the body of Christ is in one accord, they will show it in their behaviors. Romans 13:14 tells us, "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." The mind of Christ is to help and to bless. He doesn't want to see anybody lacking especially when it comes to survival of a life. In order for a life to be sustained, it requires food. If our mind is with that of Christ, then we will not be selfish and only think about ourselves. The amount of food that gets thrown away after holidays is astounding to me, and it leaves people with just an immediate joy. However, it is soon over after the party. Isn't this what we're remembering today what we did as young girls, teenagers, and young women? Do you feel that joy spilling over as I do at this moment?

Linda Yes because this is what being a servant is all about. The focus is not about us, but it is doing the will of God. It is walking in step with His will and His commands.

Dr. Citro: And, Linda, this kind of joy is not superficial.

Linda: Even though Dr. Citro and I are conducting this interview by phone, the joy that is inside both of our hearts is overwhelming. It has brought us back to a wonderful time of our lives when there was the sound of laughter and joy as people helped out each other. It has taken us back to a wonderful time when those we know worked together with one mind and one purpose to help those who were hurting, those who were homeless, and those who were in need in our country and around the globe. Dr. Citro, why did you choose the cover story to be about Louisa May Alcott?

Dr. Citro: I wanted to show our readers the importance of the true meaning of celebration. I can use bible verse after bible verse, character after character from the Bible. What the Alcott Family portrays is what you and I have been talking about and have experienced in our own lives in a different way. The book Little Women written by Louisa May Alcott is a very powerful story that has captured the attention of people around the world. As you know, Linda, this family lived here in the town next to me. It's a very famous home where people come from all over the world to tour. It is still standing as the original home, and the school is attached to it. Ellianna and I were exploring all the historic homes in our community just a month or so ago, and Ellianna and I went to the Alcott home. I found myself sharing with my daughter the true meaning of how to celebrate. The Alcott Family had to

**The mind of
Christ is to help
and to bless.**

celebrate Thanksgiving, Christmas, and the New Year under very harsh conditions. Food was scarce and there was a war. Yet, you found this family to be a giving family, a family of heroism who looked out for their community, lending a helping hand to the hurting, and delivering food that they themselves did not have. God used them to showcase the Jesus in them that they proclaimed. As we know, Linda, we are hurting as a nation and as a world as they were. However, they took the focus off of themselves and chose to become a blessing to those around them.

Linda: I find that when we, like the Alcott Family did, take the focus off ourselves to be a blessing and to do the task that God set before us, that it helps joy well up in us.

Dr. Citro: You got it, Linda. I'm not going to retell the story here since it's very well written by Ellianna. It's outstanding. She got the meaning that I was trying to drive home to her that the holidays are not just about her but about what you give because of your life. Your life has meaning. Let me just point out one thing about this story. Daniel Chester French was a student of Amy Alcott who designed the monumental statue of Abraham Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. He also did the Minuteman Statue known as *The Shot Heard Around the World*. He also did *The Statue of Life* and *The Alma Mater*. These are just a few amongst the rest. Amy's father Mr. Alcott promoted womanhood and allowed their daughters in a male-dominated world to be whom God had created them to be. Their mother Mrs. Alcott changed the world for women by promoting the right for women to vote. So, you see, Linda, they didn't care that they were in the midst of a war. They had no new clothes to wear at the fancy parties. Their sister died of scarlet fever because she tried to help families in her

community who had children that came down with scarlet fever. If you've seen the movie, you will clearly feel the joy despite their hardship. They celebrated. The Bible tells us to rejoice at all times, and this is what I believe the world has lost in today's society.

Linda: So, we can take a lesson from those who have gone on before us, those who have lit the path for us to see what true celebration is all about.

Dr. Citro: Linda, very well said. May the readers see through the power of the Holy Spirit as they take and put on the mind of Christ, the true meaning about the word "Celebrate." God wants us to celebrate His way, not our way. His way has blessings that never end. The memories are recalled years later and well up inside of us still, that joy unspeakable and full of glory. That is what we need.

Linda: To our readers, you have read it here. As you go about your time of celebration, remember what it truly means. We take joy in the God of our salvation. We rejoice and celebrate as God would us to, not how the world views it. As you go about into this holiday season, we pray that you are able to go in with renewed significance of these days we celebrate and bring it on into the New Year with you. God bless you.

Have a wonderful holiday season, Everyone! And remember the reason we are able to celebrate. We can celebrate because of the Lord who is the Giver of Joy, and He is the one who sustains us no matter what comes our way or what circumstances we find ourselves in. Much love to you all.

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REJOICING EVEN IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY

BY JUSTIN NOAH CITRO

In times of uncertainty, it is important for us Christians to rejoice in the hardships of this life because we know that Christ has overcome the world (John 16:33). That reason alone is cause for celebration because that gives us the assurance to press on. No matter what this earth throws in our path we must rejoice in the tough times because the Lord is with us.

Being strong and courageous is another step in celebrating. In this world, we know there many evils that come to seek, destroy, and belittle our faith. However, we are to fear not for Lord has gone before us to fight our battles both physical and spiritual. This is also another reason for celebration.

Through the course of this world, the Lord has told us to keep our faith strong and not to be swayed by the things of this world. The Bible tells us in Joshua 1:9 that the Lord has commanded us to be strong even though it seems tough to be strong. Again, I say rejoice and dance for the Lord has overcome!

Many Christians give up too easily in this world; many do not see God in the current situation that the world is facing with this Covid-19 pandemic. However, I assure you that God knows what He is doing in every situation. The Lord has already defeated this pandemic. We also know what the Bible says in Isaiah 54:17 that no weapon formed

against the people of the highest God shall prosper. That is another reason to celebrate!

We are the people of God, His sheep, chosen by Him to carry out the good work until we either die or are raptured into the air when Christ comes back that again is another reason for celebration the King is coming back for His people. From the very beginning of time until the end of the age,

the Lord will never leave us or forsake us. This world may try to bring us believers down, but those who afflict us do not know the power of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel! The Lord has fought for us in every battle we have faced in our own personal lives. This fact alone is cause for celebration because without the Lord's help we would not be able to do it on our own. The past year and a half has been difficult, but without help from the Lord, it would have been even more difficult.

**The Lord has
commanded
us to be
strong even
though it
seems tough
to be strong.**

Brothers and Sisters, I leave you with this rejoice and celebrate for the Lord is doing a new work! Build up your faith, trust in him, and make sure your heart is right with God, for the time and the hour of Jesus' return is getting closer and closer

LIVING RIGHT, IN A WORLD GONE WRONG

BY JONATHAN DISTAULO

Christendom is over. Christianity is not. You would do well to know the difference. (Read more about this from Mike McDaniel's book "Resurgent Church.") I may not be able to offer you solid quantifiable evidence to support my claim, but have you seen the storylines in the world news lately? How about our current political scene? The very ideas that helped shape historical and modern American society and culture have been turned upside down. Andy Stanley wrote an article titled "Why 'the Bible said so' is no longer enough," which as far as attention-grabbing titles go, certainly grabbed mine. Very interesting read. Here's my rhetorical question: "Do you feel your Christian beliefs and values are still welcomed at the local public school meetings, or town hall hearings?" If not, then I think you understand what this article is about. It might also be helpful to be reminded of what Jesus said, **"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake."** (Matt 5:10 ESV)

Let me suggest a harmless experiment; chat with your neighbor (or co-worker) about a church event, like a service or meeting, and see if they actually understand what you're talking about. Here's the catch, your neighbor or co-worker has to be under the age of 35. Is the Christendom vs. Christianity reality becoming even more clear to you now?

Perhaps this is a good thing. Being marginalized for your faith in Christ is precisely the kind of experience the New Testament church thrived in.

So how does one live right, or righteously, in a world that is increasingly hostile towards the Gospel? A passage from Colossians comes to mind: **"So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose**

garment. Never be without it. Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing." Col 3:12-15 MSG

Notice the absence of phrases like, "Stand up for yourself!" and "Don't let others take advantage of you!" in this passage. Reread it if necessary. I think it may be helpful to share some insight from the world of business law to further flesh out what this passage is going on about. In business law we learn that contracts are for the protecting of individual rights. When two parties enter into an agreement of some kind each party protects themselves against loss or suits, should the agreement dissolve somehow. Some Christians (most likely nominal ones) live their life or interact with the world around them as though they have entered into a contract. The Scripture teaches us something very different. God chooses to enter into a covenant with us, and covenants are for the surrendering of individual rights. Contracts protect rights, covenants surrender rights. Contracts vs. Covenants. Kind of like Christendom vs. Christianity, don't you think? Christians have entered into a divine covenant initiated by God. He alone has the right to demand perfection, righteous living, sinlessness, but He doesn't. He gives up that right for love. He sent His Son to pay the price for such a covenant to remain intact for eternity.

So, when you step outside your door and into this topsy turvy world, put on the garments God made for you: compassion, kindness, humility... you may not see the results you want but your job is to obey. The battle doesn't need to be fought; the battle has already been won. Give God's Word more "room" in your house. When you live out the Gospel you are more likely to be reminded of your covenant with God, His forgiveness of your sin, rather than what's wrong with your unruly neighbor or anti-faith co-worker.

Jonathan DiStaulo, MA, LPC
Foundations Counseling & Consulting, LLC

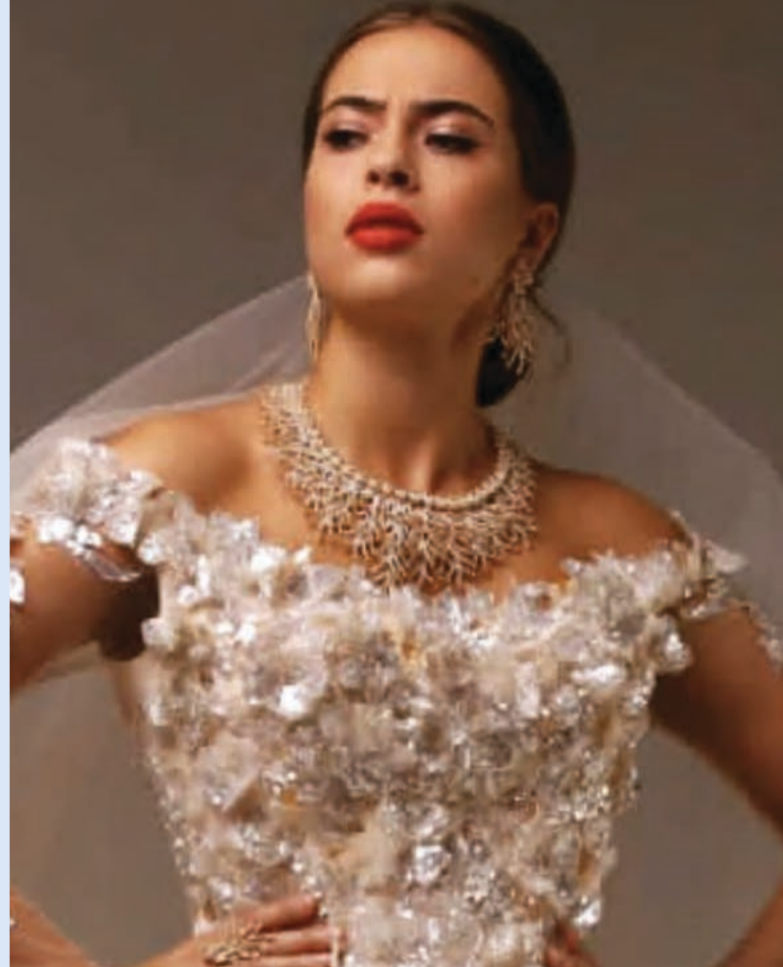
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MR. SALIM KATAYA IS A WORLD-RENOWNED DESIGNER WITH OFFICES IN DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES. HE BEGAN HIS CAREER IN FASHION IN DAMASCUS, SYRIA AND ROME, ITALY UNTIL THE SYRIAN WAR. HE THEN RELOCATED TO DUBAI. HIS DESIGNS ARE SHOWCASED ON THE FASHION RUNWAYS AND IN FASHION MAGAZINES AROUND THE GLOBE. HE IS A RESPECTED DESIGNER, AND HIS DESIGNS HAVE EARNED HIM MANY ACCOLADES. WE ARE HONORED TO SHOWCASE HIS COLLECTION FOR 2018.



Celebrate the Lord at All Times

BY PASTOR KENYON WATSON

Psalms 107:8-9 Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men! For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.

Psalms 118:24-29 CEV 24 This day belongs to the Lord! Let's celebrate and be glad today. **25** We'll ask the Lord to save us! We'll sincerely ask the Lord to let us win. **26** God bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord! We praise you from here in the house of the Lord. **27**The Lord is our God, and he has given us light! Start the celebration! March with palm branches all the way to the altar. **28**The Lord is my God! I will praise Him and tell him how thankful I am. **29** Tell the Lord how thankful you are, because He is kind and always merciful.

Celebrating the Lord should not be stressful, but it should be joyful. It should not cause you to feel pressured, but it should be a part of who you are. Celebrating the Lord is a privilege. Why? It is a privilege that you and I can give the Lord Jesus all the glory, praise, and honor that he deserves.

Within our natural state of mind, most of us believe that a person should only celebrate and praise the Lord when He does some good for them (such as giving you a car, house, child, etc.), when, in reality, this should not be so because God deserves to be celebrated at all times. He is the one who gave you the breath of life. Without Him, you would not be in existence.

David said it this way in **Psalms 66:16**, **come and hear, all ye that fear the God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul.** Here David was celebrating and praising God for His goodness, for who He is, and for what He had done in his life.

Celebration is not just a thought; it should be an action.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines *celebrate* as a means to proclaim, to keep, to commemorate, and to observe. These are some synonyms for celebrating: to bless, to exalt, to glorify, to praise, and to extol.

When we celebrate and praise the Lord among men, He, in turn, blesses and favors us with His goodness and mercies. David said in **Psalms 34:1-3**, **I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make its boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear of it and be**

glad. Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.

I will ask you these 3 questions:

1. What has the Lord done in your life that warrants your praise?
2. When was the last time you remember yourself celebrating and honoring the Lord?
3. Do you praise the Lord only when He does something you can see with your natural eyes, or do you celebrate Him despite the circumstances and the challenges that confront you?

**When we
celebrate and
praise the Lord
among men,
He, in turn,
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us with
His goodness
and mercies.**

Celebrating the Lord should not only be something you do in your secret place, but it should also be done in the presence of others, including your family. I believe it is vital and necessary that we honor and celebrate the Lord at all times, both in good times and bad times. Here are some scriptures that support this belief:

Psalms 145:6-8 – *Men shall speak of the power of Your awesome acts, And I will tell of Your greatness. They shall eagerly utter the memory of Your abundant goodness And will shout joyfully of Your righteousness. The LORD is gracious and merciful;*

2 Chronicles 7:3 – *When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, "He is good; his love endures forever."*

Isaiah 63:7 – *I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us*

Exodus 15:2 – *The LORD is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.*

Let's look at the life of the three Hebrew boys mentioned in the book of Daniel 3:23. These 3 boys were judged by king Nebuchadnezzar and sentenced to death by fire because of faith in their God. Yet despite their situation, they still held onto the word of God, glorifying, praising, and celebrating Him as Lord of all. Because of their faith in praising and honoring God, the Lord not only delivered these three Hebrews boys from the burning fire but also blessed and promoted them to a higher status within the province of Babylon.

Let's look at another example in the book of Esther. The people of God were between a rock and a hard place because Haman, a general to King Ahasuerus, plotted to destroy the Jewish people. Although the queen (Esther) was Jewish, she could do nothing to help her people.

Neither could the Jewish nation help themselves because they were already in captivity. Queen Esther knew that if God didn't show up for the Jewish nation, there would be no more hope for them. So, she took it upon herself to approach the King about Haman's plot, although knowing that her life was at risk because the queen should not approach the King unless he summoned her. Despite this, Esther and the Jewish nation fasted, prayed, and celebrated the Lord (Esther 4:16-17) for their victory over their enemy's plot to destroy them (Esther 9:1-32).

Through Esther's faith in praising and celebrating the Lord, she defied the status quo, a law and decree that cannot be altered once written.

If you are going through a season in your life that you don't understand, I encourage you to honor the Lord by worshipping and celebrating him and watch what will happen. I promise that your life will take a turn for the best because by doing this, you automatically grant the Holy Spirit the access to move in and realign everything in your life so they can be how God desires them. After reading this article, what will be your outlook on life? Will you remain where you are even when you know that the Lord has better for you, or will you celebrate and praise the Lord into your victory? The ball is in your court.



“Sing for Joy”

BY ALAN AND HILLARY LATHAN

Music is very important to God! His Holy Scripture is filled with it. Angels singing, psalteries, timbrels, and even a shepherd boy playing his harp.

Zephaniah 3:17 says He will sing over you. Wow! God Sings! And if God sings over us, we surely must reciprocate. Mutual Joy!

Our Lord has singing around His throne, “Holy! Holy! Holy!” 24/7. Voices lifted in praise, worshipping God. Of course, there is no time in heaven. But you get the idea. See Revelation 4:8-11.

Music has power. Trumpets blew to precede victory for Joshua chapter 6:16,20. It's always best to have praise music to assure victory. God inhabits the praises of His people. Psalm 22:3. Music goes to the soul. It can calm or agitate. But when used in worship, it brings the presence of God. Ephesians 5:19 says, “Sing and make melody in your heart to the Lord.”

At the dedication of Solomon's Temple, the musician's praised God, and the “Glory of God” came down. Priests were overwhelmed and could not minister. But God did minister. See 2 Chronicles 5:12-14.

While in prison, Paul and Silas sang praises. An earthquake freed them and their jailer was brought to salvation. See Acts 16:25-34.

Psalm 150 says, “Praise ye the Lord. Praise God in His sanctuary in the firmament of His power. Praise His mighty acts. Praise His excellent greatness. Use trumpets, psalteries, harps, timbrels, dance, stringed instruments, organs, cymbals. Let everything that has breath Praise the Lord.”

Psalm 100 says, “Make a Joyful Noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness. Come before His presence with singing.” Some people have approached us over our years

as choir leaders saying they cannot join choir because they cannot sing. We always refer them to this Scripture. God only asks for a “joyful noise.” So feel free, be it at home or in public, to lift your voice in praise. God will love your offering no matter how you sound.

Now, you see some of the Scriptures that show how important musical praise is to God. But how can you practically apply these Scriptures in your daily life?

Today's technology affords many options. Our Smart TVs contain endless channels of music and Christian Shows to fill our homes with music. One channel we love is the Christmas Music channel. It's really okay to sing Christmas Songs year-round. Such Joy!

We were raised on the old Gospel Hymns of the Evangelical Faith. They are actually “Prayers of Praise.” The comfort inside of their poetry will soothe your soul. These can be found on YouTube, radio stations, and church services on the Internet in more traditional settings. If you prefer Contemporary Sounds, these can be found in the same places in your Internet searches. Classical lovers, same searches work for you as well. That's the beauty of our choices. God loves them all for He made us who we are. Worship with Hymns, Praise Choruses, Chants. Anything that brings Glory to God!

**Praise God!
Especially
when you don't
feel like it.**

It brings God to you! A good start to this is to think back to the songs of your childhood. Those songs reside in your heart. “Jesus loves me, this

I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong. We are weak but He is strong. Yes. Jesus loves me. Yes. Jesus loves me. Yes. Jesus loves me. The Bible tells me so." Remember we are all "children" in God's eyes. This song will comfort you just as much if not more now that you are an adult.

Singing is a very special gift we get to have on earth and take with us to Heaven! It keeps you young in spirit. "We don't stop singing because we grow old, we grow old because we stop singing!"

Holidays provide such a wonderful opportunity to praise God through music. The beauty of Autumn can stir any song to burst forth. The crackling fire will ignite flames of praise. Smells of home cooking will call forth tones of joyful noise as you anticipate the warmth of hearth and home on a chilly night.

Thanksgiving is a fantastic time for praise in song as "We Gather Together" around our tables and think of our Family that is now living in Glory. Then meeting together in one accord singing, "Come ye, Thankful People Come," recalling all our gifts that God provided for us over the past year. But nothing makes music live quite as much as Christmas!

Every twinkling light seems to dance in praise of Christ's Birth. Handel's Messiah rings through our hearts. Even though we may not be able to travel to large concert halls, God has blessed us with the internet to hear music from around the entire globe.

May your Holidays be filled with Praise and Worship. We hope you now have discovered tips here to enhance your Christian Faith. Yes. Music is very important in your daily walk with our Lord.

So, until we meet in that Heavenly Choir, We leave you with these beautiful Carols of old:
Hark the Herald Angels Sing, Glory to the newborn King.
Away in a Manger no crib for His bed.
O Come All Ye Faithful, O Come let Us Adore Him.
Silent Night Holy Night, Christ the Savior is Born.
Hallelujah!
Joy to the World!

"Sing For Joy," Psalm 95:1

Alan and Hillary Lathan

Life of Celebration

EDDIE MASIH

Greetings, Everyone, in the most precious name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Christian life is a life of celebration. When The Lord brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt, He brought them out celebrating the freedom from the Egyptian ruler (Pharaoh). Later at Mount Sinai, God gave them the law through Moses and loaded them with celebrations: Celebration of the Passover, Celebration of the Unleavened Bread, Celebration of the Days and the Months, Celebration of The Lord. They underwent celebration after celebration in different intervals, almost all through the year.

Galatians 4:4 says, *"But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law."* Jesus said in Matthew 5:17, *"Do not think that I have come to abolish Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."* Jesus came in fulfillment of the Law, meaning the law was incomplete in the Old Testament, and it is completed through Jesus Christ. The entire New Testament is the fulfilled law of Jesus Christ. Old Testament was the time of double portion blessings; New Testament is the time of hundred-fold blessings. In the Old Testament, sins were covered. In the New Testament, our sins are washed away by the blood of Jesus for eternity. Hallelujah! The Old Testament was the time of celebrations of specific days and months. However, in the New Testament, every day is a celebration in the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Every moment
with Him is like
swimming in the
sea of gladness.**

That's the reason why Apostle Paul writes over and over to the church of Philippi,

**“Rejoice in the
Lord, I say it
again Rejoice.”**

We are the believers of the New Testament, and hence, we have all the more reasons to celebrate The Lord in our lives. Everyday! Irrespective of the situations, challenges, battles et cetera. And that's called a true Christian.

Celebration of Salvation and Grace

Salvation is one of the most wonderful gifts we believers have received from God. Gabriel the angel was sent to declare the message of God. *"And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins,"* Matthew 1:21. One man sinned and the entire race became sinful. Romans 3:23 says, *"All have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God."* The redemption of sin was not possible without the blood; therefore, God sent His only begotten Son (Jesus Christ) who died for us and took the punishment upon him. He knew no sin but was made sin for us. The plan was accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So let's celebrate for we are under grace, we have found salvation in the Lord and in the power of His might. Celebrate Salvation "Every day."

Celebration of The Holy Spirit

We believers were made drenched with the Holy Spirit. Jesus, when He walked this earth in flesh, taught his disciples about the Holy Spirit and said, *"Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you."* (John 16:7) The Holy Spirit is the promise of God and this very promise

was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when God rained his Spirit down from heaven. Since then our body became the temple of the Holy Spirit. He said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Hebrew 13:5) He is not man that He will lie. His promises are yes and amen. He was with us, He is with us, He is in us and He shall be with us forever and ever. Wow! What a mighty, faithful and promise keeping God we serve. So rejoice and celebrate the Holy Spirit "EVERYDAY"

Celebration For Our Names are written in (In Heaven)

Jesus told his disciples "Rejoice, for your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20) Every believer of Jesus Christ is a church, which means "separated". We are separated for God through Jesus Christ. He said, "In my Father's house are many mansions: I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2) As John the Baptist went ahead of Jesus to prepare the way for The Lord, likewise, Jesus has went ahead of us to The Father to prepare the way for us in Heaven. There are mansions in Heaven and there are our names written on our mansion. I am already seeing the glorious vision of my mansion. Do you see yours?

Celebrate people of God, for you not just have a house but mansion in heaven. You might not have a mansion in this world but for sure will live in mansions in Heaven. Moses could only see the Canaan from afar, but we will not just see it but we are about to enter in it very soon. This gives us reason to celebrate. Heaven belongs to believers. Yay! Celebrate Heaven "Everyday"

Celebration of hope to be with God for Eternity

John 14:3 "I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." The church is referred to as the bride of Christ. The groom always comes to take the bride home. We are the bride of Christ and Jesus is our groom. He had promised he shall come to take us to our home which is in Heaven. He wants to keep us with him forever, we shall live with him, gazing at His beauty, loving Him for eternity. Wow! Apostle John pens his vision in the book of Revelation and prays "Even so, come Lord Jesus" Revelations 22:20. We are already living in the last chapter of the book of Revelations. Jesus is coming very soon to take us home and we shall enter into Eternal Celebration. I am all set to fly with Him beyond the sky. Are you?

Dear Precious Saints, celebrating in Christ is a lifestyle of a believer. Last year (2020) and this year (2021) has brought in major losses in the lives of people. Many have lost their dear ones, family members, relatives and friends. Many have had major hits in their jobs, businesses and finances. This was a well-planned plot of the devil against the world in the form of Covid19, but I have good news for you, God is saying I have exposed him to nakedness. He has lost the battle already because I am still in control and on my throne.

**Celebrating
in Christ is
a lifestyle
of a
believer.**

Regardless of what is happening around, we have the reasons to celebrate Christ.

Celebrate for you know him, celebrate for you are saved by the grace of God, celebrate for the gift of the Holy Spirit, celebrate for your names are written in the book of life, celebrate for Jesus is coming to take his bride and you shall be lifted up with him in the sky to live with him forever and ever.

Friends, if you are not a believer of Jesus Christ, you are missing out on the life of celebration in him. I would like to take this time requesting you to please prepare your heart and whisper this prayer after me and you shall enter and inherit the world of eternal celebrations. If you are a believer and slipped somewhere on the way, you can still participate in this prayer.

Dear Jesus, I am a sinner and have sinned against you. Please forgive all of my sins and wash me clean with your blood. I open my heart before you and pray to you, to please come into my heart, come into my life and receive me in your Kingdom. From this day on, you are my Lord and I am your child. In Jesus name, Amen.

If you have sincerely prayed this prayer, you have become the child of God and have entered the heavenly kingdom in the spirit realm. The heaven is applauding in your welcome. The angels are celebrating for you and from this moment on, you shall be celebrating with them too.

Congratulations for the new life! Celebrate the goodness of God! Everyday!

EDDIE MASIH IS VICE PRESIDENT OF THREAD OF HOPE. HE IS A MINISTER IN INDIA AT CHARISMA FAMILY FELLOWSHIP AND HE HOLDS A WEEKLY LIVE BIBLE STUDY, "REASON FOR HOPE WITH PASTOR EDDIE." HE HOLDS A BACHELOR'S DEGREE AND MASTER'S DEGREE IN THEOLOGY. HE IS THE CO-AUTHOR OF THE BOOK, "CAN YOU MISS THE WILL OF GOD?"



Celebrating our Passover

PASTOR MICHAEL HEIL

Exodus 12:14 Now this day will be a memorial to you, and you shall celebrate it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you are to celebrate it as a permanent ordinance.

I Corinthians 5:7 For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.

Psalms 24:7 Lift up your heads, O gates, And be lifted up, O ancient doors, That the King of glory may come in!

Many years ago, when I was in high school, I played football on the school team for four years. But it was my senior year that was so wonderful, so significant. My senior year, we won the conference championship. Not only that, but we were the seventh rated football team in the state of Illinois that year; undefeated and on tide. It was a marvelous year for Grayslake high school; and it was an experience I will never forget. We won the last game of the year against the team that had been favored to win the championship in a night game 7-0. After the game we drove back to Grayslake, showered up, and walked into the school gym. The whole town of Grayslake was gathered in the school gym patiently waiting for us! Bear in mind, this was at 11 PM on a Friday night. The town of Grayslake usually went to bed at 9 PM on a Friday night, yet here were a couple thousand people from the community cheering, laughing, enjoying each other, and celebrating a great accomplishment their high school football team had achieved. Even now, many years later, I remember walking up those stairs from the boy's locker room to the school gymnasium and hearing the excitement and the joy of all the people waiting for us. What a celebration!

As great as that celebration was, I know that we all have a celebration many times greater awaiting us. God shares with us in I Corinthians 10:11, "Now all these things happened to them

as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." When we read the history of Israel, the law that God gave them, the sabbaths they were to keep, the feasts they were to participate in, and all the other events and circumstances of their history, we need to always consider how does this apply to my walk with the Lord today? I want to point us towards the celebrations that God commanded Israel to participate in. Too many times when Christians read the Old Testament, they seem to come away with the idea that God is 01 ago some this on harsh and demanding and rigid, like a bitter old man sitting on a park bench chastising the young kids playing in the park. Nothing could be farther from the truth about our heavenly Father. Psalm 2:4 tells us, "He who sits in the heavens laughs." And in Zephaniah 3:17, we see God exalting over his people with joy and great rejoicing. In Jeremiah 31:4 God prophesies to Israel, "Again you will take up your tambourines, And go forth to the dances of the merrymakers." Does this sound like a stoic, old fuddy-duddy, who is irritated every time his children celebrate and cut loose with joy and dancing and laughing? No, God is preparing us on earth now for a grand and amazing celebration one day soon in heaven. You might say we are in training; training in how to enjoy the life and the redemption Jesus Christ has given to us.

There are fifty-two verses in the Scriptures, speaking of celebration or celebrating, and all but two of those verses use the words in the context of the feast of Israel: especially the feast of Passover. The feast of Passover was given to the Jews the day of the final plague God placed upon Egypt. You might remember the tenth and final plague Egypt suffered was the death of their firstborn child. God told the Israelites to take the blood of the Passover lamb and applied to the doorposts of the residence. Then on that somber and solemn night when the death Angel came to

Egypt, and all who resided in Egypt, if the death Angel saw the blood on the doorposts, he would Passover the people. The judgment of death would not come upon them. It was a horrible and haunting night for the Egyptians, God saved his people, Israel, through the blood of the Lamb. This was such an important event in the life of Israel that when they were released, God commanded them to celebrate that day with a feast called: The Feast of Passover! It was not a suggestion, it was not a good thought, and it was not up for a vote, the Jews were commanded to celebrate.

Why did God command the Jews to celebrate The Feast of Passover? In answering this, we again see the goodness and the mercy of our God. First, God directed Israel to celebrate the feast as a memorial to them. In the day and age we currently live in, I fear the idea and the purpose of memorials has been overlooked. In America today, we have roving mobs of people going around tearing down statues of famous Americans. Those are memorials. They have been placed in cities, in parks, and in buildings to remind people in America of important events in the shaping of who we are as a people. These statues display and remind us of the history, be that history good, bad, or even ugly, it has helped to shape us into who we are. When God told Israel to establish the Passover as a feast every year, it was for the same purpose. It was to remind Israel of the great cost, the death of the firstborn in Egypt, that God save them from. If the blood had not been on the doorposts, the firstborn of the Israelites would have died also. The Passover was a great night of salvation for Israel that God wanted them to pass down to the children, the grandchildren, and to all posterity so that they would remember their God, and constantly strive to be in fellowship with him.

Not only was the Passover to be celebrated each year by the Jews, but the Passover of Israel is also an important lesson for the church today. As I shared earlier, God tells us in the New Testament the events that happened to Israel were to be an admonition for the church. Admonition is a thousand-dollar word that is easily explained by some five- and ten-dollar words; it means counsel, advice, or caution. With Passover in the Old Testament, the church gets to see the goodness and the love of God, while also viewing how Israel responded to God's blessing. As we look at the means of saving Israel during the Passover, we see that God was very specific about the blood. It was not the blood of any old animal; it was the blood of a lamb. And it was not any old lamb, it

had to be a male lamb. Finally, not only was it a lamb, not only was it a male lamb, but it was to be an unblemished lamb... a perfect lamb. It could not be malnourished, or have blotches on it, or maybe have one eye that did not focus correctly; no, God's Passover required the blood of an unblemished lamb. Israel was to perform this Feast of Passover faithfully every year reminding them not only of their deliverance, but the cost of that deliverance. Sadly, Israel was not faithful in remembering the great and wonderful blessing that God brought forth for them when he delivered them from Egypt. They treated it with insignificance, as a duty rather than a living reality in their life.

God has told you and I, the church of the living Christ, that the Passover of Israel is an admonishment to us. We are to be counseled by the example of how God gave the Passover to Israel, and how they responded to it. But we are also to be cautioned as we view how God gave Israel the Passover and how they responded to it. God tells us in I Corinthians 5:7 that, "For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed." In other words, when God commanded Israel to sacrifice an unblemished male lamb and use its blood in application on the doorposts for salvation, that was a type or a shadow of our coming Messiah. God tells us in I Peter 1:19, 20, Jesus is the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. Jesus planned to come to earth and become human in every way, shape, and form that we are human, live here, and finally the Passover lamb not only for the Jews, but all mankind. It is interesting when Jesus came into Jerusalem for the last time, just before his crucifixion, the Pharisees and Sadducees seem to have all kinds of questions for him. Most Christians today when they read those passages are blessed by seeing how wise Jesus was in answering each question well. But there was more happening here than Jesus just answering questions. You see, the priests were required to examine the lambs on the Feast of Passover. This was to make sure that the lambs that were used in sacrifice unto God were actually unblemished; so the priests would give each lamb a detailed examination. This is what was happening with Jesus when he came into Jerusalem, all these questions were a form of examining him by the Jewish leaders. And with each answer and each response, Jesus proved that he was without blemish and could be offered up as a rightful sacrifice unto God.

Still, as we celebrate Jesus as our Passover, we need to be reminded constantly that we are the ones who apply the blood. Even as the heads of the households in Israel applied the blood on the doorposts so the death Angel would Passover, you and I by faith apply the blood of our precious lamb who was slain to our lives. We do that by our confession. A confession that happens daily when we praise God for sending Jesus; when we praise our Lord for coming for us; when we confess to others that we are born again by the blood of Jesus Christ. Yes, the Jews celebrate the feast of Passover every year, but you and I, the church of the living Lord, celebrate Passover daily. Daily, we remember the depth of our sin; daily, we remember the hopelessness in our life; daily, we remember the emptiness inside; and then, oh, the blessed joy and peace, we remember our Lord sacrificed on the cross for us. We remember the blood, we remember the spirit inside, we remember the crown of thorns on his head, and we remember that blessed statement "It is finished." How many times have I experienced this blessed Passover in my mind's eye? And, as I remembered the blood that set me free, I apply it to the doorposts of my life by again thanking the Lord that I have been set free. It is a time of joy, it is a time of excitement, it is a time of dancing and praising and singing; it is a time when I feel like that. If I do not cry out in joy... the very rocks around me will.

As wonderful as it is celebrating Christ as our Passover, we are only in training! As we daily celebrate our Lord, it is only a preparation for when we get to heaven. God tells us in I Corinthians 2 that, "Things which the eye has not seen and the ear has not heard, And *which* have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him." As careful as I am at handling the word of God, constantly watching and evaluating statements and opinions about God and Christ, against holy Scripture, I am going to take the

liberty of indulging in some speculation about heaven.

I would imagine that celebrating with joy on earth: our shouting of praises, the raising of our hands in celebration, the dancing before our Lord, the hugs with brothers and sisters, will be dwarfed by the excitement and rejoicing in heaven.

God gave me a dream one night that was so vivid and so wonderful, I did not want to wake up. In the dream I was a younger version of myself and somehow, I knew I was in heaven. And I remember as I was walking around in heaven, some other people came by shouting "come with us, come with us." And as I started to run with them, more and more people came alongside and started running with us. And I remember thinking at the time, if we do not get there soon, I am going to be tired. But the more I ran, the stronger I got; the more I ran the more excited I got; the more I ran the greater expectancy and elation settled on the crowd. So, as I was feeling excited, I asked one of the people running with me where we were going? And he said, the King of glory is coming! The King of glory is coming! Finally, we arrived at two huge gates, and they swung open, and there was Jesus. All of the crowd was rejoicing, in many various different ways. Some were jumping for joy, others were bowing down reverently, others started singing songs of praise in perfect harmony, others had tears rolling down their eyes, tears of joy! And then, sadly, I woke up. God had just given me a foretaste of the celebration of Jesus we will experience in heaven. So let us with one spirit and one heart, celebrate our Lord here on earth as we get ready for that blessed day when the gates will swing open, and we will see the King of glory!

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CITRO

COLLECTION FINE JEWELRY

Citro Collection has expanded even during our lockdown. We have now designed a brand new necklace: two hearts combined as one. As believers, when we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we become one with God. For anyone who struggles through anything, this necklace is a constant reminder that we belong to God and He resides in us. In addition, this heart necklace was designed with the intention of purchasing as is (no stones) or with stones to be given to mothers, grandmothers, fiancées or wives for birthday necklaces. You can place your desired stones to represent the months of children, grandchildren, and the one you love; or if you lost a loved one you can place the color of the birthstone as a reminder that your loved one is in Heaven.



The heart is available in silver, white and yellow gold, platinum, and stainless steel.

Prices of the jewelry varies according to which metal or stone, semi gems, gems or lab created gems and stones you choose. You can send an email to info@threadofhope.org for prices. All of the jewelry will be created and shipped all over the world by our jeweler Princess Diamonds. All of our jewelry will come in a jewelry box. Shipping charges will be applied in accordance to where you live. No taxes will be charged as all proceeds will benefit **Thread of Hope, Inc.**

This exclusive beautifully custom-designed bracelet is the first piece of jewelry released from THE CITRO COLLECTION FINE JEWELRY with the inspiring Thread of Hope Logo which represents hope and reminds those who wear it that no matter what they're going through there is hope. This bracelet can come engraved with initials or date of a special occasion or loved one. Please send us an email to info@threadofhope.org for prices.

TOH HOPE COLLECTION: 1ST PIECE IN THE COLLECTION

This exclusive beautifully custom-designed is the first piece of jewelry released from THE THREAD OF HOPE COLLECTION, called Rahab's Thread of Hope, with the inspiring Thread of Hope Logo which represents hope and reminds those who wear it that no matter what they're going through there is hope. The bracelet is available in silver, white and yellow gold, platinum, and stainless steel.. All proceeds go to help women and children who are victims of sex trafficking. When you receive your purchase, it will come in a jewelry box. Don't forget to order yours today for your loved ones. You can purchase Rahab's Thread of Hope at www.threadofhope.org.



This section on education is important to us and is there to help encourage parents for better communication between home and school for a successful academic career.

ART BY OLIVIA DISTAULO

ART BY OLIVIA DISTAULO FIRST YEAR ART MAJOR

BEING IN A CLASS FILLED TO THE BRIM WITH TALENTED ARTISTS, I WAS EXCITED TO GAIN EXPERIENCE FROM TEACHERS AND MY FELLOW PEERS. IT WAS FRESHMAN YEAR WHEN I STARTED MY FIRST ART CLASS AND FEELING NERVOUS AND EXCITED AS I WALKED IN THROUGH THE DOOR.

I TOLD MYSELF, "THIS YEAR I WILL HAVE MY ART HANG UP IN MY SCHOOL!"

SO THAT WAS IT, MY GOAL WAS SET. IT BRINGS ME BACK TO MY TIME IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, WHEN I FIRST STARTED MY INTEREST IN ART. EVEN TO THIS DAY I STILL HAVE MY OLD WORKS OF ART, ALONG WITH A COUPLE AWARDS.

AS I GOT OLDER I FORGOT HOW MUCH I LOVED ART, UNTIL MY SENIOR YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL. IT BROUGHT ME COMFORT AND PEACE OF MIND. SO IT ALL JUST CLICKED FOR ME. I ENJOY GETTING TO BE CREATIVE, AND I BELIEVE THAT MY ART IS SOMETHING SPECIAL. SO MY FIRST SEMESTER OF COLLEGE, THE HEAD OF THE ART DEPARTMENT PICKED MY ART TO HANG IN THE HALLWAY OF THE SCHOOL FOR AN ENTIRE YEAR!

MY FIRST GOAL WAS ACHIEVED!



POWER SURGE CELEBRATE!

BY DR. CAROL DRAKE WHEATLEY

CELEBRATE!

Every person in every country – throughout all ages – has celebrated!

Celebrations were initially a time to come together to show gratitude to God for His abundant provision for things like marriage, the birth of children, harvests, victories in battle, and eventually more commercial endeavors like the purchase and sale of land and goods. We celebrate these things and feel good about ourselves; but we also reinforce events that are important to us and can demonstrate our solidarity when we celebrate things and events that we have in common.

Celebrations morphed into use of the term “festival” and are today typically community-oriented, where people celebrate a common characteristic such as music, dance, or specific religious holidays. Festivals, more often than not, involved celebrations centered around a feast. We see this type of celebration throughout the Word of God as the children of Israel celebrated God through sacrificial offerings and partaking in those offerings.

Today, we celebrate holidays centered around a large family-style meal, and especially at church, we love our “potluck” dinners! But most modern celebrations are just an opportunity to get together and talk and eat. We acknowledge the nostalgia of celebrations of the past and look forward to future celebrations. Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter...all holidays (holy days) that were intended to be events to honor God the Father, are now just commercialized gatherings where we spend too much money, eat too much food, and drink one too many libations. Where is the holiness? Lost in ways that are too numerous and too sad to mention. I think that's a depressing commentary on today's society but it has happened for a reason.

When we drift away from the Lord, we lose sight of the reason for true celebration and we replace what should be pure joy with presents, food, drinks, decorations, and one party after another. And we won't even go into how much fun it is getting together with all the crazies in our families (especially the ones who know their families have crazies but don't realize it's *them!*) We're seeking happiness but it is elusive because we expect happiness to be provided by other people and how they treat us. Happiness comes from our surroundings, but joy comes from within. Knowing that the God of all Love dwells within us and that we have eternal life with Him is the only thing that can truly make us happy...joyful...content.

The good news is that when we ask Jesus Christ to be the Lord of our lives, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside of us and one of the wonderful gifts he brings us is joy! He brings us peace! Love! Oh! My goodness...it's true...no money can buy that. No Christmas present on the earth can bring comfort to a grieving heart or hope to a lonely soul. No cocktail or drug can bring peace to a disquieted and confused mind. Only a relationship with the Lord can do any of that.

Our hunger can only be satisfied with His presence. And He's right there! Standing at the door of your heart, knocking, waiting for you to let Him in! And it's so easy: “Lord Jesus, I invite you into my life and make a commitment to follow you all the days of my life. Reveal yourself to me as my loving Father and Savior. Thank you for forgiving me and giving me eternal life.”

Remember, you don't have to do anything except believe! Jesus did it all...you just have to receive His forgiveness, His righteousness, and His acceptance into His Kingdom.

Now that's a reason to celebrate!

One of my favorite scriptures is 2 Corinthians 5:16 which tells us, *"Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer."* What I believe this scripture means (and which is borne out in verses 16 through 21) is that Jesus the Man is no longer among us, but Christ the Spirit has been sent to us to comfort us and guide us. I believe this scripture admonishes us to look at the things in our lives according to their spiritual significance, not according to their worldly, material appearance. I know this is a stretch for some of you, but it is critical for you to understand that the Christ is Who lives within us and the Christ (the other Comforter) Who came to indwell us. We must now look at the Christ (Who lives in us) and must no longer look at each other according to the flesh. We have to look at each other according to the Christ that dwells within each of us who is born again. Colossians 1:27 clearly states, "...Christ in you, the hope of glory." The first part of that scripture tells us that this glory is mysterious and that it is comprised of riches!

Now that's another reason to celebrate!

Colossians 2:16 cautions us not to be intimidated by people who keep the rituals from the Old Testament while the Jews were under the law. They observed every Sabbath, every New Moon and a whole bunch of other stuff because they were commanded to by the law. Their only hope was to obey the law and hope for the best. They never realized that the only way to be righteous before the Lord was to simply believe...the exact same thing Abraham did! But somehow, they totally lost sight of their faith and replaced it with the law. Jesus came to set them free from the law. As Jesus, He came to deliver them, and as the Spirit, He gave them liberty! (2 Corinthians 3:17)

So how do we celebrate the Lord?

We rejoice in Him! What's the difference celebrating and rejoicing? Easy...to celebrate is something we do, but rejoicing is a condition of our hearts, a bubbling over of the joy that is within each born-again believer! Philippians 4:4 tells us, *"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice!"*

Praise is one of the ways we rejoice (and celebrate) the Lord. Praise is not just singing songs in church or in our car with the radio blasting out the latest Christian songs. Praise is taking the time to sincerely tell the Lord how wonderful He is and how much we appreciate Him. Praise is lifting Him up with gratitude, appreciation, and joy.

Remember, we have Christ within us, the "hope" of glory...that means we have within us the expectation of good things to come. As we focus on Christ – as we focus on things that are above and not of the flesh - we begin to feel a sense of awe and appreciation realizing that, like Jesus, we can do nothing of ourselves, but must rely on what we see the Father doing and saying and then we must do and say the same things.

When we know we are walking in His will by doing and saying what He does and says, there is an overwhelming joy and contentment that we feel in our soul. As this contentment begins to well up within us, the natural outpouring of joy offers praises to the Lord in an atmosphere of intimate worship.

That's how we celebrate!

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LOOK INSIDE ↴



Learning Disabilities: A Contemporary Journal

Learning Disabilities: A Contemporary Journal (LDCJ) is one of the leading scientific periodicals in the field of learning disabilities (LD) and related disorders with more than 20,000 subscribers worldwide. Ever since its foundation in 2003, its continuing mission has been to provide research papers of the highest quality that contain well-grounded information on diagnosis, assessment, interventions, policy, and other relevant issues related to academic failure. LDCJ follows a double-blind peer review procedure to ensure fair and anonymous assessment of all submissions. It is published bi-annually in print and online by Learning Disabilities Worldwide (LDW).

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Applying a Convolutional Neural Network to Screen for Specific Learning Disorder

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Early detection is key to intervening with students diagnosed with a specific learning disorder (SLD), which includes problems with spelling, grammar, punctuation, and clarity and organization of written expression, as a means of preventing potential negative consequences from this disorder. Deep convolutional neural networks (CNNs) perform better than human beings in many visual tasks such as making a medical diagnosis from visual data. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the ability of a deep CNN to detect students with a diagnosis of an SLD based on their handwriting. A so-called MobileNetV2 deep CNN architecture was used by applying transfer learning. The model was trained using a data set of 497 images of handwriting samples from students with a diagnosis of an SLD as well as students without this diagnosis. The detection of an SLD on the validation set yielded a mean area under the receiver operating characteristics curve of 0.89. This novel attempt to detect students with the diagnosis of an SLD using deep learning can potentially provide fast initial screening of students who may meet the criteria for a diagnosis of an SLD, thereby improving their chances of effective intervention.

Keywords: Specific Learning Disorder, Deep Learning, Deep CNNs, Transfer Learning

INTRODUCTION

A specific learning disorder (SLD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that can be detected only after formal education starts (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). About 10% of school-age children in the United States are diagnosed with this disability (Fortes et al., 2016; Gorker et al., 2017). An SLD can manifest itself in several academic areas, including reading, writing, and mathematics (APA, 2013). When the diagnosis is focused on reading, symptoms may include difficulty with word accuracy, reading fluency, and reading comprehension. A disability in written expression, in turn, shows itself in difficulties with spelling, grammar, punctuation, and organization. Finally, mathematical disabilities may manifest themselves in severe problems with memorizing mathematical facts, with fluent calculation, and with mathematical reasoning (APA, 2013).

The above symptoms are further clarified according to degree of severity, ranging from mild, moderate to severe (APA, 2013). A diagnosis of an SLD is complex and made through a combination of observation, interviews, family history, and school reports (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; McDonough et al., 2017), which can lead to a late diagnosis.

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Early identification of SLD is vital. If the challenges remain undetected, detrimental consequences, including high levels of psychological distress, depression, suicidality, and poorer overall mental health, may ensue (APA, 2013). Early diagnosis and intervention, on the other hand, can significantly mitigate the negative impact of an SLD on mental health (APA, 2013) by helping to prevent the frustration and decrease in wellbeing caused by an undiagnosed SLD, as found in a study conducted in Italy (Lombardi et al., 2019).

Deep Learning and Diagnosis

Deep learning algorithms are more accurate than human problem-solving strategies for many visual tasks (such as strategic board games, human and chimpanzee facial recognition, plant disease identification, and object recognition) (Esteva et al., 2017; Ferentinos et al., 2018; Schofield et al., 2019). In addition, they perform better than humans in medical diagnosis based on visual data such as skin cancer classification, breast cancer screening, and pneumonia detection (Esteva et al., 2017; McKinney et al., 2020; Rajpurkar et al., 2017). Indeed, advances in computation, very large data sets, and emerging new techniques enable deep learning algorithms to recognize very complex patterns in data that are beyond human perception (Esteva et al., 2017).

Successful deep learning applications are increasingly helping with the medical diagnostic process (Esteva et al., 2017; Kermany et al., 2018; McKinney et al., 2020; Rajpurkar et al., 2017). For example, deep learning applications for mental disorder screening have been based mainly on data from neuroimaging (Galatzer-Levy et al., 2014; Vieira et al., 2017). Thus, a range of psychiatric and neurological disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, schizophrenia and more, can be screened from neuroimaging data using deep learning (Vieira et al., 2017). In addition, neurodevelopmental disorders such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autism spectrum disorder can be screened from neuroimaging data with deep learning (Heinsfeld et al., 2018; Vieira et al., 2017).

With the exception of a few studies (Gurovich et al., 2019; Mor & Dardeck, 2018; Rad et al., 2018; Shukla et al., 2017), most research on using deep learning has employed neuroimaging to flag possible mental disorders. Unfortunately, this impedes implementation of deep learning in the diagnostic screening process of mental disorders because neuroimaging is rarely used in psychology due to its high cost (Galatzer-Levy et al., 2014).

Mor and Dardeck (2018) identified people at risk for PTSD using readily collected ecological risk factors and deep learning. Similarly, Shukla et al. (2017) detected developmental disorders from facial images using deep learning. Further, they built a deep learning model that performed better than humans in recognizing and differentiating among a spectrum of neurodevelopmental disorders, including autism spectrum disorder, fetal alcohol syndrome, Down syndrome, progeria, cerebral palsy, and intellectual disability. In addition, other researchers (Gurovich et al., 2019) have built a deep learning model that identifies facial phenotypes of more than 200 genetic syndromes such as Lubs XL MR, fragile X MR, Prader-Willi, MR XL Bain type, Angelman, Ch1p36 del, fetal alcohol, Potocki-Lupski, Rett, and many more.

Finally, Rad et al. (2018) used deep learning to detect stereotypical motor movement in patients with autism spectrum disorder.

Deep Learning and SLD Diagnosis

An SLD may affect handwriting in a way that can be visually distinguished (Li-Tsang et al., 2018). Symptoms may include severe problems in written expression, including difficulty with spelling, grammar, punctuation, and organization (APA, 2013). Handwriting performance and sensorimotor skills may also be a sign of an SLD (Li-Tsang et al., 2018). Thus, students with this condition write at slower speed and with greater variation in written character size (Lam et al., 2011) and require more time to complete handwriting assignments in class (Engel-Yeger et al., 2009). Engel-Yeger et al. (2009) suggested that their movements were less mature than their nonlabeled peers, and their performance is less accurate in space and time. Students with an SLD were found to erase more and complain about fatigue. The legibility of their handwriting was poor compared to the handwriting of their nondisabled counterparts. These findings apply to students with dysgraphia and other types of an SLD.

Modeling Approach

Deep convolutional neural networks (CNNs) represent state-of-the-art technology in visual tasks (Esteva et al., 2017). For example, MobileNetV2 is a deep CNN that achieves cutting-edge results in visual tasks (Sandler et al., 2018), including object detection, face attributes, fine-grain classification, and landmark recognition (Howard et al., 2017). The great benefit of MobileNet models is that they are designed to be deployed on mobile devices, allowing a rapid inference from a photo taken on a mobile device (Howard et al., 2017; Sandler et al., 2018). MobileNet models were trained on the ImageNet data set, which contains more than 14 million images with 1,000 object categories (Howard et al., 2017; Sandler et al., 2018).

Transfer learning is a technique whereby a model developed for a given task is reused as the starting point for a model to be used on another task. Specifically, it involves removing the last layer of the pre-trained deep neural network, adding new layers suitable for a current specific task, and then training with a new data set (Esteva et al., 2017; Khan et al., 2019). Transfer learning is very useful when researchers wish to utilize pre-trained, state-of-the-art deep neural networks (Khan et al., 2019).

The purpose of the current study was to evaluate the ability of deep learning using transfer learning and the MobileNetV2 model to distinguish between students who have an SLD and those who do not. Outfitted with deep learning, mobile devices can assist with rapid screening of students with an SLD based on their handwriting. This, in turn, may contribute to early detection and intervention after a careful follow-up evaluation.

METHOD

Sample and Outcome Measure

The target population for the study included high school students between 15 and 18 years old, grades 10 to 12, from Hadash High School, Bat-Yam, Israel. Consistent with the prevalence of SLDs reported in the literature (APA, 2013), the

prevalence of an SLD for the students who comprised the sample was about 11%. Seventeen of the 152 students who participated (11%) had a diagnosis of an SLD.

Handwriting samples were collected from 152 students who volunteered to participate in the study. No remuneration was promised or given. Students agreed to provide their old notebooks for use in the study. About 500 pages of handwriting were scanned and saved as images. Two sealed and locked boxes were placed in one classroom for a few hours after the school day for two consecutive days. One box was intended for notebooks of students who had previously been diagnosed as having an SLD, while the other was designed for students without an SLD diagnosis. (The students had previously been diagnosed, unrelated to the present study.) The notebook collection process was voluntarily conducted with complete anonymity. The outcome measure of the study was a dichotomized variable of no diagnosis of an SLD vs. diagnosis of an SLD.

The pre-trained MobileNetV2 (Sandler et al., 2018) was utilized using transfer learning as it is a suitable architecture for transfer learning in visual tasks as needed in this study. The last SoftMax layer of the MobileNetV2 architecture designed for classification of 1,000 different classes of the ImageNet data set was removed, and three hidden layers of Relu neurons were added: Layer 1 of 800 neurons, Layer 2 of 400 neurons, and Layer 3 of 200 neurons. Additionally, the last layer of a single sigmoid neuron for classifying the two desired classes in this study was added: no diagnosis of an SLD vs. diagnosis of an SLD. The four layers that were added on top of the pre-trained MobileNetV2 were trained on the collected training set.

Table 1 presents the deep neural network architecture and model summary using MobileNetV2 and transfer learning. Specifically, it shows the layers in the model and the number of units in each layer. The images were pre-processed for MobileNetV2. The shape of the images was 224X224, and image normalization was applied. In addition, dropout and data augmentation were used to enhance the performance and generalizability of deep neural networks (Perez & Wang, 2017; Srivastava et al., 2014). A more detailed description of the methodology is provided in the link found in the discussion section.

Table 1. Model Summary

Layer	Output Shape	Param #
Keras Layer	(None, 1280)	2257984
Dense	(None, 800)	1024800
Dropout	(None, 800)	0
Dense	(None, 400)	320400
Dropout	(None, 400)	0
Dense	(None, 200)	80200
Dropout	(None, 200)	0

Total params: 3,683,585.

Trainable params: 1,425,601.

Non-trainable params: 2,257,984.

Validation and Accuracy Metrics

The data set of 497 images of handwriting was randomly divided into a training set of 447 images and a validation set of 50 images. Five metrics were used to estimate the performance of the deep learning model: area under the curve (AUC), precision, recall, F-score, and accuracy. All the metric values reported represent the results obtained from the validation set.

Area under the curve refers to the area between the receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curve and the x-axis. The receiver operating characteristic curve is defined by plotting the true positive rate against the false-positive rate at different thresholds (Majnik & Bosnić, 2013). The area between the receiver operating characteristic is an unbiased metric of performance and may be compared to the AUC of different systems (Karstoft et al., 2015). *Precision* is defined by true positives divided by the sum of true positives and false positives (Goutte & Gaussier, 2005). *Recall* is defined by true positives divided by the sum of true positives and false negatives (Goutte & Gaussier, 2005). The *F-score* is a balanced metric, defined by a weighted average of precision and recall (Hand & Christen, 2018). Finally, *accuracy* is defined by all true predictions of the model divided by the total of all predictions (Sim et al., 2019).

EXPERIMENTS AND RESULTS

The model was trained for 25 epochs. The greatest accuracy occurred after 21 epochs and then started to decline from epoch 22, as expected because of overfitting (Cha et al., 2019). Number of epochs refers to the number of times that the learning algorithm works through the entire training data set. Figure 1 shows the working system – that is, the procedure from the input of handwriting image to the output that gives the classification. The model yielding the best accuracy was saved for further analysis of performance metrics. The model yielded the following results: AUC = 0.89, precision = 0.94, recall = 0.89, F-score = 0.91, and accuracy = 0.92. Figure 2 presents the changes in accuracy during training.

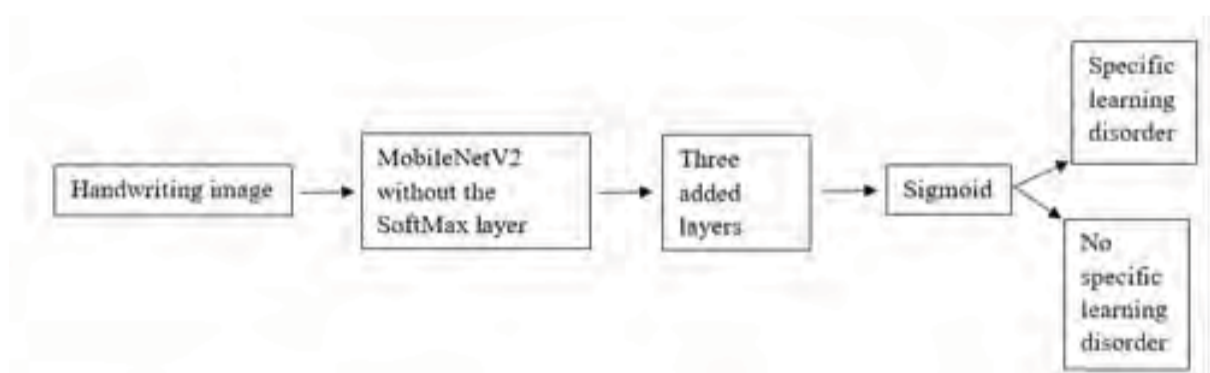


Figure 1. The working system.

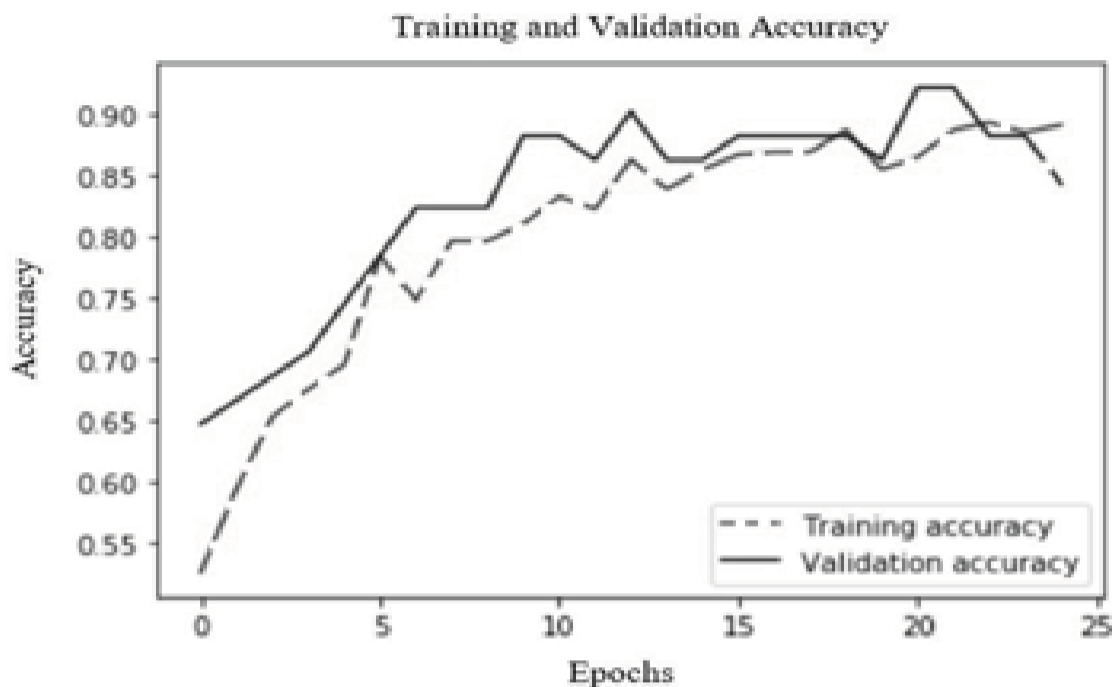


Figure 2. Accuracy during training.

DISCUSSION

The present study evaluated the ability of deep learning algorithms to screen students with an SLD by using their handwriting. It is the first study to apply deep learning to screening for an SLD classification from handwriting samples, which were easily collected for fast inference and detection.

The study model yielded an AUC of 0.89, indicative of a good predictive model in the domain of mental diagnostics (Galatzer-Levy et al., 2014). Further, a precision of 0.94, recall of 0.89, F-score of 0.91, and accuracy of 0.92 indicate that the model yields very good results with regard to SLD detection compared to other studies that have used deep learning to detect mental disorder (Vieira et al., 2017). That is, values of performance metrics in other studies using deep learning to detect mental disorders from neuroimaging data were between 0.65 and 0.95 (Vieira et al., 2017). Further, the reported accuracy of a model designed to identify facial phenotypes of genetic disorders using deep learning was 0.91 (Gurovich et al., 2019), and the AUC and F-score of a model designed to identify people at risk for PTSD using ecological factors and deep learning were 0.91 and 0.83, respectively (Mor & Dardeck, 2018).

The finding that deep learning applied to handwriting samples provides efficient initial screening of students for SLD is promising. Given that about 10% of school-age children have an SLD (APA, 2013; Fortes et al., 2016), this can make the otherwise complex task of SLD diagnosis faster and simpler.

It is important to mention that we are not suggesting that such a model would replace the essential diagnostic process in which professionals consider a combination of information from observations, interviews, family history, and school reports (APA, 2013). We are suggesting, however, that a model such as the one designed for this study can provide fast initial screening of students for SLD, thereby significantly contributing to early detection and intervention.

Applicability of the Study

Smartphone applications that can help with the initial screening of medical or mental disorders would provide low-cost universal access to essential diagnostic care (Esteva et al., 2017). The deep learning model built in this study is based on MobileNet, which was designed for smartphones (Howard et al., 2017). MobileNet provides fast and accurate performance deployed on mobile devices (Howard et al., 2017). Outfitted with a CNN, mobile devices can aid educators, reading specialists, and other relevant professionals with a means to achieve fast initial screening of SLD. Screening for students with this condition using this system requires no more than taking a photo of a student's handwriting on a smartphone, uploading, and sending it to the model, and receiving the model answer. For further clarification, the system designed in this study may be viewed at https://colab.research.google.com/drive/1SUByhCjS29pR_njEwFKD7v3YFZ9C_i9H

Limitations and Recommendation for Future Work

This study was conducted with students at Hadash High School, Bat Yam, Israel. The results of this initial study, therefore, cannot be generalized beyond this specific Hebrew-speaking population. In addition, the size of the training set was relatively small, which is an important limitation as the size of the training data set is the most important factor for enhancing the generalizability of deep learning models (Perez & Wang, 2017). Therefore, a major recommendation for future work is to significantly increase the size of the handwriting data set.

In addition, it would be important and interesting to assess the handwriting of students using multiple languages to get a picture of how the algorithm holds up across different alphabets and writing systems. For each language, it would be necessary to develop a new system and re-examine its performance. In order to increase the generalizability of our model to different populations, the main recommendations for future work, therefore, include collecting handwriting samples from many different populations in many different languages.

Summary, Conclusion, and Future Directions

This study demonstrated the feasibility of screening students with an SLD based on handwriting samples using a deep learning algorithm. The model designed for the study is easily deployed on smartphones, enabling fast initial screening of students with an SLD simply by taking a photo of their handwriting. Early intervention is essential for children with an SLD, and a system such as this may significantly contribute to early detection and subsequent intervention. The system is far from being a universal, optimal solution because the training data set was limited. It is hoped, however, that the study's findings will serve as an inspiration for the future development of a universal solution for early screening and detection of SLD, which would ideally include many different populations from across the world.

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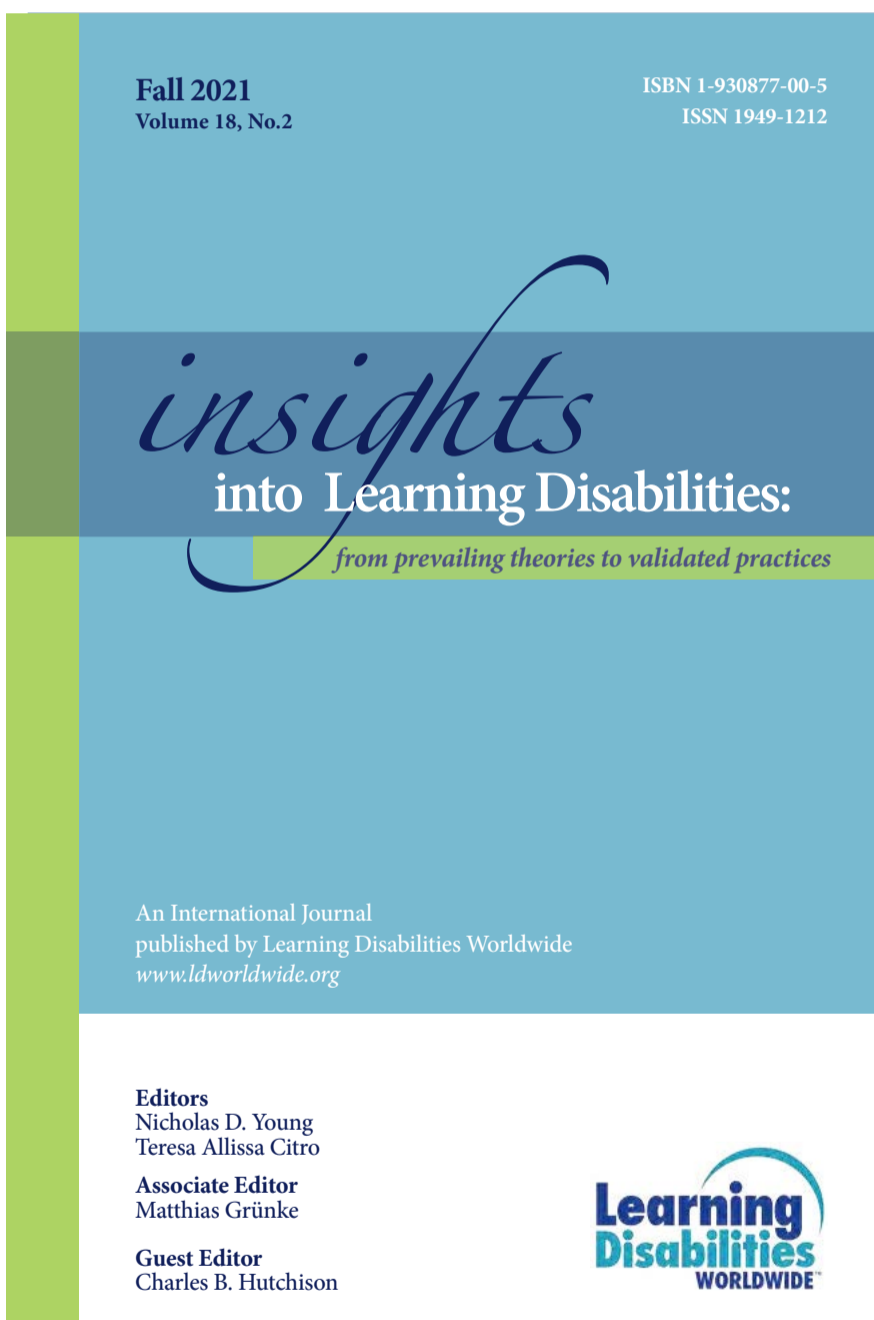
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AUTHORS' NOTE

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COVID-19-Induced Academic Disability: Furthering the Case of Disability by Induction

Charles B. Hutchison

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, USA

“Truth is best seen through opaque glasses.”

Charles Francis Hutchison

THE OMNIPOTENCE OF TRUTH

Nature is more honest than humans give her credit: she acts with malice towards none, and her truth marches on with omnipresence. It was a bombshell when, in 1962, Thomas Kuhn argued in his book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, that even in the discipline of science, the progression of scientific knowledge is influenced by current accepted paradigms. In simplistic terms, his argument was that scientific knowledge (or emerging *created* knowledge) was being inadvertently manipulated — or to nice about it, misinterpreted — in order to fit what the scientific community expected. This knowledge misinterpretation would continue until new observations emerged that were so compelling as to force a change in the nature of the accepted knowledge. The popularity of Kuhn’s (1962) publication’s forced a change in public consciousness about the nature of science and the nature of knowledge creation, and subsequently helped to further buttress the concept of “paradigm shift.”

As an African immigrant whose educational enterprises have included Ghana, Hungary, and the United States, I have long lived with multiple cognitive dissonances. For example, why is it that the formal educational outcomes of African American are significantly lower than their White counterparts, and yet, the broader society was slow to correlate that fact to the obvious impact of historical racist policies that imposed artificial poverty and deprivation of societal opportunities on previously enslaved people? Everywhere in the world, there is a natural correlation between educational attainment (and the related, *perceived* academic abilities) and students’ socio-economic background. This is not surprising, because children from lower socio-economic households are not only more easily impacted by the economic disruptions, but are also more likely to experience higher educational interruptions (Kuhfeld, Soland, Tarasawa, John-

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son, Ruzek, & Liu, 2020). In other words, great students are not born as such—they are made with family resources.

Immigrant minds are often fodder for wonderment, largely because we often mature in the logical, rational facts in one educational context before entering another educational context as immigrants. That fact is notable, because it engenders the necessity for the immigrant mind to hybridize factual information from different educational contexts into new, composite cognitive realities. This new, hybridized reality is akin to what Bhabha (1994) would caption as the “third space”—not only in theoretical meaning-making, but also, in practice. In essence, immigrant academic workers always seek a place of cognitive contentment—and such contentment must be logically reasonable, unless one is willing to eternally live with cognitive dissonance.

Early in my travails as an immigrant in the United States, my third space was one of cognitive discontentment, for a simple reason: In a world where all humans register educational realities with our five common senses, I could not cognitively resolve the simple query: Could educational realities that are powered by human common sense become that easily transformed when one traverses geographic boundaries? How is it that certain obvious, common-sense observations appear to elude many? On further deliberation, however, the answer becomes obvious: Most disciplines are inadvertently ruled by disciplinary paradigms (Kuhn, 1962), and therefore, common sense should not be taken for granted.

Enter COVID-19 and the opacity of truth—truth, at least, in education. The abruptness of COVID-19-induced a shift from face-to-face to online instruction. Almost immediately, I noticed that some of my best face-to-face students had been transformed into either failing or missing online students: They had stopped completing their assignments, and their grades had begun to suffer. In other words, they had become situation-based, academically-disabled students. These students had become victims of the oft-uninspected, as earthquakes would reveal invisible fault lines. As it became obvious in the course of the semester, some of my students who were parents dropped out of school in order to become pandemic-induced, home-school teachers or home care-takers for their children. Other students asserted that they were not disciplined enough for online work, and so needed the physical classroom experience in order to help them complete their work. Still others just did not have the requisite technology (including the necessary wireless network) for their online work. This was, indeed, the report across the world—so much so that most developing economies practically lost the 2020 academic year. This observation naturally precipitated my perennial question: Who is truly academically disabled?

Advanced economies were not spared by the academic effects of pandemic. The U.S. Department of Education Report (2021) highlighted the educational impact of COVID-19 on learning outcomes:

- COVID-19 negatively impacted students' physical and mental well-being.
- Pre-pandemic, many students of color faced significant barriers to educational opportunity. COVID-19 worsened the same.
- Students with disabilities experienced more difficulties transitioning to remote learning than their non-disabled counterparts.
- Before the pandemic, students of color had fewer opportunities, resulting in poor educational outcomes. Post epidemic, they had even fewer educational opportunities and even worse educational outcomes.

All in all, the disruptive impact of COVID-19 on academic enterprises across the world cannot be overemphasized.

TRUTH AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: A HIDDEN TRUTH MANIFESTED TO THE WORLD

COVID-19 was, and still remains an unforgiving teacher, partly because it force-fed the world unpalatable lessons. In the context of education, alongside foisting “social distancing” and the concept of “essential workers,” it precipitated new instructional realities. Of particular note, however, is that it also forcibly removed societies' transparent cultural lenses that were pre-medicated with illusions of social reality. In the silences of locked down cities and people's boredom, the pandemic subordinated the world into silent students of each other's humanity as it compelled peoples of the world to watch more, see more, understand more, and embrace more. Thus was born the Black Lives Matter movement, as an example.

Whereas the Civil Rights Movement long asserted that social justice, educational, and economic opportunities were asymmetrically distributed in society, that reality was not apparent, obvious, or factual to a society engaged in the tedium of life's business. The opacity of COVID-19, however, shed a light on the bitter truth: social inequities were prevalent across society, and Black Lives Had Not Mattered. This truth was powerfully lucid across the world, via social media currents of the youth. The youth of all colors and persuasions, literally all around the world, contested otherwise: Black Lives Matter—and “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” (as Martin Luther King put it). They took this message to the streets and brought their parents and other sympathizers along, in what is arguably the largest social movement in memorable world history, according to the mass media (cf. New York Times' “Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in U.S. History.”) A newer social justice consciousness had been born.

If education is the daughter of the humanities, then the assertions argued thus far should be granted—that educationdom has suffered from a distorted vision, and therefore warrants an ophthalmologist’s prescription, and COVID-19 was the doctor. COVID-19 clearly taught the world that the social realities of Blacks in America was not evident to other American demographics until Black reality was forced into public consciousness, largely through the killing of George Floyd. Black Americans had lived a different socio-psychological reality from their American counterparts—in affirmation of the existence of multiple realities (cf. Ogawa, 1989).

So, what is the point being made thus far? My argument is two-fold:

- 1). The academic world is often blinded by its own incestuous argumentation, such that it is not able to break free from its self-affirming paradigms (cf. Kuhn, 1962).
- 2). Sociology, as a subject of society, is a victim of the problem of subjective instrumentation. It is obvious that Black Americans, as human instruments for registering social reality, were not able to convince their other American counterparts that their experiential, sociological data was tenable: Americans of other races needed to register Black reality in a basic, compelling manner (largely the obvious killings of Black Americans, largely publicized by the social media among the youth), before they could certify the Black American social experience.

Thus emerges my query: If the societal plight of Black lives in America was genuinely invisible to the general public until forcibly triggered by the social environment induced by the COVID-19 pandemic, then what other important, consequential phenomena (social, academic, psychological or otherwise) are we missing? It is my contention that the world of special education has a blind spot in its fuller assessment of students’ academic performance.

DISPROPORTIONALITY AND EXISTENTIAL CONCERN

Anyone who has invested any amount of time to ruminate over the positive correlation between household income and academic outcomes (cf. Kuhfeld et al., 2020) naturally understands why the same correlation is true between the average Black and Latino students and the low academic outcomes that might potentially trigger Special Education referrals. This is indeed the research observation popularly referred to as “disproportionality in Special Education.” The logic that it is the effects of low income, and not innate academic potential, that manifests as low academic outcomes is indeed a problem that deserves more publicity, for different reasons. First, Skiba, Nardo, and Peterson (2002) affirm not only the existence of disproportionality in special education, but also emphasize the fact that there are problems in placement decisions not to mention related disciplinary consequences.

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Another reason disproportionality in special education is a social problem is that the student victims of misplaced referrals into special education services are very likely unaware that they are not learning disabled; they just think that they are not as smart as their other classmates. Furthermore, disproportionality in special education (against mostly students of color) is a serious issue is that, very much like the problem of subjective instrumentation argued earlier, there are no objective criteria for determining the referral thresholds for special education services. According to Sullivan (2011),

ongoing disproportionality strongly indicates systemic problems of inequity, prejudice, and marginalization within the education system. Studies of disproportionality have generally focused on the high-incidence categories of specific learning disabilities (SLDs), mild mental retardation (MIMR), emotional disabilities (EDs), and, to a lesser extent, speech-language impairments (SLIs). (p. 318)

Sullivan, citing the work of researchers such as Klingner et al., (2005), laments that there are concerns about the stated high-incidence categories (i.e., SLDs, MIMR, ED, and SLIs), notably “because their definitions are vague and inconsistent across contexts; and diagnostic practices differ considerably among states, school systems, and individual practitioners” (p. 318).

Sullivan’s assertion has always been self-evident, because I have long thought along the same axis. For example, I had previously made the case that disproportionality in special education could possibly stem from other peripheral factors (Hutchison, 2018). These factors include cross-cultural misunderstanding, the absence of cultural capital, and the “minority effect,” whereby human beings are easily cognitively disoriented when a part of their cognitive space has to be allocated to deal with survival needs (as opposed to academic work) in the classroom (e.g., when they are self-conscious of their minority status in the classroom) (Hutchison, 2009). Students who are victims of the above-mentioned contexts are likely to have lower academic outcomes, and thus approach the performance limits of learning disabled students. I therefore argued that such peripheral factors should be considered as part of the assessment for special education placement of minoritized students (Hutchison, 2018). In the context of this article, COVID-19 was just one more factor that buttressed the need to consider these and potentially other peripheral factors that can induce a reduction in student performance.

In essence, potentially all over the world, there are children who have been improperly diagnosed with various forms of learning disabilities, with potentially life-long consequences. The primary aim of this essay is to stimulate readers to consider the fact that, in a natural classroom environment, average, academically functional students who are perceptively successful can easily be-

come destabilized by shifting one of several variables in their learning environments. COVID-19 was one of such variables. In that sense, COVID-19 helped us to realize that the threshold for triggering the classification of average students into special education is lower than generally perceived. In social environments that are replete with social inequities, it is necessary to expand the considerations for alleviating the ongoing disproportionality in special education, because it “strongly indicates systemic problems of inequity, prejudice, and marginalization within the education system” (Sullivan, 2011).

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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Are you looking to have young and vibrant skin? Are you looking for skin care that reduces fine lines? Great looking skin doesn't just happen. It's something we do. There are so many great products out there for all skin types and all budgets. The important thing is to make sure you get plenty of water, eat clean as much as possible, protect your skin from the sun, and use good cleansers and proper moisturizers, along with anti-aging products.

SCITRO

What is all the Rave about Rhodiola Extract?

BY LISA BRISBOIS DYER

BEAUTY CONSULTANT FOR CITRO COSMETICS & SKINCARE

In this issue of Everyday Life, I am excited to share with you the importance of keeping your skin hydrated by using cream on your face. If you are looking for younger, glowing, and reduction of wrinkles, then you must keep your face hydrated. You do this by applying cream on your face. Remember, not all creams are healthy and save. Look for a cream that are free of PARABENS, PHTHALATES, SULFATES, GMO, and SILICONE.

Rose Face Balm.



"Rhodiola Extract has antioxidant properties for the skin 20X more powerful than Vitamin C and 50 times more potent than vitamin E." Wrote, Heather Elrod, of SkinPhD

"I was so excited when I read that above statement as I was conducting research on Rhodiola Extract for our Rose Face Balm." Said, Dr. Teresa Allissa Citro, President and Chief Executive Officer, of Citro Cosmetics and Skin Care.

That is quite a powerful statement. We know the importance of vitamin E, and the benefits from

Vitamin C (when Vitamin C is applied properly). Knowing this research findings is very important because we have a treasure in Rose Face Balm. We can put a product on our face with confidence that our skin is going to love it because of its benefits it produces.

In her excited expression, "Lisa, Rhodiola Extract is very powerful. Let me tell you what it does. It protects cells from free radical aggression. In addition, it recharges the cells with energy. Thus, providing very significant stimulation of the skin's cell respiration. If you love the Rose Water, you will absolutely love this product," Said, Dr. Citro.

I decided to test this product myself to see what was Dr. Citro was talking about. I like to share with you, the readers my findings.

This luxurious, decadent face balm is perfect for your skin. It's uniquely textured balm melts right onto your skin. It nourishes and provides long lasting comfort and soothing hydration. Very important for your face. The skin is softened, smoothed and subtly firmed. It brings back that youthful radiance as it restores it. In addition, it delivers a subtle freshness and soft glow to your skin. It's really all about the ingredients and exactly how effective they are. Hands down this product rocks.

This is what Rhodiola Rosea Extract does. It helps promote production of beta-endorphins in the skin which will benefit inner wellness and relaxation. Rose Water helps to moisture, soothe, and hydrate the skin. Glycerin helps moisturize, nourish and protect the skin.

"Lisa, I'm excited you found the same thing I did. People don't understand it is all about hydration. It is vital to keep our skin hydrated. If you're not doing this, your skin will show it." Said Dr. Citro

"I love that glow, Dr. Citro!" "Lisa, me, too! Recently, I saw a commercial with a popular music/actress celebrity. She spoke about her face cream providing that glow and shine to her face. I had to laugh because Citro Cosmetics and Skin Care took this approach, too. And we see it in this particular product, Rose Face Balm. Lisa, I love this product. I believe it is a great product for your face.

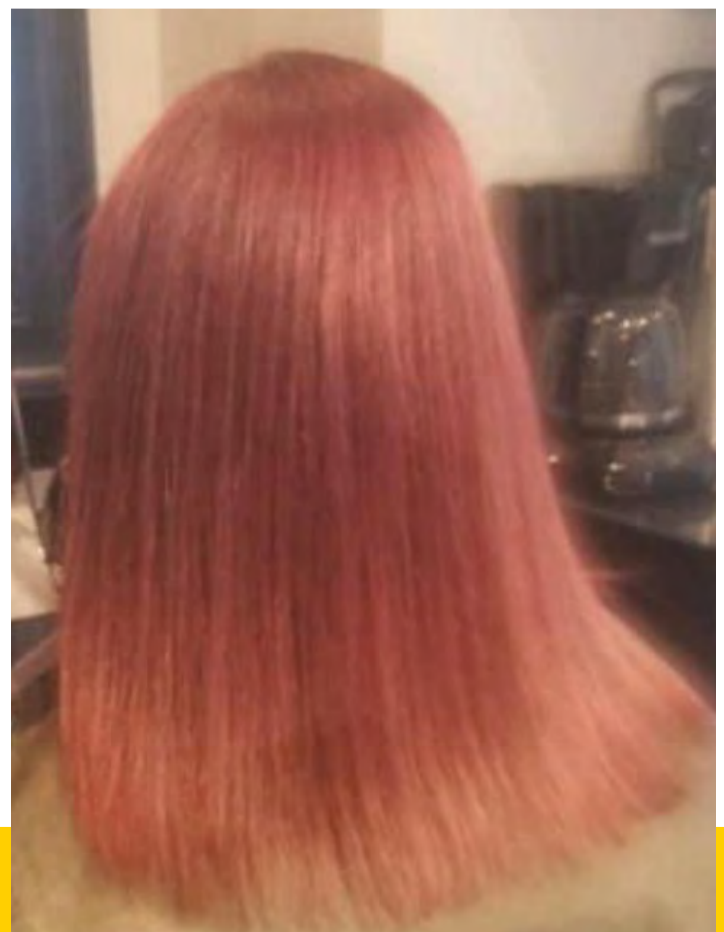
I have to agree with Dr. Citro. This product is Fabulous. It actually works, and it healthy for you. This product was produced in the USA, and approved by the E.U. As we know the E.U. have much stricter guidelines and it's a big deal when they approve a product. Please [click here](#) to see further information, and ingredients on this incredible product. As always, we remind our readers to check with their doctors before applying anything on their faces. Especially if they are under the care of a medical doctor. Remember, too, when trying a product test, it first on your hand, or arm. Then, try a little on one of the sides of your face. If you have no reaction, and your doctor feels its safe for you, then use it. You will love it.

This product is without the use of CORN, BARLEY, WHEAT, SPELT, OR RYE. It is GLUTEN FREE, VEGAN, AND PROP 65 COMPLIANT. Our products are NOT TESTED ON ANIMALS. **Click here** for ingredient information or to place an order.

Hair Styles & Colors

BY PAULA ST. CYR BASTRACHE


2022 brings timeless Brown and Blonde combinations. You can combine Golden Blonde highlights on Chestnut hair or Caramel lowlights on Golden Blonde hair, creating various looks using different shades of Browns and Blondes outcomes. Also, the naturally Sunk-issed look is simply Devine!









A close-up photograph of a wooden basket filled with fresh, vibrant vegetables. In the foreground, several brown mushrooms with white stems are prominent. Behind them, a bright red bell pepper lies horizontally. The basket is also filled with various leafy greens, including what appears to be bok choy and other leafy vegetables. The background is softly blurred, showing more greenery and a hint of an orange, suggesting a variety of fresh produce. The overall lighting is natural and bright, highlighting the textures and colors of the vegetables.

A well-balanced diet is important for good health. For a real transformation, it starts from the inside out. Exercise is also important to control weight, build healthy bones, and tone muscles. There are so many exercise programs out there to try. Walking, swimming, jogging, body lifting and sculpting are just a few. Speak with your doctor which is best for you. It's important for our self-esteem, and after a workout, we're infused with energy. Enjoy the health benefits of eating organic, exercising, and replenishing your body with the right vitamins and what they can do for you.



Recipes by Michael

RECIPES BY MICHAEL ANZIVINO

Spaghetti with Calamari

Ingredients Needed:

1 lb. Calamari, cleaned and sliced into rings
1 pt. grape tomatoes, cut in half
1/8 C. Kalamata Olives, cut in half
1 Tbl. Capers
3 cloves Garlic, sliced thin

1/4 C. Chopped Flat Leaf Parsley
1/4 C. Fresh Basil leaves
1/4 C. Extra Virgin Olive Oil
1 Box Spaghetti
Salt, Black Pepper, Chili Flakes to taste

Directions:

Salt 4 Qts. of water and bring to a boil. Add pasta and cook till al dente.

In a deep sauté pan, heat oil. Add in sliced garlic. When garlic has cooked for a minute, add in tomatoes. Cook covered for a few minutes till tomatoes are soft. Add in calamari, Olives, Capers, salt, pepper, and chili flakes. Cook till calamari is no longer translucent. Remove from heat. Add in parsley, basil, and cooked pasta. Mix together. Enjoy.



Building a Holiday Cheese Board

When selecting cheeses for your board it is good to know your crowd and what they like, as well as any food allergies.

I like to pick out cheeses with a variety of milks and textures that will please many palettes.

A double or triple cream cheese is going to be buttery, decadent, and always welcome on a holiday board. A Spanish Manchego or an Italian Pecorino are a must in the sheep's milk department. A lot of people shy away from blues, but I think every board should have one. Get something on the milder side like a Saint Agur and introduce your guests to this wonderfully balanced French blue. Goat cheeses are very popular, and are a healthier option for those with trouble digesting cow's milk cheeses. They also pair well with honey, jams, and nuts.

No cheese board would be complete without a good Cheddar. This will round out your board. The more aged the Cheddar, the less lactose it will have. So, those with concerns should be able to eat this. Now, add things that your guests can nibble on. Salami, grapes, dates, apricots, nuts, and quince paste, as well as a sliced baguette and some good crackers. Enjoy.



Managing an Overweight Dog or Cat

BY ELLIANNA DESTINEE CITRO

Maintaining your pet's weight is a crucial part of your pet's health. Just like with people, overweight and obese animals are at an increased risk of diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, etc. An important factor of making sure that your pet lives a long, happy life is properly managing their weight. According to the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention, in 2018, *56% of dogs and 60% of cats* in the US were overweight or obese.

Sometimes we may give them scraps from our table. After all, who can resist such a cute face? Or maybe we give them a couple extra treats because we just love them so much.

However, even small things such as those can contribute to poor weight management.

Maybe your pet is clever. Maybe they know just when you're most likely to give them a treat and shower them with love and affection. My cat certainly does.

While it may be difficult to do, resisting the temptation to pass your pet an extra treat here and there is important for their health. Many people believe that maybe their pets won't love them anymore when they refuse to give them a scrap from their table. That isn't the case. It is true that many pets are in fact extremely smart, and they know how to get their way; but it is *your* responsibility to manage their food intake.

In addition to being a factor in weight gain, in some cases, giving your pet table scraps can become an immediate danger. Foods such as chocolate, grapes, raisins, and even onions and garlic, etc. can be extremely toxic to your pet.

The occasional, pet-safe treat now and then is okay, but we may have a tendency to over-do it. On the

back of pet treat containers, there are daily feeding guidelines based on your pet's weight. Those guidelines should always be followed. If your pet is in need of weight loss, cut down the daily treats to half, or give them a few every other day, or maybe sometimes even none at all. There are even certain people-food items that may be okay for the occasional treat but be sure to do your research before feeding your pet anything that isn't made specifically for pets. While many times they still may beg you for more treats, instead substitute with lots of petting or playtime with their favorite toy.

If you have an overweight pet, or want to keep your pet at a healthy weight, in addition to limiting treats, consider the following:

1. Daily exercise.

Dogs love walks, swimming, playing fetch, or even just running around the backyard. According to PetMD, your dog should have at least 30 minutes to 2 hours of exercise daily. That of course will depend on your dog and its breed. Some breeds, such as brachycephalic breeds (boxers, pugs, bulldogs, etc.), can overheat easily and have problems breathing. *Be sure to monitor and limit your pet's activity when necessary.* Cats require a different kind of exercise. While you can purchase cat harnesses and leashes, most cats prefer to remain indoors. Indoor cats should be kept busy with a wide variety of toys, such as feather-on-a-stick toys, laser pointers, mouse toys, et cetera. Setting up cat furniture is also beneficial, as your cat will enjoy climbing up and down.

Always monitor your pet when they are playing with a toy.

Every animal is an individual and may not tolerate activities that others may enjoy. Elderly pets or pets

with breathing problems, arthritis, or other physical disabilities will typically be unable to exercise like other pets.

2. Choose the right diet.

In a previous issue, I discussed some guidelines on choosing the proper food for your pet. Of course, foods with a great source of protein are the best options. Foods lower in fat but higher in fiber can also contribute to weight loss.

But an ideal ingredients list isn't the only crucial factor in controlling your pet's weight. We all know that food portions are important, not only for people, but for animals, too. The backs of pet food bags/containers list guidelines for the recommended daily amount that your pet should consume based on their current weight. Using a measuring cup ensures that you are feeding them the correct amount. But of course, your pet may require a different amount than what is recommended, so ask your veterinarian about how to adequately adjust their portions based on your pet's individual need.

3. Consult with your veterinarian.

Some pets may need special help controlling their weight for a variety of reasons. Discuss any concerns with your veterinarian. They could give you food recommendations, specific instructions and guidelines to follow, or prescription diets designed for weight-loss.

Each pet is an individual with unique needs. Consider everything discussed above, but most importantly consult with your veterinarian about your pet's best interests. Keeping all of these points in mind, you can manage your pet's weight and help them live a long, healthy life!

ELLIANNA DESTINEE CITRO IS A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT WITH A PASSION FOR ANIMALS. SHE ASPIRES TO GO TO VETERINARY SCHOOL. SHE HAS AN INTEREST IN DIGITAL ART AND HAS BEEN COMMISSIONED FOR PET PORTRAITS. HER ART HAS BEEN RECOGNIZED BY POPULAR ACTORS AND A POPULAR FASHION BRAND. SHE ENJOYS SINGING, READING, AND WRITING; HER WRITING HAS ALSO BEEN PUBLISHED.

The Sandwich Generation

Across the United States, millions of middle-aged adults struggle with the dual responsibilities of raising a child and caring for an aging parent. They are members of what is commonly called the sandwich generation. In fact, a 2018 Pew Research Center analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics data found that 29% of adults have a child younger than 18 at home, and 12% of parents with a child at home provide unpaid care for an adult as well.¹

The rise of the sandwich generation is a byproduct of two powerful trends: (1) women giving birth later in life, and (2) the increasing longevity of the U.S. population. When you combine these factors with a growing number of young adults living with their parents, it's easy to see why so many middle-aged Americans are concerned about the future. If you are one of them, here are a few steps you can take to protect your loved ones and prepare for the financial responsibilities ahead

Have a plan for eldercare.

Talk to your parents about the kind of care they'd prefer, and discuss it with your siblings. See which, if any, family members have the capacity to help provide care and which home would be the most accessible. In case external help is needed, research local resources to see what is available—and at what cost. Most importantly, consult an attorney and make sure you have all the legal documents needed to make sudden medical and financial decisions if the need arises.

Evaluate your resources.

Before determining a course of action, make sure you know what resources are available. Can your parents pay for care on their own? Do they have long-term care insurance? Do they own any whole life insurance policies with living benefits² that they may be able to use to pay for care? Can other family members contribute financially? Is public assistance a viable option?

¹ Gretchen Livingston, "More than One in Ten U.S. Parents Are Also Caring for an Adult," Pew Research Center, November 29, 2018. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/11/29/more-than-one-in-ten-u-s-parents-are-also-caring-for-an-adult/>.

² Loans against your policy accrue interest at the current rate and decrease the cash value and death benefit by the amount of the outstanding loan and interest.

Protect your children's lifestyle and future.

While caring for a parent is a huge responsibility, it's important to make sure your children's needs and your own retirement needs are also met. If you haven't done so already, set up a college fund and make funding it a priority. If your place of employment offers a 401(k), try to contribute the maximum amount allowable, and make sure you contribute at least enough to get the full company match. Also, consider purchasing a term or whole life insurance policy that can help to protect your family's future in case anything tragic happens to you.

Caring for children and aging relatives at the same time is never easy, but with the right planning and resources, it is possible to do both. With so many people joining the ranks of the sandwich generation, now's the time to start planning for the future.

This educational third-party article is provided as a courtesy by Rosemarie Bombara, Agent, (CA Insurance Lic.#4114525) New York Life Insurance Company. To learn more about the information or topics discussed, please contact Rosemarie Bombara at 781.398.8633.



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RAISING RIGHTEOUS CHILDREN

By Dr. Teresa Allissa Citro



Thirty Days of Wisdom, Encouragement, and Prayer for Christian Parents Raising Honorable and Pure-Hearted Young Men and Women

Teaching children how to live godly lives in a world geared toward selfishness is beyond difficult. Moral character, self-respect, respect for peers, respect for authority, the sanctity of life, purity, and honoring God in all things, are the character traits of a righteous child.

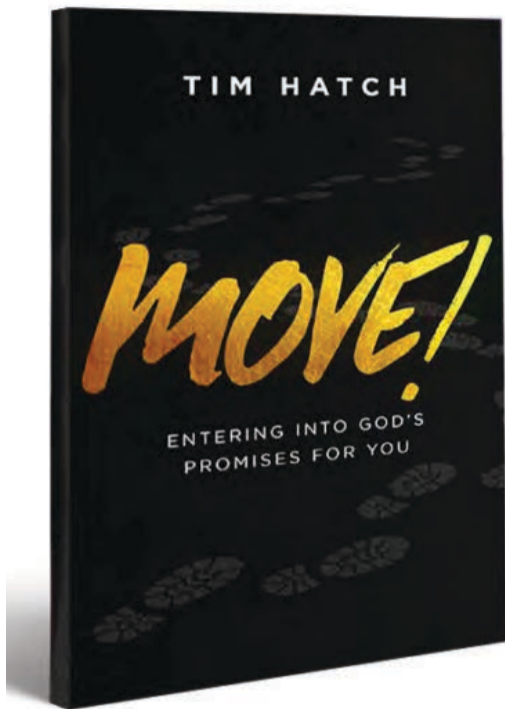
Through real-life examples and practical application, Dr. Citro shows parents how to instill Godly-character, confidence, and success from birth to adulthood. In this easy-to-read and easy-to-understand thirty-day devotional, Dr. Citro uses personal examples of challenging situations, taboo topics, and biblical ways to handle each.

Each daily devotion includes teaching surrounding a specific issue, a practical example of the topic, along with a parental prayer for spiritual power and dominion. Dr. Citro explains how to effectively put the Armor of God on our children while personally living a life of holiness and righteousness.

"Grandchildren are the crown of grandparents, and parents are the glory of their children." *PROVERBS 17:6*

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IN A BAD NEWS WORLD.

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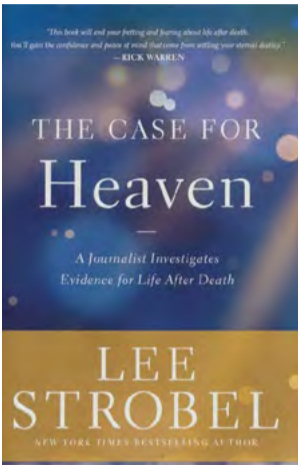
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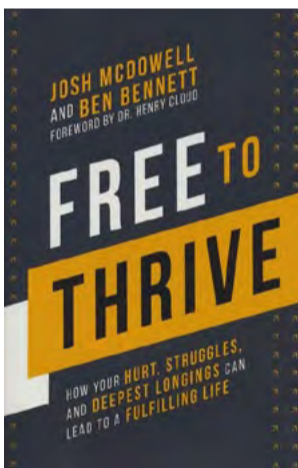
THE CASE FOR HEAVEN

By Lee Strobel

Publisher's Description: "We all want to know what awaits us on the other side of death, but is there any reliable evidence that heaven exists? And if so, what do we know about it?"

In Why Believe in Heaven?, bestselling and award-winning author Lee Strobel investigates the evidence for the afterlife and offers credible answers to our most provocative questions about what happens when we die. Through fascinating conversations with respected experts, Strobel offers compelling answers for questions such as: How can we know there is an afterlife? What is heaven like? Who will be there? How will we spend our time there? What does it mean to see God face to face?

Derived from material published in *The Case for Heaven*, this compact book is an exhilarating journey through the credible, awe-inspiring life to come."



FREE TO THRIVE

By Josh McDowell & Ben Bennett

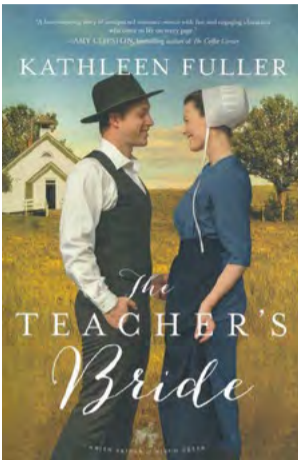
Publisher's Description: "Overcome your struggles. Fulfill your deepest longings. Your whole life awaits you."

Many people today are struggling with unprecedented levels of anxiety, hurt, doubt, guilt, and shame. Medical and mental health professionals confirm that much of the dysfunction and disconnectedness we experience in life stems from unresolved relational and emotional hurts. These hurts leave us with unfulfilled God-given longings that we seek to fulfill through unhealthy behaviors and relationships. Yet, our struggles aren't random; they're signals that when answered, can pave our way towards a thriving life.

In Free to Thrive, Josh McDowell and Ben Bennett invite you on a journey of healing and will teach you how to overcome unwanted behaviors by engaging your unmet longings. With a blend of hard-won wisdom and youthful energy, they present: Biblical teaching, Recent neuroscientific research, Time-tested principles, Personal stories of deliverance, Practical tools, Opportunities for reflection

No matter what you are struggling with, it is possible to experience the spiritual, emotional, and relational wholeness that God wants you to have-- and live the thriving life you were made for."

Must Read Books for 2022



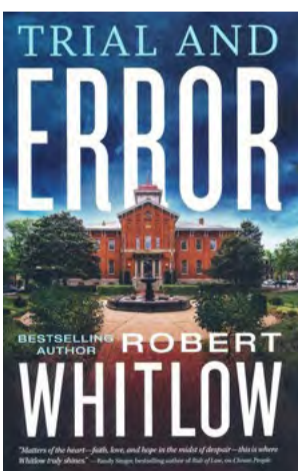
THE TEACHER'S BRIDE

By Kathleen Fuller

Publisher's Description: "If there is one thing Christian Ropp will not allow in his classroom—or his life—it's chaos. So why is he drawn to Ruby Glick, a woman who seems to bring mayhem wherever she goes?"

Christian Ropp moves to Birch Creek to accept a teaching position in the rapidly growing Amish community. He's determined to put the rambunctious school in order as well as check another task off his list: finding a wife. Of course, that would be much easier if women were like textbooks, straightforward and logical. When an accident puts Christian out of commission, a new community member named Ruby Glick takes over his classroom. But Ruby's exuberant teaching style clashes with Christian's careful methods and he worries his students will never be the same.

With a track record of catastrophe, Ruby always feels too clumsy, too distracted, too... much. Desperate for a chance to prove that she can do more than make mistakes in her life, she throws herself into her new teaching position. But when Christian can't seem to stay out of her way, she finds herself slipping into old, chaotic tendencies. What she doesn't anticipate is that Christian's heart is slowly catching up with his mind—and she, too, must decide whether to follow logic or love. The first in the Amish Brides of Birch Creek series (followed by *The Farmer's Bride* and *The Innkeeper's Bride*), A full-length novel, approximately 78,000 words, A sweet and wholesome Amish romance, Catch up on the Birch Creek community with the Amish of Birch Creek series and Amish Letters series."



TRIAL AND ERROR

By Robert Whitlow

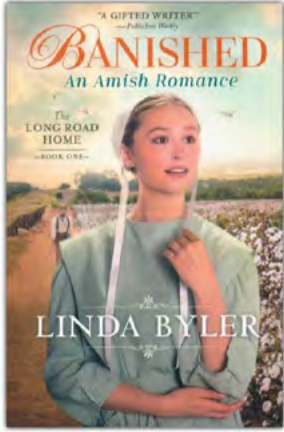
Publisher's Description: "A small-town lawyer has been searching for his daughter for eighteen years. Now another young woman is missing, and he's determined to find them both—no matter the cost."

Buddy Smith built his law practice around tracking down missing children. After all, he knows the agony of being separated from a child. Not long after his daughter's birth, her mother ran away and Buddy never saw either one again.

Gracie Blaylock has known Buddy her entire life, and now that she is clerk of court for the county, their paths cross frequently. When Gracie hears that a teenager in town has gone missing, she knows Buddy is the one for the case.

The girl's parents are desperate for answers. Together with Gracie and Mayleah—the new detective in town—Buddy chases all leads, hoping to reach the missing teen before it's too late. And as he pursues one girl, he uncovers clues that could bring him closer to the girl he thought he lost forever: his own daughter."

Must Read Books for 2022



BANISHED: AN AMISH ROMANCE

By Linda Byler

Publisher's Description: "The first book in The Long Road Home trilogy, a unique and gripping Amish romance set in the South at the turn of the century.

It was the early 1900s when Obadiah (Oba) and Merriweather's (May's) parents died tragically, leaving them orphans at ten and eleven years old. When none of their nearby relations volunteer to take them in, they are set on a train to Arkansas to go live on their Amish aunt and uncle's cotton farm. Once there, it didn't take long to discover they would be treated cruelly, no matter what they did. May, always anxious to be a godly young lady, took on more and more responsibility, trying desperately to keep the peace and convince her older brother not to run away. But when they became teenagers and Oba received one especially cruel beating, he disappeared, leaving May to shoulder even more responsibility while navigating the dangerous and lonely world she'd been placed in.

When she encounters Clinton, a young black man, on the road one day, she sees a kindness in his eyes that she's been thirsting for. He is immediately drawn to her, too, but quickly reminds her that he is black and she is white. In that time and place, there is no chance of starting a friendship. But still, they find themselves meeting discretely, spending more time together than is proper, finding joy and solace in each other's company.

When things go from bad to unbearable at the farm, May realizes she must escape from her aunt and uncle. If only she knew where Oba had gone! Can she turn to Clinton for help? Where is God when she needs Him most?"



DOMINION
OVER  **ON**
Sickness
& Disease

JONATHAN SHUTTLESWORTH

DOMINION
OVER  **ON**
Sickness
& Disease

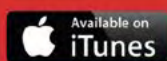
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**“God created the world in six days.
He won’t need more than an hour
to solve your trouble!”**

~Jonathan Shuttlesworth, Evangelist

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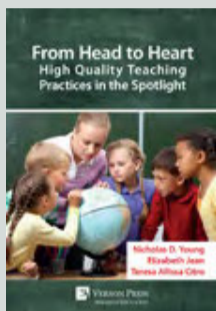
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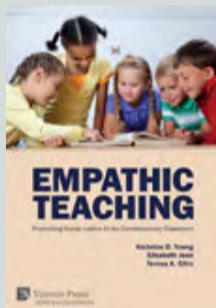


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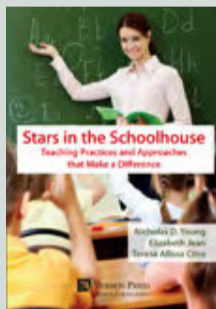


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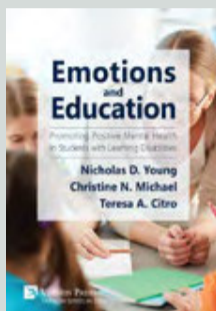
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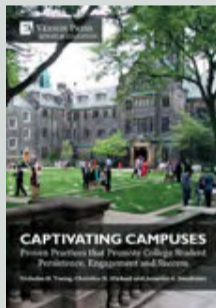


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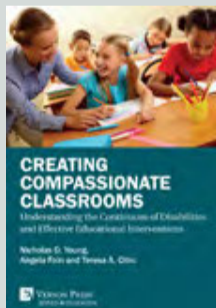


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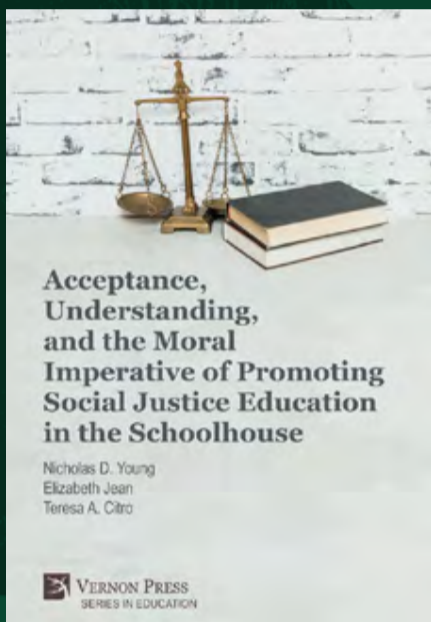
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Acceptance, Understanding, and the Moral Imperative of Promoting Social Justice Education in the Schoolhouse



*Nicholas D. Young, American International College
Elizabeth Jean, Endicott College
Teresa A. Citro, Learning Disabilities Worldwide*

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“Offers a fresh look at the concept of equity between students regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, and other defining characteristics. The book takes a brief look at the fundamentals of social justice as well as federal law before turning to the more important job of identifying students and the benefits that social justice can bring to each and every individual.”

Richard B. Holzman,
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UMass-Amherst and Springfield, MA; Superintendent
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“The authors discuss how to use both the Common Core and social justice simultaneously in the classroom as well as how assessment bias plays a role in student performance. This book is of benefit to all educators who wish to dig in a bit deeper into social justice and begin to include more equitable strategies in the classroom.”

Judith L. Klimkiewicz,
Ed.D., Senior Consultant, Mass. Department
of Elementary and Secondary Education

“Offers a close look at the possibilities that exist for students who find themselves in the classroom with a teacher who believes in teaching fairly despite the innate difficulties that come with that curriculum.”

Anne E. Mead,
Ed.D., Director, Danbury Public Schools

This book examines the critical issues associated with the topic of social justice in primary and secondary education. Emphasis is placed on programs, approaches and strategies to increasingly teach tolerance, respect, and understanding within and between these groups and members of the majority culture. This book is for teachers, psychologists and other education professionals who wish to gain a better understanding of how social justice can and should become a valuable part of the educational landscape.

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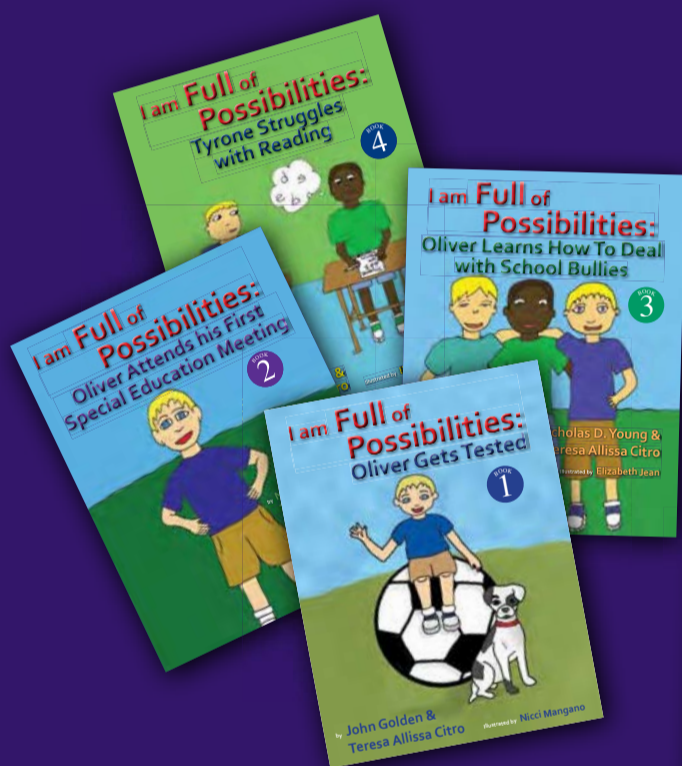
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