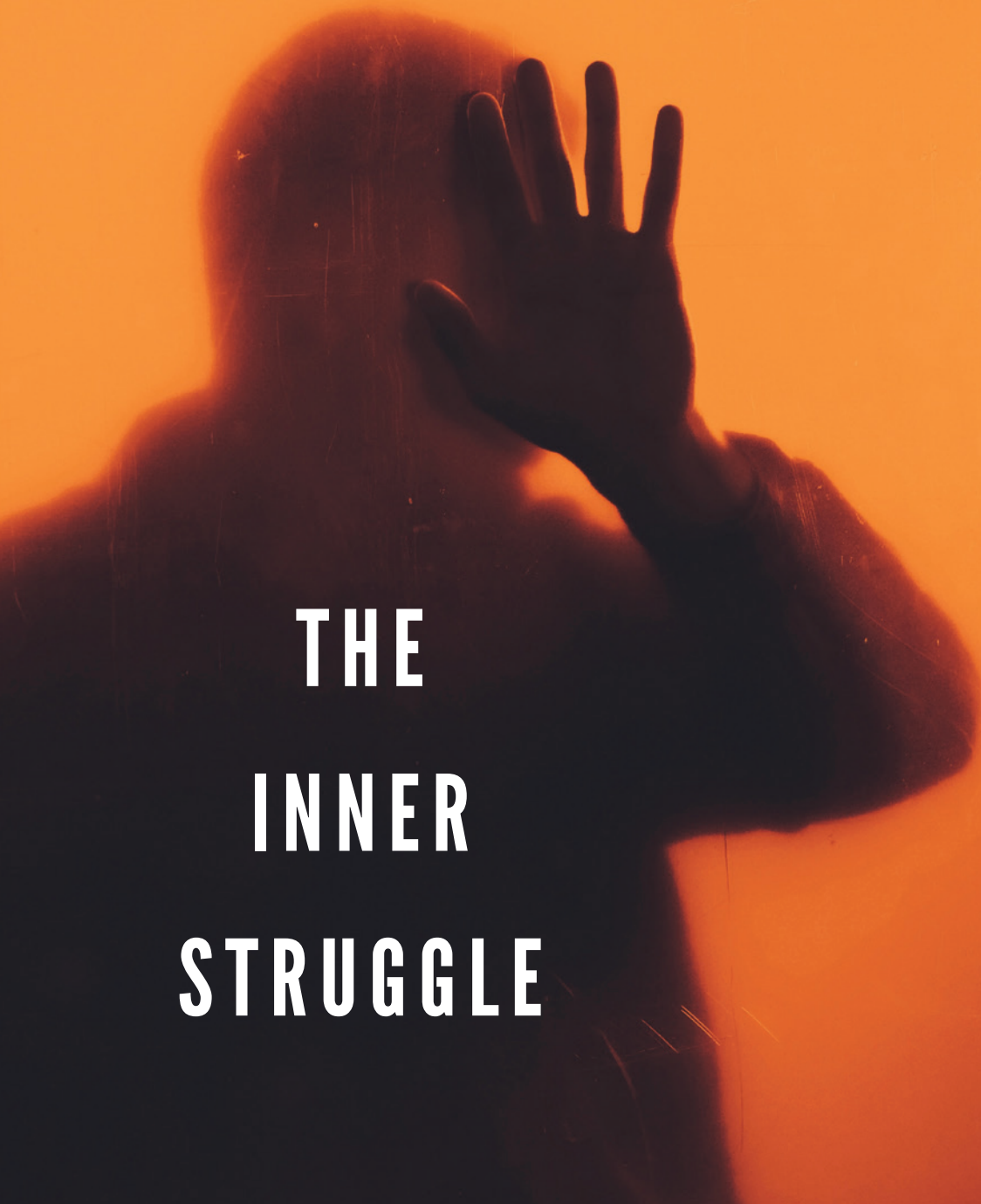


**DECEMBER 2023: I FINALLY GOT HELP + WHAT THE ANGELS THOUGHT + BREATHE + A CHRISTMAS PRAYER + MORE THAN WE CAN BEAR**

# ADVENTIST REVIEW



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# TRENDING

THE MOST SHARED  
STORIES ON  
ADVENTISTREVIEW.ORG  
LAST MONTH:

1



*What Every Christian Should Know About Halloween, by Gerhard Pfandl*

2



*A Boring Church Service, Affording Adventist Education, and Marrying Outside One's Faith, by Marcos Paseggi*

3



*Ted N. C. Wilson Visits Nigerian Governor, Urges Freedom of Conscience for All, by Chiozi Eti*

4



*Hidden Power, by H. Haskell Williams*

5



*Leadership in a "Very Interesting Time in History," Leader Says, by Heidi Straw Camargo*

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*Failures are mere opportunities for personal revival.*

## When Prophets Fail

In 1 Kings 18 Elijah is at his highest point; in 19 he is at his lowest. Chapter 18 showcases courage; 19, cowardice. Chapter 18 has Elijah as the champion against the prophets of Baal; 19 has him shivering in fear over a “text” message. Chapter 18 takes place on a mountaintop; 19, under a tree in the wilderness.

Anxiety takes hold of Elijah and causes him to desert his prophetic post when he is most needed for leadership and revival. Shortly after a great victory, he is running away from death. Ironically he then seeks death, saying, “It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!” (1 Kings 19:4). Thankfully God does not answer every prayer of our hearts, no matter how sincere we are.

How many of us have had these moments that make no sense. They cause us to contemplate death and its silence as better than life’s turmoil. Even prophets can experience suicidal thoughts, discouragement, fear, and depression, whether clinical, spiritual, or emotionally driven.

Verses 5 and 6 contain the ingredients for the Lord’s cure to Elijah’s condition. The first stage is physical therapy: God deals gently with Elijah and causes him to sleep. Rest can work wonders to reduce stress and improve mood. Sleep

restores the brain, causing clear and rational thinking.

Second, rather than speaking from a distance, the angel touches Elijah amid his loneliness and isolation. Hugging and nonsensual touch cause the release of healthy hormones that reduce anxiety and negative thoughts. Recall the times Jesus touched individuals, especially those who experienced long periods of seclusion, disease, and deprivation.

Third, Elijah is given food and water. As banal as they are, food and water are the basic building blocks of our bodies. This spiritual giant, in his zeal, forgot to replenish his body with basic physical necessities. Elijah spent all day on Mount Carmel without food, then ran with Ahab’s chariot back to Jezreel.

To conclude his physical healing, Elijah is to repeat the first three steps again: rest, touch, and sustenance. Rather than rebuke or chide, God offers small basic needs in the silence of His loving gentleness. On the strength of two meals Elijah traveled the next 40 days, for the second stage of healing: the spiritual therapy of hearing God’s still small voice again.

Perhaps there was a time you were strong with the Lord, but now you are meandering in a wilderness far away. Whether it be doubt, discouragement,

or another word, you might feel as though you are just “maintaining,” wondering what the point is in all of this. God yearns to speak with us again. To help us hear Him, He first pityingly suggests the physical counsel of rest, touch, and sustenance. Then God tenderly repeats a second round of the same. And as 1 Kings 19 concludes, God seeks to revive our hearts with His still small voice. He yearns to give us physical and spiritual strength that we may have a mountaintop experience with Him personally. Failures are mere opportunities for personal revival.

“It is not always the most learned presentation of God’s truth that convicts and converts the soul. Not by eloquence or logic are men’s hearts reached, but by the sweet influences of the Holy Spirit, which operate quietly yet surely in transforming and developing character. It is the still, small voice of the Spirit of God that has power to change the heart.”\*

\*Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1917), p. 169.

## A BALANCED PRESENTATION

I love the balanced way Amanda Walter focused on the questions and feelings of young people in “H Is for Halloween,” validating the questions and thoughts, yet showing the value of having and keeping standards. This is a tough topic, and she handled it so well! I think she had God whispering to her when she wrote this. Thank you!

**Kathleen Summerton Bonjour**

## A WORD OF CAUTION

I would like to respond to the article “H Is for Halloween,” by Amanda Walter (October 2023). Yes, children and youth need to learn to make decisions, but the path must be progressive and age-appropriate. You don’t let a 2-year-old decide to play in the middle of a busy street. The Bible says, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6).

Young children should be given safe choices, such as what shirt to wear, which breakfast cereal to eat, etc. The parents’ example will be a powerful influence in a child’s life. If the parent has no scruples, no ideals, no spiritual persona, the



### H IS FOR HALLOWEEN

One educator's approach to Halloween

AMANDA WALTER

Halloween was an extremely perplexing and stressful subject for me when I was growing up. To be candid, it continues to be so. After my parents became Adventists, the Halloween tradition was more eagerly anticipated-watched. Suddenly Halloween was off limits for discussion. Occasionally on October 31 we tried alternative activities, such as bowling or visiting the mall. Still, more often than not, we found ourselves huddled in the basement watching movies, with all lights, especially the porch lights, switched off to create the illusion of an empty house. With time, we would retreat to our respective rooms, almost afraid to breathe, as the sounds of tick-tock timers echoed outside.

#### EXPLANATIONS

One Halloween night, as I slept, a car carrying intoxicated teenagers crashing from a party crashed in front of our house. My parents extended their care to the injured youths, calling their

parents and ensuring their safe passage to a hospital. Not the next day, while they were talking about it with us, their emphasis was not on the importance of showing kindness and helping others in spite of their poor choices, but on how this incident was more evidence that Halloween was really bad news.

To be clear, I am absolutely certain that my parents' intentions were rooted in keeping us safe. Because of the lack of open conversation, however, I felt bewildered and uncomfortable whenever I had to explain why I abstained from anything related to the holiday. Beyond a hastily mentioned sentence or two about " Satan's holiday " I did not receive an explanation as to why we were to stay away from it. The situation was not any easier at church or school. Halloween's appearance to be mostly avoided topic; some kids celebrated it, some didn't, and that was the end of it. Consequently my feelings toward Halloween became a mix of dread and aversion, as I lacked my own convictions. But that is not how I truly felt because I was told it was bad.

Then I became a teacher.

#### THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Managing Halloween within a public school environment was challenging, but when I began teaching at an Adventist school,

I realized that Halloween was not the core issue. It became evident that I needed to refine my decision-making process to reconcile the convictions laid on my heart. Why did Halloween evoke such discomfort? Why did I fear the way I did when I learned how others celebrated

## TELL ME MORE

Michael Czechowski is an often little-known but important figure in Seventh-day Adventist history in Europe. I am delighted that the Review is telling us his story under the Looking Back flag (October 2023). I would like to hear more about him.

**Gregory Matthews**

## GREATER COMFORT IN TRUTH

Adam Ramdin makes a beautiful presentation of the comfortable deception saturating our current media and folk spirituality in “Same, Same, but Different” (October 2023). Don’t forget to model these much more enduring words when comforting those grappling with grief and personal loss: resurrection morning, see Jesus together, the great hope, we will rise again.

**George Odell**

## INSPIRED

I love Lori Futcher’s article in October’s issue of the Review, “The Winning Team”! An intentional and fun approach meant to live out Christ and win souls to Him. If this team were in my neighborhood, I would join in any role! I pray to be part of or form my own team, as that’s our call—to win souls to Christ, using all approaches as the Spirit leads.

**Joel Mutungi**

children in the home will grow up without a moral compass. If popular entertainment pervades the home, the resulting influence can be disastrous. As the child becomes able to reason and comprehend more complex topics, the principles and beliefs of the parents should be shared in an age-appropriate way. This works best when the home, church, and school are working together to promote Bible-based understandings and beliefs.

Halloween is not a “neutral” topic. It promotes the idea of the immortality of the soul, which is not biblical and which leads many people into deception.

**Ron Truth**



---

## I think she had God whispering to her when she wrote this.

KATHLEEN SUMMERTON BONJOUR

---

### A GASLIGHTING SERPENT

The issue on death is a timely one. Many will be blessed by it. But I have a concern.

The idea that “the serpent lied” needs careful nuance, for if you take what the serpent said and what happened, it may initially look like the serpent didn’t lie. Adam and Eve’s life did not end that day. Further, the record shows that after they ate the forbidden fruit, their eyes were opened. And finally, God Himself declared, they had “become like one of Us” (Gen. 3:22).

On the surface the serpent doesn’t come off as a boldfaced liar. Yet what appears to be truth was nevertheless a lie. If not for Christ stepping in that fateful day, putting the plan of salvation into operation, the first couple would have died. Their eyes were opened, but they didn’t acquire wisdom. Rather, they became ashamed and hid from God. And they did become as God, not only knowing good, as it had been God’s intention, but now experiencing and knowing evil. The serpent’s words looked “truthful,” but he was gaslighting the human pair, which led to their fall. It says something about how subtle Satan’s snares can be.

**Kevin James**

### COMFORTING CLARITY

The excellent article by Cindy Tutsch, “Death: Is It the Final Frontier?” (October 2023), really helped to clarify what happens when we stop breathing. It is amazing to see all the different concepts about the meaning of death! I was raised in the Catholic Church and trembled with fear about those who would be burned in hell, as well as those I believed to be in purgatory. Some are very happy when a loved one passes away, since they think that they are now in heaven. The thought helps them to alleviate the pain.

I like what Cindy said that “when the breath of life departs, there is utter extinction of life, and Jesus compares death to a sleep.” It is not a separation of the soul from the body. As a minister I’ve tried to comfort those whose loved ones have passed away by letting them know that their dear ones are waiting for Jesus to come back and take them out of the cold tomb to the glorious encounter

with Him and their loved ones. What a day that will be! Those two little tears that my wife unconsciously communicated with me when she recently passed away will be tears of joy. Jesus’ mission is accomplished for eternity!

**Leo Ranzolin, Sr.**

### A BLESSING TO LEARN

I appreciate the focus on one theme in each issue of the *Adventist Review*. It is an opportunity to consider a topic more in depth and from various perspectives. Having contributed to the “Halloween-less Homes” article on how different families approach Halloween (October 2023), it was interesting to read about other people’s experiences. It is a blessing to learn from one another.

**Valmy Karemera**

### YOUR TURN

**We welcome your letters**, noting, as always, that inclusion of a letter in this section does not imply that the ideas expressed are endorsed by either the editors of the *Adventist Review* or the General Conference. Short, specific, timely letters have the best chance at being published (please include your complete address and phone number—even with e-mail messages). Letters will be edited for space and clarity only. Send correspondence to Letters to the Editor, *Adventist Review*, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600; Internet: [letters@adventistreview.org](mailto:letters@adventistreview.org).

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**“The process of leading others to Christ could take longer than church leaders or members expect in a traditional Adventist church setting, but so far it has proved to be effective.”**

**Kleber Gonçalves, p. 14**



View of the auditorium during the secretary's report at the Adventist Church headquarters.

PHOTO: LUCAS CARDINO / AME (CC BY 4.0)

## IN FACE OF UNPRECEDENTED CHALLENGES, GC SECRETARY CALLS FOR REFOCUS ON MISSION

**ERTON KÖHLER HIGHLIGHTS INTEGRATION TO MOVE AUDACIOUS INITIATIVES FORWARD.**

MARCOS PASEGGI, *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

**G**od has called the Seventh-day Adventist Church for this time of unprecedented changes, challenges, and opportunities, General Conference secretary Ertion Köhler said in his secretary's report during the 2023 Annual Council on October 8.

“Changes are not new to us,” Köhler said in his message to the hundreds of members of the GC Executive Committee (EXCOM) gathered in Silver Spring, Maryland. “But today's changes are different: they are rapid, they are impactful, and they are profound.” He added, “We can't be afraid of changes, but they can compel us to leave our comfort

zone, be awake, and use all our resources, and the best initiatives to share our biblical message of hope to this world.”

Against this new reality, Köhler celebrated the ongoing mission refocus of the 22-million-strong denomination. At the same time, he called the church to continue tackling challenges with the power of the Holy Spirit and bold, mission-driven actions.

### THE ROLE OF MISSION REFOCUS

“Mission Refocus is one of our priorities to face this changing time,”

he emphasized, referencing an initiative of the world church that seeks to redirect planning efforts and funds to reach others for Jesus, particularly in challenging areas of the world. Mission Refocus is not only about sending missionaries and integration, Köhler explained, but also about “adjusting how we accomplish the mission to efficiently reach a world facing profound changes.”

Results are trickling in, Köhler reported. “After a few months of prayer, discussion, and evaluation, many of our organizations and institutions have established plans to adopt and send missionaries to some chal-

GC secretary Erton Köhler presents his secretary's report during the 2023 Annual Council in Silver Spring, Maryland, on October 8.

PHOTO: LUCAS CARDINO / AME (CC BY 4.0)



lenging places worldwide,” he said. “It is impressive to see how different organizations and institutions thought beyond their geographical borders and made sacrifices to be part of this worldwide initiative. Some of our attached fields that need extra support to accomplish their mission are now also contributing to help others.”

### PRESSING CHALLENGES

Köhler spent considerable time listing some of the pressing challenges the Adventist Church is facing as it tries to accomplish its mission. He mentioned the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic that has impacted church life and the ongoing wars that have disrupted the supply chain even in developed countries, increased global political instability, and skyrocketed the number of refugees.

Concurrently we are living through an unprecedented ecological crisis, Köhler said, which has affected every church territory. Connected to this are challenges to the world economy, he reminded church leaders.

Social challenges include the rise of the “Me Me Me generation,” also called the “Selfie generation.” It’s made up of digital natives who are “emotionally weak but, at the same time, eager to defend justice and constantly seeking to live a meaningful life,” Köhler said. “In terms of morality, 60 percent of Millennials live by defining what is right for them—their own rules of conduct.”

Another challenge is related to society’s understanding of human sexuality, Köhler said, and social polarization and cynicism toward all authority, including church leaders. He also mentioned challenges brought by technology, including the impact of social media and, more recently, artificial intelligence.

Finally, mission changes are impacting the world, Köhler said, as countries that have sent missionaries for at least 100 years have diminished their global mission impact, and new countries—Brazil, South Korea, Philippines, and others—have stepped up by becoming senders of missionaries.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR MISSION

The challenge, Köhler emphasized, is to see these global changes and challenges as opportunities for mission. As the foundation for any change or new initiative, Adventist leaders and members need the guidance of the Holy Spirit. “The more complicated the global scenario is, the more needed the Holy Spirit is,” he said. “We need wisdom from the Lord more than ever.”

Regarding the church’s financial investment in mission, “if God sends more, let’s invest more, especially in well-planned mission initiatives,” Köhler said. “The worst that can happen for God’s church is that when the Lord comes, He will find all the extra money He sent us to accomplish the mission earning interest in the banks and not being used in the field.”

Köhler also emphasized the importance of keeping our identity alive. “Churches that lose their identity and authenticity also lose their relevance,” he reminded church leaders. “Identity is nonnegotiable.”

Against that context, the best way to approach today’s generation is by highlighting our biblical message of hope, Köhler said. “A hopeless world is looking for a hopeful church . . . which offers people a better life in Jesus and a new life according to His Word.”

At the same time, another opportunity for mission implies focusing on disciple-making, as it’s not only the heart of the Great Commission but is the best way to reach the hearts of people living in the world today, Köhler said.

Technology is also a game-changer for mission because it can reach everybody, everywhere, at any time. “We have everything we need to move forward with a sense of urgency,” Köhler said.

Against present realities, “everybody can do something to keep the focus on the mission and to help us face our vast worldwide challenges. This is why Mission Refocus is not just a priority but an increasingly urgent priority,” he said. “Let us promote God-led changes. Let us promote Bible-based changes. This is what we call Mission Refocus in a time of change.”

\*To read a condensed version of Erton Köhler’s presentation, see p. 40.

## GENERAL CONFERENCE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE TAPS SEVEN LEADERS FOR KEY POSITIONS

A DIVISION ADMINISTRATOR AND SIX GENERAL CONFERENCE LEADERS ARE VOTED TO SERVE.

RACHEL ASHWORTH, ANN, AND ADVENTIST REVIEW

On October 8 the nominating committee for the General Conference's (GC) presented its report, recommending names to the GC Executive Committee (EXCOM) to fill seven positions.

### NEWLY ELECTED LEADERS

#### East-Central Africa Division Treasurer: Yohannes Olana Beyene

Yohannes Olana Beyene, originally from Ethiopia, has been the under-treasurer of the East-Central Africa Division. Beyene holds a bachelor's degree in accounting, a master's in accounting and finance. He assumed his new position immediately.

#### Scientist for Geoscience Research Institute: Lance Pompe

Lance Pompe has been most recently involved in academic teaching and study at Loma Linda School of Public Health. He was born in Zimbabwe and raised in South Africa. Pompe holds a Master of Science degree in geology, and a Ph.D. in earth sciences. Pompe is committed to research and education, particularly in the harmonization of faith and science. He will assume this position on March 1, 2024.

#### General Conference Field Secretary: Vyacheslav Demyan

Vyacheslav Demyan is the new president of Hope Channel International (HCI). He joined HCI in 2019 and has guided the development

and execution of programming to support HCI's missiological goals. He has a passion for media ministry and a mission to reach millions with the good news. He assumed the field secretary position on November 1.

#### General Conference Children's Ministries Associate Director: Nilde Itin

Nilde Itin has been associate director for women's ministries at the GC since June 8, 2022. Previously she served the Northern Asia-Pacific Division as the children's, women's, and family ministries associate director. She has a passion for helping young people develop a relationship with Jesus. Itin holds a Master of Arts in education and has served the Adventist Church in South America and Asia. She assumed this position on November 1.

#### General Conference Planned Giving and Trust Services Associate Director: Hector Reyes

Hector "Tony" Reyes has served as vice president of university advancement for Southwestern Adventist University in Keene, Texas, since January 2020. Previously he served in the Potomac Conference, three academies, and the Universidad de Montemorelos in the areas of development, planned giving, and advancement. He assumed the position immediately.

#### General Conference Sabbath School and Personal Ministries As-

#### sociate Director: Jaipaul Daniel Ebenezer Sundararaj

Jaipaul Daniel Ebenezer Sundararaj has served the North England Conference since 2022. While serving as the conference's personal ministries and evangelism director, he focused on discipleship ministry, the nurturing, equipping, and empowering of individuals for Christian leadership. Ebenezer is studying for a Master of Science in counseling and psychotherapy from Salford University. He assumed his new role on November 1.

#### General Conference Women's Ministries Associate Director: Galina Stele

Galina Stele has served in the GC Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research since 2012. Born in the Russian Federation, Stele has traveled the world to serve the Adventist Church in various positions, including professor of theology in the Russian Federation, coordinator and general editor of *Shepherdess and Living Church* in the Euro-Asia Division, and director of the Euro-Asia Division's Institute of Missiology. She was the first woman to graduate with a doctorate in ministry from Andrews University in 1996 and is a widely published author. She assumed this role on November 1. 

## “WE ARE HERE TODAY BECAUSE GOD CREATED THE UNIVERSE”

GEOSCIENCE RESEARCH INSTITUTE REPORT HIGHLIGHTS THE WORK OF BIBLE-BELIEVING SCIENTISTS.

MARCOS PASEGGI, *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

The Geoscience Research Institute (GRI) report at the 2023 Annual Council of the Seventh-day Adventist Church reminded hundreds of church leaders about the impact of the General Conference-funded organization for Christians who still believe in biblical creation. On October 8 GRI director Ronny Nalin shared the institute’s activities and plans, highlighting some of the theological implications of the work it accomplishes.

The mission statement of GRI is “to explore the natural world, seeking to develop and share an understanding of nature consistent with the biblical teaching as expressed in the church’s statement of fundamental belief on creation,” Nalin read. He added, “This is the compass that leads our activity and planning.”

Nalin explained that the work of GRI includes two functions: exploring and developing an understanding, and sharing that understanding with others. In the following minutes he detailed how GRI accomplishes those two functions.

### EXPLORING AND DEVELOPING AN UNDERSTANDING

GRI accomplishes this mission through original scientific research on topics that are relevant to the biblical view of origins, Nalin reminded church leaders. “We accomplish that mission by networking, mentoring, and with scholarly discussion of scientific issues,” he said. Also, it is by “producing educational resources, teaching classes, and organizing educational programs for teachers, pastors, university students, and the interested public.”



Nalin added that GRI serves as a consultive resource for the church regarding its understanding of the relationship of creation and science.

Currently GRI includes four full-time scientists. “Each one of them has been prepared by God for a very special mission,” Nalin said. “They dedicate their lives, their training, and their skills to bring glory to God through research and investigation.”

Nalin explained further that all GRI scientists are engaged in original research in areas of great significance for earth history and its relationship to the biblical account of origins. Some of these areas are geochronology (radiometric dating); igneous activity (volcanoes) in space and time; the fossil record (especially the conditions for the formation of dinosaur footprints); processes that led to widespread rock formations and deposits; the source of genetic variability in endemic island species; and the process of rapid speciation.

“This work is often field-based, so it involves some adventure in disparate locations around the globe,” Nalin shared.

The results of the GRI scientists’ research projects are published in peer-reviewed scientific journals, something that, according to Nalin, “demonstrates the relevance for the larger scientific community of our studies, the quality of our work, and also our commitment as a team to engage within the scientific community, because academia is also a place where we need people chosen for mission.”



Geoscience Research Institute director Ronny Nalin said the basis of the Adventist message is pointing people to give glory to God as the Creator. PHOTO: LUCAS CARDINO / AME (CC BY 4.0)

This is not a stand-alone enterprise, Nalin assured EXCOM members. “We have an extensive network of mentorees, especially young students and scientists that are passionate about science and learning about the natural world but are also committed to God and His Word,” he said.

### SHARING THE ADVENTIST UNDERSTANDING

One of the ways the GRI likes to share is through field conferences, including “activities where GRI scientists can be in the field, look at the rocks, study the wonderful vestiges of earth history and God’s creative activity in human history.”

Recent conferences include one at Babcock University in Nigeria in July, attended by 1,200 Adventist educators from 22 countries. Another was an early August trip with science teachers from across the North American Division (NAD). They were, in Nalin’s words, “50 wonderful teachers, so committed and dedicated,” who spent time in several locations in Arizona, United States, including the Grand Canyon. An upcoming field trip with educators will take GRI sci-

entists to Tanzania to support science teachers in the East-Central Africa Division, he reported. “We will grow together and possibly have a ripple effect in the whole division,” he said.

Recently GRI launched a graduate certificate in faith and science at the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIAS) in the Philippines. “Now we have the ability to provide higher education in three different levels,” Nalin reported, “thanks to this certificate at AIAS, a master’s at Sagunto [in Spain], and master and doctorate studies at Loma Linda University [in California, U.S.]”

Nalin also celebrated partnerships that allow GRI scientists to share what they do through the written word. GRI is a regular contributor to *Adventist Review* and publishes books through Andrews University Press. It also works closely with the NAD Education Department. Together they developed a biology curriculum book for primary and secondary school students. “It is enquiry based and also affirms the beauty of the Creator God,” he said.

Audiovisual resources are another method GRI uses to share the Adventist understanding of origins. They include, for instance, the video series *Seeking Understanding*, which profiles the life and journey of scientists and scholars who are also people of faith.

### A MEANINGFUL WORK

Nalin acknowledged that GRI’s impact would be minimal but for its branch offices around the world. Currently the organization has four branch offices in four church divisions, along with 11 resource centers. Soon more divisions will open branch offices, he said. And even those divisions without a branch office or resource center do have GRI representatives as liaisons to the institute, Nalin said.

As he closed his report, Nalin reminded EXCOM members of the connection between the work GRI does and what the Adventist Church has been called to do.

“The reality is that in this very moment there are myriads of angels, magnificent celestial beings, that are giving glory to God because He is the Creator,” Nalin said. “We exist, and we are here—you and I—because God created the universe, because God created this world and fashioned it for us to inhabit it. We are here today because God willed us. We are here today because He sustains our being.”

Nalin said that if we understand that, we realize that “that is what we have been given as a church; that is the gospel we must share. So let’s go tell other people, ‘You are special! You are loved! Somebody willed you; Somebody designed you. Give Him your heart, and He will lead you.’ That’s the special message we must share,” he said. ▀

A group from the Comunidad Oriente in Medellín, Colombia, sit together for a group photo during a recent Sabbath afternoon. PHOTO: KEVIN MENDOZA



## IAD SPEARHEADS EFFORTS TO REACH URBAN AND SECULAR COMMUNITIES

CONGREGATIONS ARE GETTING RESULTS EVEN WHEN THEY DON'T FOLLOW TRADITIONAL MODELS.

LIBNA STEVENS, INTER-AMERICAN DIVISION NEWS

New Seventh-day Adventist congregations are gaining recognition across the Inter-American Division (IAD). Congregants are gathering in spaces other than church buildings. The worship service does not follow the usual format of Sabbath School followed by a sermon. No church emblems or even the Seventh-day Adventist Church logo are visible. But there is music, there are Bible-centered messages, and specific activities and events on the Sabbath and during the week.

Dubbed as Friendly Churches, the congregations follow a plan launched in 2021 when division leaders focused on reaching non-believers in specific locations across urban areas. The groups or small congregations are managed by the Adventist Church in the conference or mission where they serve.

### REACHING THE SECULAR PUBLIC

Friendly Churches seek out university students, business owners, professionals, and people who are not interested in visiting a church building or taking part in a formal church service, said Hiram Ruiz, IAD public campus ministries director. They are not interested in organized religion. The initiative came about after the pandemic,

and highlights the need to reach believers and nonbelievers who are uninterested in any kind of religious church, he added. "We saw the need to provide a comfortable place where they could speak and listen to spiritual things without music being the main focus, or a specific dress code, but with the opportunity for them to understand God in their lives."

There are 10 full congregations of this kind across Mexico, Panama, Colombia, and El Salvador. Most have been running since early this year.

### A DIFFERENT APPROACH

The IAD was the first region of the world church to participate in the new structured program, said Kleber Gonçalves, director of the Global Mission Center for Secular and Postmodern Studies at the General Conference.

"This has been a totally different approach from what pastors have been trained for normally in our church," Gonçalves said. "The process of leading others to Christ could take longer than church leaders or members expect in a traditional Adventist church setting, but so far it has proved to be effective. We have seen how God has grown the ministry of seeking secular-minded people who are looking for answers," he said.

Each of the established Friendly Churches is in a large city populated with at least 1 million people. The churches have been designed to be a different kind of Adventist church, with an ongoing discipleship approach, Ruiz said. "It has been wonderful to see the spiritual impact these congregations are making in the lives of so many living in large cities," he said.

### IT'S NOT ABOUT NUMBERS

The Friendly Church project's success is not being measured by the number of baptisms, visitors, and regular visitors, Ruiz said. "The spiritual growth of the group works through a contextualized discipleship program, not your traditional Adventist evangelism format," he said. Yet the groups at Friendly Churches give their tithes and offerings and contribute to the Adventist Church organization that they fall under, Ruiz said.

Now the Global Mission Center for Secular and Postmodern Studies at the General Conference and the IAD are working on putting together a handbook with the how-to process, recommendations, and results obtained from established Friendly Churches across the territory. It is expected to be available before the end of 2024. ▀





Attendees to the West-Central Africa Division year-end meetings in Ikot Ekpene, Akwa Ibom, Nigeria, pose for a group photo on October 29. PHOTO: MARCOS

PASEGGI, ADVENTIST REVIEW

## WEST-CENTRAL AFRICA DIVISION CELEBRATES 20 YEARS OF PROGRESS, STEADY GROWTH

AMONG CHALLENGES, REGIONAL CHURCH LEADERS THANK GOD FOR HIS BLESSINGS.

MARCOS PASEGGI, ADVENTIST REVIEW

In a region marked by local, national, and regional challenges, the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church continues thriving, regional church leaders recently said.

This was the recurring theme in the reports presented by the president, executive secretary, and treasurer of the West-Central Africa Division (WAD) at the region's year-end meetings in Ikot Ekpene, Akwa Ibom, Nigeria, October 29-30. Leaders rejoiced at God's faithfulness in helping the church thrive despite old and new challenges to its mission in the region, which encompasses 22 countries and many local cultures and languages.

As the WAD celebrated 20 years of existence in 2023, church leaders committed to continued and deliberate efforts to increase and even double the nearly 1 million baptized church members across the region.

### FOCUSED ON MISSION AGAINST ALL ODDS

WAD president Robert Osei-Bonsu summarized the main activities and achievements across the region in a video message. The presentation highlighted some of the challenges, including security threats in northern Nigeria, social

unrest and military coups, and economic volatility.

Despite those seeming roadblocks, the Adventist Church has kept its focus on mission, Osei-Bonsu said. Between June 2022 and June 2023 the church in the region baptized more than 42,000 people, which represents a 5 percent growth rate.

### STEADY PROGRESS ACROSS THE REGION

WAD executive secretary Selom Kwasi Sessou highlighted the progress made since the Annual Council voted to establish the new region in late 2002. At that time, the newly established church region had 669,620 members. Now the WAD includes 5,243 churches and 5,450 companies, with 1,784 ministers. It also includes five Adventist universities, 176 secondary schools, and 995 primary schools, 34 Adventist hospitals and sanitariums, nine clinics and dispensaries, and two printing presses.

"The Lord has been with us, and everyone has done their own part," Sessou said. "In many regions leaders and members are working. We believe that as we strategize and provide some additional funds for evangelism, we will reach wonderful results."

### GOD'S MERCIES AMID TROUBLED TIMES

A day later, on October 30, WAD treasurer Markus Musa Dangana highlighted some of the financial challenges across the region.

He reminded members of the WAD executive committee that the region includes 15 to 18 of the poorest countries out of the 40 poorest nations with a growing population. High inflation in several WAD countries has slowed economic progress and made it more difficult to conduct business. "We must remain prudent on how we manage the resources God has put into our hands," Dangana said.

Other issues that affect the ability of the regional church to do business include increased government oversight of banking transactions, cryptocurrencies, and cybersecurity challenges, Dangana said.

Despite past, current, and future challenges, Osei-Bonsu was happy to report that gross tithe in U.S. dollars increased by 9 percent between 2020 and 2022, and total offerings in US dollars increased by 10 percent in the same period. "By God's grace, we will keep working to reach 1 million members and then double that membership by 2025," he said. ▀

Maurice R. Valentine II suddenly passed to his rest October 20. He was 63.

PHOTO: DAVID B. SHERWIN/ADVENTIST REVIEW



## GC VICE PRESIDENT MAURICE VALENTINE DIES SUDDENLY AT 63

HE IS REMEMBERED AS A VISIONARY LEADER WITH THE ABILITY TO LISTEN.

ANN, AND ADVENTIST REVIEW

**O**n October 20 Maurice R. Valentine II, a vice president of the General Conference (GC) of Seventh-day Adventists, died suddenly. He was 63.

“Pastor Maurice Valentine’s death is a tragedy for the world church,” GC president Ted N. C. Wilson said. “He was a very godly leader and an important part of our world church leadership team. Our hearts are broken with this tragic news.”

G. Alexander “Alex” Bryant, president of the North American Division, reflected on his relationship with Valentine. “Maurice and I knew each other for more than 40 years through our college life and ministry,” Bryant said. “Maurice always had a passion for God, his family, and for ministry.”

Bryant and Valentine attended Oakwood University together, where they became friends. Later they had the privilege to serve together as partners in mission in the Central States Conference. “He executed his responsibility with a high degree of excellence and professionalism,” Bryant added. “He would always find encouraging words to speak to those he met, and took the time to listen to them, espe-

cially in the darkest moments.”

Valentine began his journey in ministry in 1985, serving as a pastor in various churches across Colorado, Iowa, Missouri, and Nebraska in the U.S. over 28 years. Valentine became the ministerial director of the Mid-America Union Conference from 2006 to 2012, furthering his impact on the church. He was later called to the Central States Conference as assistant to the president, vice president for administration, and then president.


In September 2017 Valentine was called to the Lake Union Conference (LUC). “Maurice served the Lake Union Conference faithfully as secretary and then as president,” LUC president Kenneth Denslow said. “In whatever roles he served, he was always loyal to Christ, the church, and its mission.”

In April 2021 Valentine transitioned to the North American Division (NAD) to serve as vice president for media ministries. GC associate treasurer Richard Stephenson served with him at the NAD and the GC and recalled him as a true visionary for digital media and online evangelism. “He

was a mentor to me in seeking new and creative ways to share Jesus,” Stephenson said. “He shared with me many times his belief that the church must better utilize media and technology to connect and engage with those looking for Jesus.”

Valentine’s impact extended far beyond his titles, those who got to know him said. His election as a vice president of the GC at the 2022 GC Session was a testament to his exceptional gifts, leaders said. “Having been elected at the same time, I felt a special bond with Maurice. He was a giant of faith,” said Audrey Andersson, also elected to serve as a vice president at the 2022 session. “Always kind, courteous, and considerate. He would stop by my office to talk and pray. No one could meet Maurice and not be touched by his warm Christian demeanor.”

Valentine is survived by his wife, Sharon (Livingston) Valentine, and their three adult children.

Wilson encouraged the global church to pray for the family and remember our ultimate hope. “Our hearts are encouraged by the reassuring fact that Jesus is coming soon!” he said. 



### 5,000 ADVENTIST WOMEN COMMIT TO CHANGING THEIR COMMUNITIES.

More than 5,000 women gathered in Guatemala City to take part in a countrywide women's ministries event, to hear the Word of God, pray, connect, and learn from one another. They also shared how they have been making a difference in their communities. The event was the largest women's ministries congress in Guatemala, and it was held on September 30.



### ADVENTIST-MANAGED SKILLS TRAINING CENTER OPENS IN ZAMBIA.

On October 8, members of the Dorcas and Adventist Men Organization (DORCAMO) societies celebrated the official opening of the first phase of the new DORCAMO Skills Training Center in Choma, Zambia. Hundreds of church members and leaders from the South Zambia Conference attended. The facilities, which are expected to run various survival skills initiatives when finished, were commissioned by Zambia's Science and Technology minister, Felix Mutati.



### COLOMBIA CYCLING TEAM REACHES COMMUNITIES WITH HOPE AND

**HEALTHY LIVING.** A team of 35 Seventh-day Adventist cyclists embarked on a grueling 260-mile tour as part of the "Hope on Wheels" Colombia initiative October 11-15. Along the way, they delivered 780 books, 450 water bottles, and 550 pieces of literature, reaching 1,750 people with the message of the "I Want to Live Healthy" initiative.



### MEDICAL MISSION BRIDGES HEALTH-CARE GAPS IN MALAYSIA.

The Adventist Church in Sabah, Malaysia, in partnership with the Malaysia Union Mission, arranged a medical mission on the island of Pulau Gaya on October 23. Because of the island's isolation, people have difficulty receiving needed medical treatment. The medical team provided care for more than 150 people. Children in the community were offered various activities, as well as multivitamins, food, and health tracking, while the demographic survey group went from house to house collecting data.



### CHRISTIANS ON SCIENCE FILM RELEASED IN FIVE ADDITIONAL LANGUAGES FOR CREATION SABBATH.

The original English version of *Christians on Science* was released by the Geoscience Research Institute (GRI) in October 2021. Thousands of people have since seen the film, fulfilling the goal of its producer, Birgir Oskarsson. Because of the film's positive reception, Oskarsson has sought to broaden its impact by translating it into several European languages. These translations have been coordinated by GRI's European branch office, in collaboration with several Seventh-day Adventist institutions.



### ADVENTISTS FROM ACROSS BRAZIL LEND THEIR VOICES TO RECORD

**THE BIBLE.** The initiative to record the Bible is part of the Bible Society of Brazil's (SBB) seventy-fifth anniversary celebrations. The project is titled "+31 Thousand Voices With the Word." A minibus, which travels throughout Brazil, has been fully outfitted to record voices of volunteers. These read one verse at a time, and when finished with the recording, each volunteer has their name registered and receives a bookmark and a thank-you from SBB for their participation.



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# I FINALLY GOT HELP

*Challenging the  
perception of  
mental health*

SAVANNAH CARLSSON



In the Adventist Church the concept of mental health challenges or mental illness is sometimes seen as a lack of faith. Choosing to go to counseling or taking medication sometimes comes with negative connotations. We tell those who are struggling that prayers can cure us of our downcast mental state. It is said with the best of intentions—God is a God of miracles, after all. But the result is often doubt when those prayers aren't answered in the way we think they should be. *Am I not being faithful enough? Does God not love me? What am I doing wrong? Why isn't God healing me?* It can often spiral someone even deeper into depression.

I'd like to challenge the idea that mental health should be dealt with differently than physical health. We go to physicians and dentists on a regular basis for a checkup. We get blood tests and measurements to make sure we are healthy and to prevent any future health challenges down the road. Yet we view emotional and mental health very differently. Could we consider mental health care in a similar manner? If you're not currently struggling, having a regular visit with a counselor could be viewed much like an annual physical or a biannual teeth cleaning. Sometimes it's preventative. Sometimes counselors can help with tips and tricks to deal with the regular pressures of life. Sometimes they help you see and address unresolved trauma that will result in continued counseling sessions, just as getting a diagnosis for pneumonia might call for continued treatment.

There are many examples in the Bible of faithful people who were downcast. David, for instance, wrote dozens of psalms in which he cried to God in despair. In my own moments of depression and despair, David's words have given me comfort. As human beings we feel things deeply. And, in conjunction with our relationship with God, it is OK to need help processing those feelings. Sometimes that can be a family member, a friend, or a pastor. And other times you might need someone neutral who can help you work through the complexities of the circumstances.

#### **LEARNING THROUGH DOING**

After welcoming my first child in 2018, I deeply struggled with postpartum depression.

I was vehemently opposed to getting help. I thought I should be able to do it all myself. When I finally realized that I was not OK, that I wasn't getting better, I got on medication, and I visited with a therapist that our marriage counselor recommended.

I don't even remember her name. I met with her twice—once for the intake appointment, and once for our first counseling appointment. I left the second appointment feeling worse than when I went in. I wasn't sure what to expect, and looking back, I realize she was too eager to "fix" my problems and didn't do enough listening. I needed to acknowledge, accept, and process my feelings before I could begin the work of healthier habits. She took my self-diagnosis at face value without fully investigating to determine if what I thought was the problem was really the problem.

It was challenging when, having finally acknowledged needing help, I met with someone who just wasn't the right fit for me. She was a very nice person. We simply did not click the way you should with a counselor. It took me at least a month to try again. You see, when my doctor gave me a prescription for antidepressants, she also made me promise to go to counseling. And because I made that promise, I felt a responsibility to find someone. My first foray into individual counseling was unsuccessful, and I wanted to throw in the towel. Eventually, however, I gathered my courage for another attempt, and called my employer-provided counseling service. I asked for referrals to Christian counselors, and they gave me several names.

I ended up connecting with Heather. My heart pounded as I walked into the little waiting area outside her office. She was running late, and my anxiety started to spike. Her previous client departed, and she welcomed me inside. Heather was warm, encouraging, and kind. She started our session with an intake survey, something much more scientific than my last counselor. I loved it! We talked about why I was there, and she offered to pray for me. The experience was vastly different. I had an immediate connection to her. A sense of peace. Heather has been my counselor now for three years.

## When I finally realized that I was not OK, that I wasn't getting better, I got on medication, and I visited with a therapist that our marriage counselor recommended.

In my time with her, we discovered that my challenges were not just postpartum depression, but anxiety-driven depression. That discovery changed the way I viewed myself and set me on a path to significantly healthier patterns of behavior. Heather would challenge me on a variety of levels, including setting regular devotional times to meet and talk with Jesus. It was exactly what I needed, and I truly believe that God led me to her so that I could grow personally, professionally, and spiritually. I am forever grateful for my relationship with her.

### MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN

Once I got comfortable with my regular counseling appointments, I would inform my assistant that I wasn't available during certain times because I was going to my counseling session. I could tell that he felt a little uncomfortable with that knowledge, and I waited for him to talk to me about it. He later told me that at first it felt weird to be talking about it. Counseling was such a taboo topic somehow. Then he thought about it and decided that it shouldn't be taboo. We ended up having some amazing conversations about counseling and how much it helped. It was so simple—just talking about my counseling sessions normalized the topic for both of us.

When the world shut down because of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of our regular coping mechanisms were taken away. Things such as spending time with friends or family, exercising outside or at the gym, taking vacations, having breaks from our family when needed, making healthy choices related to eating—many of those things were no longer available to us. According to the World Health Organization, “global prevalence of anxiety and depression increased by a massive 25 percent” during the first year of the pandemic.<sup>1</sup> According to the Centers for Disease Control, not only did we see a steep incline in anxiety and depression, but the severity of anxiety and depression also increased significantly.<sup>2</sup> We also saw a huge upswing in the rates of domestic violence and abuse during the pandemic, and rates globally increased by 25 to 33 percent.<sup>3</sup> Finally, according to an article published on Forbes.com, adults receiving mental health treatment increased from 19.2 percent

in 2019 to 21.6 percent in 2021, but approximately 42 percent of adults stated they couldn't afford the treatment they needed.<sup>4</sup>

Human beings were made for connection. As the world became more connected globally (thank you, social media!), we also became more disconnected interpersonally. This created a major disparity between the natures we were created with and the societal norms around us.

God created Adam, and then created Eve so he would have a helper—someone to be with him. Woman was created taking a piece from man, and moving forward, man was created through woman (Gen. 2:18-24). We are completely and abundantly intertwined. One cannot exist without the other. We were created to live abundantly, to have full lives of joy and peace. Sin created separation between us and God, and from each other as well. It takes intentionality and work to create and maintain healthy relationships. And sometimes we need help to ensure that our lives are lived in fullness. Having a wonderful counselor can make a significant impact.

Consider what your thoughts are regarding mental health and mental illness. Is there someone in your sphere who is receiving counseling? If you don't know, I would like to challenge you to find out. Go into conversations with an open heart and mind. Let's normalize the concept of caring for our mental health just as we care for our physical health. Let's talk about our experiences. Let's start thinking about counseling as a normal, routine part of life. Let's encourage each other to get annual mental health checkups. Let's normalize “I was talking to my counselor the other day and . . .” Let's create an environment in which we don't feel judged for our emotional or spiritual challenges, but rather encouraged to carry and share each other's burdens. 📌

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.who.int/news/item/02-03-2022-covid-19-pandemic-triggers-25-increase-in-prevalence-of-anxiety-and-depression-worldwide#:~:text=In%20the%20first%20year%20of,Health%20Organization%20\(WHO\)%20today](https://www.who.int/news/item/02-03-2022-covid-19-pandemic-triggers-25-increase-in-prevalence-of-anxiety-and-depression-worldwide#:~:text=In%20the%20first%20year%20of,Health%20Organization%20(WHO)%20today)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7040e3.htm>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression#:~:text=An%20estimated%203.8%25%20of%20the,world%20have%20depression%20\(i\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression#:~:text=An%20estimated%203.8%25%20of%20the,world%20have%20depression%20(i))

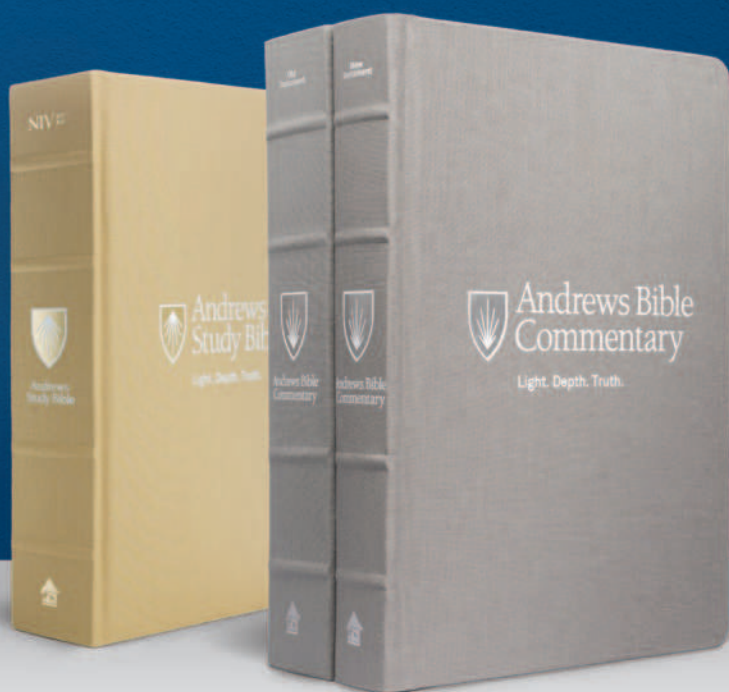
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/health/mind/mental-health-statistics/>

**Savannah Carlsson** is director of human resources and communications for Minnesota Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.



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# NO CONDEMNATION



*How to spot the lies depression and anxiety tell you*

**JONATHAN BETLINSKI,  
RACHEL SCRIBNER,  
GARY PARKS**

*Editor's Note: The following material is adapted from a pamphlet series on mental health produced for North American Division (NAD) Health Ministries and is used with permission by its publisher, AdventSource. We believe it to be especially relevant to this conversation.*

**A**nxiety isn't easy for anyone to battle. But for those of us who grew up with a religious background, it can get a little extra complicated. See, anxiety disorders can create irrational feelings of guilt. And sometimes, those of us who follow Jesus think any guilt at all must be a message from God. That's where the problem happens. Anxiety creates guilt for no reason; we believe God must be sending us that guilt; and then anxiety and religion get all tangled up in a messy downward spiral of confusion. The more anxious we feel, the more we worry that we aren't good enough for God. We try harder to be good enough, but that makes us worry more. And the more anxious we become, the guiltier we feel.

Finally, if the spiral goes unchecked, we can end up cutting more and more things out of our lives until there's nothing we can do, and nothing we can eat, drink, or think about that doesn't

make us feel guilty. But we don't feel better. We feel even worse.

So now what? How can we separate our own anxious feelings from God's promptings on our hearts? Here's a thought that might help as we each learn to listen for God's gentle voice: God calls us toward things, while anxiety condemns us.

When the Pharisees brought Jesus a woman caught in adultery, she probably felt guilty. And she had a reason. She'd broken the law, and she knew that according to the rules of her time, she wouldn't live much longer. But after the hypocritical Pharisees slipped away as Jesus wrote in the dust, He turned to the guilty woman and asked her a question: "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:10, 11, NIV).

Jesus didn't ask the woman if she felt guilty. That wasn't His goal. He knew she'd made a mistake, just as everyone else on earth had, but He didn't spend His time telling her how wrong she was or looking down on her. He simply pointed her in the direction of a happier and more fulfilling life and said: "Go."



Jesus is a healer, not a prosecutor. Romans 8:1, 2 says, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death” (NIV). The Bible is clear that Jesus wants to heal us. He wants us to be whole. But our God doesn’t condemn us. He calls us toward things—gives us steps we can reach.

Depression and anxiety can put some heavy thoughts into your head. And the more you believe those negative ideas, the more anxious or depressed you become. The good news is that you don’t have to stay in that cycle of negativity. Every time you confront a negative thought and replace it with something true, your depression or anxiety loses a piece of its power.

### TYPES OF NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

The first step to confronting these sneaky negative thoughts, or cognitive distortions, is learning how to spot them. Here are a few cognitive distortions to watch out for:

**Mental Filtering:** Magnifying the negatives and ignoring or filtering out all the positives. Example: “That party was awful; one of the people there didn’t want to talk to me.”

**All-or-Nothing Thinking:** Everything is wonderful or terrible; you’re either a success or a failure, and there’s no in-between. Example: “There are good people and bad people. If he did a bad thing, then he must be a bad person.”

**Overgeneralization:** One unpleasant moment is proof of an ongoing cycle of failure. Example: “I got a bad grade on my first assignment. I must be an awful student. I should quit school before it gets any worse.”

**Mind Reading:** Assuming you know what other people are thinking when you haven’t talked with them. Example: “I don’t have to ask Steve if he’s mad at me. I just know.”

**Catastrophizing:** Expecting disaster to strike or the worst-case scenario to happen. Example: “What if the airplane engines die? What if there’s a tsunami?”

**Personalization:** Believing that everything is all about you or taking everything personally. Example: “Julie looks nice today. She probably did that to get revenge on me.” Or “If only I hadn’t been late to the party. Everyone had a bad time because of me.”

**Control Fallacies:** Either we feel controlled by others (example: “I’m just destined to be unhappy;

## How can we separate our own anxious feelings from God’s promptings on our hearts?

there’s nothing I can do”), or we feel responsible for things outside our control, such as other people’s feelings. Example: “You look so sad. What did I do?”

**Should Statements:** These distortions tell you that if you don’t meet the standard, you deserve to feel guilty. Example: “I’m so lazy! I only walked for 30 minutes when I should have exercised for an hour.”

**Emotional Reasoning:** Believing that if you feel a certain way, it must be the truth. Examples: “I feel like I got a bad grade, so I did” or “I feel stupid and lazy, so I really am.”

### NEGATIVE THOUGHTS ARE LEARNED

All those negative thoughts that jump into your head were learned—possibly from someone important to you when you were younger. You’ve heard people say these things often enough that you accepted them without question. And by now you’ve probably repeated them so many times that they’re automatic; they pop into your head before you even realize it.

You can unlearn and replace negative thinking. It might be tricky at first. Once thoughts have become automatic, they can be slippery and slide into your head before you notice. But with time and patience you can learn to spot them and retrain your brain to think differently. And one day they won’t be automatic anymore. You’ll have completely replaced them with new, positive thought processes.

God may call you to make a change in your life, but if He does, you will know what He’s calling you to do, and it will be a step you can manage. By quieting the voices of fear in your head, you are moving toward healing, toward wholeness. 🌱

Find more helpful resources at [OneTeamMentalHealth.org](https://www.oneteammentalhealth.org), [NADHealth.org](https://www.nadhealth.org), and on the new Adventist Health Ministries website, [reminded.org](https://www.reminded.org). You can purchase the whole Mental Health Series from [AdventSource.com](https://www.adventsource.com).

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# YOU'VE GOT ISSUES!

RON COFFEN

**D**olly, a pastor's daughter and a pastor's wife, faithfully spent hours reading the Bible each morning and *The Adventist Home* each evening. Yet she battled severe, unrelenting depression. She viewed compliments in her mother's weekly letters as veiled criticisms, and her distress, amid her faithfulness, nearly ruined her marriage and family life.

## SPIRITUAL GIANTS FACED ADVERSITY

Hebrews 11 lists Bible heroes commended by God—people of faith. A list worthy of our meditation. What does it mean to be a person of faith? Were they flawless? focused? fearless? “By faith,” did they avoid all physical adversities, emotional turmoil, and cognitive distress?

Let's do a quick check on *physical adversities*.<sup>1</sup> Did Abel, the faith chapter list leader, avoid all physical adversity? No, he was murdered—an extreme physically adverse event. Did Abraham avoid all physical adversity? No, he headed off to Egypt when his family was starving (Gen. 12:10).

What about Isaac? No, his eyes ailed him so he could not visibly distinguish between his sons. Moses? No, he could not hold up his arms, but trusted advisors supported him. Hebrews 11:35-38 makes it clear that there is no promise, this side of heaven, that physical adversity bypasses the faithful.

Across the hundreds of generations since humans let sin into the world, the ravages of sin's general toll on the Edenic human body have diminished physical functioning, in many cases through no direct action by those who suffer—Abel died at another's hand, Abraham did not create the famine, and Isaac did not blind himself.

## EMOTIONAL TURMOIL, COGNITIVE DISTRESS

But what about *emotional turmoil*? and *cognitive distress*?<sup>3</sup> Did Noah avoid all emotional turmoil or cognitive distress? No, preaching 120 years with only mocking distressed him.<sup>4</sup> What about Jacob? No, for decades Joseph's loss caused heart-wrenching grief.<sup>5</sup> Did Joseph avoid emotional turmoil when betrayed by his brothers or cognitive distress when falsely imprisoned, then forgotten by the cupbearer he'd encouraged? No,

he emotionally pleaded to his brothers, wept when handed over to slave traders, and felt betrayed by the cupbearer.



Did Moses avoid stress? No, Jethro saw how overwhelmed Moses was judging every problem among the Israelites, until Jethro helped him obtain support. Was Jephthah emotionally unruffled? No, he was religiously impulsive; he wept grievously, wracked by regret (Judges 11:35).

Did David, a man after God's own heart, avoid mental health challenges? No, numerous psalms testify to his struggles with anxiety and depression. "The troubles of my heart have enlarged," he lamented. "Bring me out of my distresses!" (Ps. 25:17). "For the enemy has persecuted my soul; he has crushed my life to the ground; he has made me dwell in darkness, like those who have long been dead. Therefore my spirit is overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is distressed" (Ps. 143:3, 4). As with physical adversity, Hebrews 11:35-38 makes no promise that the faithful will bypass emotional turmoil and cognitive distress.

And then there's Elijah. He had just demonstrated God's domination over Ahab, one of the worst kings in Israel's history, paired with arguably the worst queen in Israel's history. Exceeding Elijah's faith-based request to Yahweh for fire to consume the waterlogged sacrifice, God sent fire that vaporized sacrifice, water, dirt, and rock! Talk about empowering! It was so empowering that Elijah ran faster than Ahab's horse-powered chariot for perhaps 15 miles! Yet the next scene presents Elijah anxious, suffering, deeply depressed, and feeling alone. A man of faith, the prophet of the Lord was hardly worry-free.

Besides having faith, we would identify the Bible's faithful in modern language as also having issues with sibling rivalry (Joseph), social anxiety and speech challenges (Moses), mood disorders (Elijah), anger management and impulsivity (Peter, James, John), parenting problems (Eli), suicidal ideation (Job, Elijah, Jonah), and the list goes on.

Yet God praises them in the faith chapter; describes them as having a heart like His; collaborates with them in a celebration of their faithfulness while they simultaneously faced daily unrelenting, unrelieved emotional turmoil and cognitive distress. Similarly, Jesus indicates that those who die in tragic accidents are no more sinful than anyone else (Luke 13:4), and rain (both physical and metaphorical) falls on the just and the unjust. In a world embroiled in the great controversy's pull to chaos, time and chance bring

distress to everyone (Eccl. 9:11). Can the faithful experience mental health issues? It seems the biblical answer is, definitively, "Yes."

## CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

So what *are* the causes of mental health distress? Living in a world hundreds of generations away from God's perfectly ordered creation puts us all in a battleground in which three major factors are behind mental health distress: long-standing factors, triggers, and maintaining factors.

*Long-standing factors* may be genetic or inborn, or occur early in life. Although they may cause distress directly, they often just put one at risk for developing distress. An example of a physical long-standing factor is being seven feet tall—an innate factor that does not *cause* concussions, but puts one *at risk* for concussions in a society in which doors are typically six-feet-eight-inches high. Similarly, a psychological long-standing factor is a reactive temperament—for example, infants who wake easily at night have nervous systems that react strongly to relatively small fluctuations in the environment.

*Triggers* are events occurring just before the onset of distress. If one is seven feet tall and running to escape a burning building, one is likely to forget to duck at doors, and to end up with a concussion. The triggers for getting a concussion are the fire, fearful running, and forgetting to duck. A psychological trigger for someone with a reactive temperament might be the unexpected death of a close friend, which could cause broad emotional distress (reactive nervous system), leading to worries about the potential death of other loved ones, potential illnesses, potential financial crises, or other "what ifs."

*Maintaining factors* are events that keep the distress going. For example, being seven feet tall and regularly playing chase in the house with one's children is a social maintaining factor that makes one more likely to hit one's head on door jams and experience concussions. A psychological maintaining factor for someone with a reactive temperament might be skipping work whenever one worries about possibly being judged, not fitting in, or making social blunders at work. When one skips work, the reduction in immediate distress is attributed to avoiding work; so one avoids work more and more when distressed, which maintains anxiety.

## Long-standing factors, triggers, and maintaining issues cause cognitive distress and emotional turmoil.

Long-standing factors, triggers, and maintaining factors cause cognitive distress and emotional turmoil. God created emotions to strongly alert us about unmet needs. Properly deployed, energy from emotions fuels problem-solving resources to address those needs. Emotions do not tell us how to solve the problem, but they do signal a problem and provide energy. Neglecting the signal exacerbates distress.

When a person of faith experiences cognitive distress and emotional turmoil, God sometimes resolves the distress miraculously. Yet God does not promise such resolutions for the faithful. Rather, He has called for humans to rule over creation (Gen 1:26, 28)—as beings created in His image, we are, like Him, to bring order from chaos to resolve problems and reduce distress. God declared that being alone is not good, and He has provided for a supportive community of individuals who take care of others with wisdom, knowledge, and discernment for the healing of those who are distressed (Eph. 4:11, 12; 1 Cor. 12:7-11).

### PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

Helpers generally employ four modes of solutions:

**Learn something new:** This is *internal* change. If one does not have the required knowledge, if one is missing a skill, or if a skill has not been sufficiently practiced, then learning is the first intervention to try. It involves learning the missing knowledge or skill. If knowledge is present but the skill is not performed well, then supported practice may improve performance and reduce distress.

**Shift to a different skill:** This is also *internal* change. If the knowledge and skills exist as much as possible but performance still lags, use other strengths to compensate—if it is hard to use self-talk to calm anxiety, shift to playing music.

**Adjust the environment:** When internal change is not possible, implement *external* changes to enable functioning within a modified environ-

ment. Change the environment or task demands, or provide tools so that the need can be met. Medication, exercise, and diet help one's body and chemicals get back to ideal functioning and are examples of external tools.

**Manage:** If neither internal nor external changes are possible, the intervention is to develop mental and emotional skills for managing chronic distress. This might involve developing humor related to the challenge, adjusting expectations, or capitalizing on social supports, e.g., regularly talking to supportive people about the difficulties, or meeting with people who share similar difficulties to allow for expression of emotions and to find ways to creatively move forward.

Earth is the battleground of the great controversy. Even when we are people of faith on the winning side, we will experience distress until God brings the battle to the final end. Until then, be a safe support for yourself and those who are under the siege of emotional turmoil and cognitive distress.<sup>6</sup>

They do not lack faith; may they not lack your compassion as modeled by Christ. For faithful but suffering Dolly, the compassion she obtained from professional psychological counseling, prescription medications, proper diet, exercise, and prayer have resulted in decades of cheerful relationships with her husband, children, and grandchildren. ▀

<sup>1</sup> For this article, my working definition of *physical adversity* is a bodily state interfering with optimal functioning. This working definition describes the opposite end of the continuum of the *physical* element of the World Health Organization's definition of *health*: "a state of complete physical . . . well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (<https://www.who.int/about/governance/constitution>).

<sup>2</sup> For this article, my working definition of *emotional turmoil* is a psychologically generated physiological state creating behavioral urges and which interferes with optimal functioning. This working definition builds off the American Psychological Association's definition of *emotions*: "conscious mental reactions . . . subjectively experienced as strong feelings . . . typically accompanied by physiological and behavioral changes in the body" (<https://www.apa.org/topics/emotions>).

<sup>3</sup> For this article, my working definition of *cognitive distress* is a mental state that interferes with optimal functioning in which one's thoughts lead one to anticipate undesirable outcomes. This working definition builds off the American Psychological Association's definition of *distress*: ". . . stress that results from being overwhelmed by demands, losses, or perceived threats. It has a detrimental effect by generating physical and psychological maladaptation" (<https://dictionary.apa.org/distress> and cf. <https://dictionary.apa.org/stress>).

<sup>4</sup> Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1890, 1908), pp. 96, 97.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

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# WHAT THE ANGELS THOUGHT

Earlier this year I stood by the field outside Bethlehem where an angel announced to shepherds the birth of Jesus. (OK, if it wasn't that particular field outside Bethlehem, then it was another field outside Bethlehem.) After the angel told the shepherds that "you will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger" (Luke 2:12), a host of angels—who must have, like cosmic fireworks, lit up the night sky—began to praise God and sing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" (verse 14).

What must have gone through the angels' minds? These cosmic beings lived in heaven, with Jesus as their divine leader—for how long? Perhaps millions, even billions, of years (based on earthly timekeeping). They knew that "all things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:3). They, too, saw Jesus as "the brightness of His [the Father's] glory and the express image of His person" (Heb. 1:3).

And now, their Creator, the one whom they worshipped in His celestial glory, had condescended to become not only a human baby but a human baby of Jewish peasants living in an impoverished backwater of the Roman Empire. But that was only the beginning. He whom they knew and praised and worshipped as their Creator—He was now going to suffer through decades of life amid a fallen creation and, then, offer Himself to die in order to redeem that creation?

Even we—short-lived blobs of protoplasm with sin-darkened minds 6,000 years from the tree of life and (barely)

eking out an existence on one tiny planet amid billions of galaxies—are astonished at the thought of the Creator dying for us. But what about these angels, who knew not only the glory of the preincarnate Christ but the glory of heaven, where He interacted with them? Talking about how the angels reacted when, millennia before the Incarnation, they were first told about the plan of salvation, Ellen White wrote: "Then joy, inexpressible joy, filled heaven. The glory and blessedness of a world redeemed outmeasured even the anguish and sacrifice of the Prince of life. Through the celestial courts echoed the first strains of that song which was to ring out above the hills of Bethlehem—'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.' Luke 2:14."\*

Remember: the entire creation—at least 93 billion light-years in diameter (that's as much as we can see, at least for now)—is involved in the great controversy. Sin began in those same heavenly courts where the angels worshipped Jesus, the same angels who, outside Bethlehem, praised God for the Incarnation.

And whatever they thought at His birth, imagine what the angels thought when the One whom they praised and worshipped in heaven had, on earth, cried out in anguish, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Mark 15:34).

If we, sinful, fallen, corrupt, are astonished at the cross, can we imagine what sinless beings, who knew Jesus in His heavenly glory, must have thought?

Probably not. ♣

\* Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1890, 1908), p. 65.

Clifford Goldstein is editor of the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*.

CLIFF'S  
EDGE  
CLIFFORD  
GOLDSTEIN



WE ARE ASTONISHED  
AT THE THOUGHT OF  
THE CREATOR DYING  
FOR US. BUT WHAT  
ABOUT THE ANGELS  
WHO KNEW THE  
PREINCARNATE  
CHRIST?

# Windows

*A raw journey of  
navigating mental  
health challenges*

**ANNALISE TRUMAN**



## Aren't mental health issues supposed to be things we can just pray away?

**A** window. THAT window. The one at the end on the second floor of a somber brick building. The one I look up at through my windshield through flooding tears as I prepare to drive home. A few short minutes ago I was on the other side of that window; then turning my back to walk down the long dim hallway, I left my 12-year-old adopted daughter there with her temporary roommates and the mental health staff in the unit.

*O God, as I stare at this window, please open a window for us or at least give us a glimmer of light. We are in a black hallway with no idea where there even are windows. We cannot do this again—this cycle of ER visits and hospitalizations—and we are at the end of our rope. We can't bring this sweet girl home for the safety of everyone, but neither do we have any good solution of where to send her that will benefit her. We have tried the options available; they did not help the situation, and actually made things worse. We can't send her back into that. God, You have a plan for this girl. She is Yours. Somehow there must be another solution. But what? God, please, PLEASE, open a window.*

This is not new to our girl, the one we have loved and raised as our own since adopting her at birth. After all, she has been at this same mental health hospital five times in the past year. It's the better of the several hospitals and residential program she has experienced. The PTSD from her 32-day stay at a previous hospital was so intense that it took lots of therapy to work through to where she can even sleep at night. My sweet 12-year-old. The ravages of mental health struggles and the lack of resources to effectively help have taken their toll. How can this be real? She is still a baby. Why?

Before I put the car in gear to drive away from the view of that window, I pick up my phone and pull up a song list. Suddenly the words and tune enveloping me become my theme song for the foreseeable future. "All my life You have been faithful; all my life You have been so, so good. With every breath that I am able, I will sing of the goodness of God."

Choking, sobbing, in a voice that is more of a desperate cry, those words come out of my chest over and over and over while navigating the nearly two hours back home. Yes, God, You have been faithful. You have been so, so good. All my life. I have breath—I will sing. I will sing of Your goodness. Because right now, that is all I can do. I can't see ahead. I can't plan. I can't imagine dragging myself out of bed in the morning. But I will praise You because You *are* faithful. Peace washes over me, a realization that God has this and that somewhere, somehow, there is a plan. There will be answers.



## NO JUDGMENT ZONE

I pull up in front of home in the wee hours of the morning, exhausted from the long drive and all the emotion and sleeplessness of the past several days. There's her bedroom window, dark and empty. She should be behind that window, not the one two hours away. A broken alarm sits on the windowsill. Inside the room are motion detectors and alarms on the door, too. The things we did to keep her safe from herself and us safe from her. Her poor brain . . . so unable to process everything going on in her mind.

I walk through the front door, thinking of how it should mean protection and family and happiness. Lately this door has swung open for a steady stream of therapists and social workers, friends and neighbors, coming to give some respite and help clean and cook, and yes, ambulance workers and police and even Child Protective Services. Our home has not even felt like our own lately. This door has been the one she has run out of multiple times, the last time disappearing into the foggy, rainy woods surrounding us and reappearing in a police car. Thank God she found a police officer and not someone who would take advantage of a runaway. I turn to our master bedroom door and sigh with the realization that for right now we don't need to sleep with all the other kids in our room and our door locked. We can breathe a little. A little. We don't know what the future brings, because a hospital cannot keep her forever. But for now we are thankful.

I find myself at a loss to describe to people what life has been like for our family. When people say they can't imagine, I simply shake my head and tell them that it's true, they can't, and for that I am truly thankful. Really. No one should have to experience this. Normalcy is evasive. Oh, to just sleep, to play, to work, without drama or fear. It's simply impossible unless she is safely behind locked doors in a facility. We try to go hiking or biking or have movie nights as often as possible to decompress with our three younger girls who have experienced so much trauma and confusion lately. But there is always the looming knowledge that soon we will all be back in 24-hour high alert mode.

Fear lurks . . . fear of judgment. After all, we are not only Christians but also a pastoral family. Aren't mental health issues supposed to be things we can just pray away? Aren't pastors' families supposed to at least appear to have it together? Well, all facades are completely crumbled, and our family dynamics are stripped and naked for the criticism of all.

I know from both experience and friends' stories how brutal churches can be. I flinch in proverbial fetal position, waiting for the judgment to descend. All that comes is love. Support. Child care. Bills pressed into our hands for gas. Food delivered multiple times a week to our front porch. My husband's responsibilities covered by elders. The church calling special prayer sessions specifically for our family after every church service and during the week. The blows of criticism don't come. My head lifts a little. I attend church, but sometimes am so paralyzed I can't even make it out of the back hallway; but I am found and brought a plate of food, a cup of hot tea, and hugs. Oh, that everyone understood how much a hug helps. And those who let me sob until their shoulders are wet with tears—*bless them, God!* Those of us going through unbearably hard times just need to know we are seen, our stories are valid, and we are loved.

The little snippets I begin to share on social media, the thoughts here and there or the brief and quite generic updates, start to bring private messages. We are not alone! So many read between the lines and write to say they get it. They offer support or ask for prayer. Or advice. Or to ask permission to share what I wrote with a friend going through a similar situation. *Oh, God, there are so many going through what we are going through. How is this possible? What stronghold does*



*the enemy have with our young people? This is truly a crisis. And what is the solution?* There are no answers except that He hurts so much too.

### PHYSICAL REACTION

*With every breath I will praise.* My physical breath is literally short. My husband drives me to the hospital at top speed while on the phone with the ER. They meet us at the door and take me straight back. This has never happened to me before. I can barely breathe. I can't move. My entire body is paralyzed from the neck down. I can think, I can speak, but this is scary! Every test over the next few hours shows I am OK, thank God. The doctor comes in and asks if I'm under any stress. Hubby and I look at each other, and the realization comes crashing upon us that it's the one-year anniversary of us first taking our girl to the ER.

The memories are intense. We spent 19 days in that medical hospital, not allowed to take her home for safety reasons but also just waiting for placement at a psych hospital for her because so many other families are going through exactly what we are going through. After a year of her being in and out of ERs and hospitals and doing intense therapy sessions and having regular state-provided home interventions, my system crashes. It won't be the only time I struggle to physically breathe. Once the pressure is off and she is safe, my body has just no way to know how to regulate itself. No longer having to be on high alert, suddenly the mini panic attacks strike. Weeks of waking up gasping for air, of heart palpitations, of emotions everywhere. Of bursting into tears in the most random of times and places. But God, I am breathing. And because I am breathing, I will praise You because You are faithful. All my life.

*God, we still stand in a pitch-black hallway and need a window opened! We need at least a glimmer of light from somewhere, but really, we need a window flung wide open. We have no leads. Where can our daughter be safe and get real help?* I have no idea, so I will praise. It is all I have, this praise thing. It's all that brings peace. Praise defeats the enemy. It's my only weapon against the indescribable depression that constantly seems to crouch at my feet. I fall on the floor begging for answers. I reach to the sky, as though clawing to physically feel God. I need answers. I need assurance. There are no answers. But there is assurance. Assurance that God has this under control. So I praise.

### A GLIMMER OF HOPE

Once again, I find myself in a car, looking out a window. This time the car window overlooks, not the austere brick of a mental health hospital, but sparkling blue waves lapping along the shore of a tropical island. My husband is next to the taxi driver in the front seat, and sharing the back seat with me is our sweet girl.

Through the most incredible turn of events, when we literally had *no* solutions, we were providentially led to a very specific Christian therapeutic boarding school that was everything we had prayed for and more. Her acceptance came so fast, passports acquired in a matter of days, more-than-adequate funds raised by friends (and strangers), and we found ourselves suddenly on board a plane to the Caribbean. It was all so sudden that it couldn't be anything but God—could it? What *if* we just had everything fall together? What *if*? Is this *really* the right thing to have our girl so far away? *God, are we on track here?* The taxi driver reaches over to turn on the radio, and the first song to fill the silent space in the car triggers instant tears in my eyes. "All my life You have been faithful; all my life You have been so, so good. With every breath that I am able, I will sing of the goodness of God." My theme song! That song I have clung to every single day. That has run through my head hundreds or thousands of times. That has sometimes been the only prayer I could pray. *O God, You did more than send a glimmer of hope. You flung a window wide open where we couldn't even see a window.* The years of healing ahead have hope. We inhale the fresh air and praise.

If you have identified with our story and are still in the dark hallway yourself, please keep holding on. We are in a much better place than a few months ago, but we are still in the shadows as we work through the healing process. I still cry many tears and often ask God where the next window is. When those windows stay closed longer than you think you can bear, know that His goodness and faithfulness will be evident. ▀

\* Annaliese's daughter is flourishing in the therapeutic program described above. If you would like more detailed information about the school, please contact the Adventist Review office.

**Annaliese Truman is a pseudonym.**

# BREATHE

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*Understanding  
the reality  
of trauma*

**LESLIE RODRIGUEZ  
AND INGRID WEISS SLIKKERS**



**W**hat is trauma? Why is everyone talking about it, and why should Christians, in particular, be concerned with it? Psychological trauma can derive from various sources, but the result can leave an individual feeling helpless, unsafe, or unable to cope with the aftermath of a distressing and overpowering experience, even as a believer. Trauma occurs when a person experiences something that is perceived as physically or emotionally threatening. These experiences can produce feelings of exceeding stress, terror, or helplessness, and can produce lasting effects upon the individual's mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Such trauma is prevalent, without regard for socioeconomic status, race, gender, or religion around the world.

### HOW TRAUMA IMPACTS US

The word "trauma" comes from the Greek word for "wound" or "to pierce." Parallel to physical trauma, such as a broken bone or a skin wound that visibly and permanently alters the body, psychological trauma can leave lasting imprints even while internally concealed. If these emotional injuries aren't being addressed, the brain and the body's overall health can be drastically impacted as trauma affects the central nervous system.

When confronted with something perceived as physically or emotionally threatening, our body instinctively triggers a stress response. This means that our executive functioning, which allows us to make calculated decisions, shuts off for survival. Stress hormones flood our system to activate the self-preservation instinct resulting in a flight, fight, freeze, or fawn response: we may either flee the threat, confront it head-on, become motionless to let it pass, or submit to what is happening. This God-gifted stress response is lifesaving. However, extended activation and hypervigilance because of chronic and repeated high stress, especially without protective and supportive relationships, can severely wear down the body and brain and become toxic stress.

Scientists are concerned that prolonged exposure to toxic stress not only affects the immediate mental and physical well-being of the individual, but also sets the stage for long-term health challenges, significantly impacting overall quality and even duration of life. The Adverse Childhood

Experiences Study showed that negative experiences during childhood created a higher likelihood of negative behavioral and health outcomes such as diabetes, heart disease, or even premature death. This landmark research stimulated deeper and more widespread investigations of the impact of trauma and even exploration into intergenerational effects. Toxic levels of stress impact the prefrontal cortex, which can affect the ability to attach and the capability to manage relationships; may inhibit regulation; and limit cause-and-effect thinking and decision-making. This can lead to significant depression and anxiety.

### WHAT CAN CHRISTIANS DO ABOUT TRAUMA?

Prior to humanity's being able to express the idea of trauma, God had already provided the means of healing. Our brain is indeed an organ, so fundamental health principles of nutrition, exercise, sunshine (vitamin D), water, and sleep are vitally important for restoration. Of course, every moment should involve prayer, acknowledging our faith and dependency on God for ourselves and others. In our efforts to respond to the impact of trauma and its far-reaching effects, it's essential to prioritize making professional mental health referrals whenever accessible.

Trauma theory urges that many of the behavioral manifestations that we see in ourselves or in others are a direct result of coping with adverse experiences that have or are occurring. A trauma-aware perspective moves us from asking "What's wrong with that person?" to "What's happened to that person?" This doesn't require us to have comprehensive knowledge about someone's entire past or expertise in mental health. As followers of Christ, we are invited to pause in our reactions, as we do not know others' stories. We do not know how their nervous system may be responding to potential toxic levels of stress in their lives. In the character of Jesus, our ideal response is one of compassion.

As the Israelites faced the daunting Red Sea, filled with desperation, fear, and panic, how did God reassure them? "The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still" (Ex. 14:14, NIV). You need only to be still. Amid tumultuous times, God encourages us not to fear. One of the greatest gifts we have is breath, God's first gift to us when He created Adam. A divine endowment bestowed upon all of us, it stands as one of the most pow-

## A trauma-aware perspective moves us from asking “What’s wrong with that person?” to “What’s happened to that person?”

erful means to counteract the impact of trauma. When someone feels overwhelming emotions rise and their stress response begins to activate because the heavy imprint of trauma on the body, simply taking a few slow, deep breaths can help relax both the mind and body. Breath is life and can help to regulate our bodies to be able to make decisions. For the best outcomes, researchers recommend inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth, with the exhalation being longer than the inhalation. This intentional stillness that God calls us to is something we can practice and easily teach and share with our loved ones. It is a tool available to everyone, and science proves its immediate benefits when strong emotions arise from our activated nervous systems.

As mental health concerns increase in the world, resiliency has become an area of focus. At a quick glance, resiliency is generally defined as the ability to recover rapidly from difficulties or the capacity to emotionally or physically cope or recuperate from a crisis by returning to a pre-crisis state. Resiliency has been compared to elastic and the skill to “bounce back” after being stretched. Recent discussions point out the reality that when we go through a crisis it is impossible to subsequently return to a pre-crisis state; resiliency should instead be defined as the development of new ways of coping or going through life. This developed definition describes resilience as being actually stronger, wiser, and with profound personal growth from trials and tribulations—in other words, post-traumatic growth.

If you were to ask any expert in the area of trauma and mental health to summarize in one word what is most important for post-traumatic growth, they would say, “Relationships.” Though we fall short of God’s perfect love, we are called to love with a similar consistency. For individuals, especially those impacted by trauma, consistent relationships play the utmost of important roles. They need assurance of safety and support within the relationship. This doesn’t mean condoning any possible poor decisions, but ensuring that love and care for them transcend, offering a sanc-

tuary of support and understanding within our families and church community.

God beautifully created us *in* and *for* relationships, and the science supports this. This divine blueprint reveals our intrinsic need for connections and sense of belonging. It is vitally important that we create intentional spaces in our churches where deep unconditional relationships can be formed and strengthened. Creating and nurturing these spaces will not only enhance the well-being of individuals but also fortify the unity and strength of our churches to bring healing to God’s people.

Throughout Scripture we encounter individuals who grapple with trauma resulting from the sin and brokenness of this world, each interacting with God in unique ways. Elijah, when isolated and faced with the fear of death, succumbed to depression, doubting God’s purpose for his life (1 Kings 19:4). Yet Job, sitting upon his pile of ashes, covered in boils after enduring immense suffering and affliction, remained devoted to his faith and refused to curse God (Job 2:10). Even the freed Israelites, having witnessed one of God’s greatest miracles, grumbled and complained during their journey in the wilderness (Ex. 15:23, 24; 16:2, 3). Still, throughout every story, for each individual and for humanity in every generation, one aspect remains constant—God’s unchanging love and care for His people (Heb. 13:8). He reassures us with the proclamation: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness” (Jer. 31:3, NIV).

As believers, we know that in this world trauma will increase as time continues. Romans 15:13 reminds us that we have a God of hope who can fill us completely with joy and peace as we trust in Him. Against trials, tribulation, and trauma let us lean into this divine hope so that we can become beacons of light as we journey in healing with others who may be grappling with their own struggles. In doing so, we emulate the transformative power of God’s hope, radiating it outward and touching the lives of those we encounter. May we daily walk in remembrance of this promise, overflowing with everlasting hope and taking each other’s hands so that no one walks this earth alone. 🕊

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# A CONTENTMENT FORMULA

*The Secret to a Fulfilled Life*

**D**iscontentment is a weighty load to carry. It clouds the day, haunts the night, and burdens the mind. On the other hand, contentment brings rest, calm, and continuing fulfillment. Contentment expels discontentment with quiet serenity.

God loves a cheerful *giver*, but He also loves a cheerful *liver*. A contented believer strives to be thankful to God, despite their circumstances (1 Thess. 5:18). Such a person has developed the art of appreciating God's providence and being grateful, in the best and worst of times.

Ellen White notes: "Pure religion brings peace, happiness, contentment; godliness is profitable to this life and the life to come."<sup>1</sup> While contentment means trusting God regardless of circumstances, there is a healthy discontent that should be encouraged: personal discontentment with ourselves that motivates us to self-improvement and greater usefulness to God and others (Phil. 3:14, 15).

## CONTENTMENT VERSUS HAPPINESS

Contentment is sometimes mistakenly viewed as happiness. Happiness is a short-term emotion typically characterized by delight, lightheartedness, even laughter. Alternately, contentment is a long-term stable state of fulfillment, peace, and confidence that engenders an attitude of satisfaction, regardless of circumstances.

Christ developed an attitude of contentment to its highest level. "In the heart of Christ, where reigned perfect harmony with God, there was perfect peace. He was never elated by applause, nor dejected by censure or disappointment. Amid the greatest opposition and the most cruel treatment, He was still of good courage."<sup>2</sup>

## STEPS TO CONTENTMENT

How can we develop a contentment growth mindset? Paul deliberately trusted in the providence and presence of God, whatever the situation. He passionately believed that all events and circumstances work out for the good of believers, in this life and the life to come (Rom. 8:28).

Paul clearly delineates the core principles of contentment mastery:

**The Awareness Mindset.** Honestly assess your contentment status, noting your strengths and weaknesses. Accept the fact that contentment is an intentionally "learned" skill. Its "secret" is ongoing development, implemented throughout life with patience and persistence (Phil. 4:11, 12).

**The Attuned Mindset.** It takes your *choice* and *will* to be content. Make an habitual practice of gaining control over your thoughts (2 Cor. 10:5). This will happen by the cooperation of your will combined with God's help. "I can do all things through Christ" (Phil. 4:13).

**The Actuated Mindset.** Guard against external worldly allurements, internal lusts, a fearful spirit, and other strategies of Satan to create discontentment. The contentment lifestyle is nurtured by prayer, Bible study, humble service, and a faithful partnership with the Spirit (Heb. 13:5 and Eph. 6:10-18).

When we follow this spiritual formula for contentment, through Christ, we will be successful in this life and the life to come. Commit to the commitment formula today. 🍀

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1961), p. 242.


<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898, 1940), p. 330.

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TRANSFORMATION TIPS  
DELBERT W. BAKER



HOW CAN WE  
DEVELOP A  
CONTENTMENT  
GROWTH MINDSET?



# WEeping AT THE NILE

*A look at Moses and  
childhood trauma*

## JAROD THOMAS

**G**abor Maté was born to Jewish parents in Budapest, Hungary, in 1944. He came into the world just two months before Nazis marched into his motherland. During this horrific chapter of human history, an estimated 70 percent of the Jewish population in Hungary experienced unspeakable atrocities.

A medical doctor recognized for his work among the residents of skid row in the inner city of Vancouver, British Columbia, Dr. Maté has become well known for research on the link between trauma and addiction. Writing about his upbringing, he says:

“For the first 15 months of my life my father was away in a forced labor camp, and for most of that time neither of my parents knew whether the other was alive or dead. I was 5 months old when my grandparents were killed at Auschwitz. Many years later, not long before her own death at age 82 in Vancouver, my mother told me that she was so depressed after her parents’ murder that some days she got out of bed only to look after me. I was left alone in my crib quite often.

Two days after the Germans marched into Budapest, my mother called the pediatrician.

‘Would you come to see Gabi?’ she requested. ‘He has been crying almost without stop since yesterday morning.’ ‘I’ll come, of course,’ the doctor replied, ‘but I should tell you: All my Jewish babies are crying.’”<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Maté asks the question: “Now, what did Jewish infants know of Nazis, World War II, racism, genocide? What they knew—or rather, absorbed—was their parents’ anxiety.”<sup>2</sup>

What happens when political enemies invade your country, kill half of your countrymen, take those who remain and force them into cramped, unsanitary conditions? The statement “All of my Jewish babies are crying” indicates the experience of childhood trauma, well before any infant was aware of what was happening to them, as they internalized the stress of society and their homes.

### OUT OF EVIL, SOMETHING GOOD

Deep in the sacred record of history, another group of Jewish babies were crying. A pharaoh who feared neither God nor humans decided the best way to deal with a burgeoning immigrant class was to oppress, enslave, and burden them with heavy labor. But these were God’s people, and, under His care, their numbers only increased. Pharaoh resorted to darker measures: infanticide.

He instructed the Hebrew midwives: “‘When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.’ But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live” (Ex. 1:16, 17, ESV).

Not to be deterred, Pharaoh switched gears, creating an atmosphere of vigilante justice. He commanded anyone who saw an infant Hebrew boy to cast him into the Nile. Can you imagine what it would have been like to live in those days? What kind of stress and anxiety would young mothers be experiencing, living with the fear that someone might snatch away their child and toss him into the Nile?

It is into this milieu that Amram and his wife, Jochebed, delivered a baby boy whom we know as Moses. The Bible says, “The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months” (Ex. 2:2, ESV). The word *tov* has been translated as “fine,” “beautiful,” or healthy.” The whole phrase in the

original language, however, is an unmistakable echo of the Creation narrative: “God saw that it was good [*tov*].” Could it be that the birth of Moses signified a fresh iteration of God’s creative power? Despite fear, pain, social upheaval, and trauma, God is about to do something good.

“When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with . . . pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank” (verse 3, ESV). Why could she no longer hide him? He was only 3 months old; he wasn’t that big. Was it because he was crying, and his mother’s attempts to soothe him were unsuccessful? It’s tempting to think that biblical characters were insulated from things we experience today. But as a vulnerable infant, Moses was certainly impacted by the same things we are—both while in utero and after delivery.

Interpersonal neurobiologist Daniel Seigel stresses that infants have four core developmental needs. They need to be seen, safe, secure, and soothed.<sup>3</sup> Why soothed? Because infants and young children cannot yet internally regulate their emotions. They are dependent upon a mature caregiver—an external regulator—to assist them in understanding what they are feeling and help them learn to respond to stress. But what if that caregiver is depressed, anxious, or addicted? What if they are absent because of illness or death? Or what if they are preoccupied with an era of unprecedented infanticide? Some little ones may never develop appropriate tools to understand and manage their emotions.

Moses’ mother decided to conceal him the best way she knew how. She made her little boat and floated him in a secure location, his sister keeping a watchful eye at a safe distance. Moses was dearly loved. But was his caregiver able to soothe him as he floated alone on the great river? It’s not likely. How long he was in the basket, we don’t know, but God provided a rescuer. Pharaoh’s daughter, bathing in the river, noticed the basket among the reeds and called for it. “When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying” (verse 6, ESV).

There is no doubt that God intervened. Pharaoh’s daughter took pity on him, and Miriam, seeing an opportunity, arranged for Moses’ own mother to nurse and care for him while receiving official protection and a salary.

## LOSING CONTROL

God smiled upon this child and spared his life. *Could he be the coming deliverer?* Jochebed must’ve wondered. She poured herself into parenting him, knowing that the time would come when she would have to hand him back over to Pharaoh’s daughter.

When Moses came of age, his life completely upended. He moved into his adopted home—a dramatically different environment than what he was familiar with. He was given the best education money could buy. He was groomed to be a military leader and to take the throne as the grandson of Pharaoh. But something lurked in his history—the same kind of childhood trauma that many of us have experienced. Moses had many advantages, but those early months—both in the womb and after his birth—made an indelible mark on his brain. One he carried with him for the rest of his life.

What do we know of Moses as an adult? He was a helper, with a well-developed sense of justice; he also struggled with impulse control—particularly his temper—and tended to take too much upon himself, as evidenced by his management struggles during the Exodus.

“One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand” (verses 11, 12).

Was this how God was going to deliver His people? Through impulsivity and violence? No. *Patriarchs and Prophets* describes this as a tactic learned in the court of Pharaoh. He “received a mold that disqualified him for the wonderful work he was to do, making him weak where he should have been strong.”<sup>4</sup> But Moses’ reaction was more than a learned response. In his book *The Development of the Unconscious Mind* Dr. Allan Schore describes how infant males, when exposed to separation stress, exhibit lifelong struggles with their emotions, managing stress, and developing healthy attachments to others.<sup>5</sup>

Fearing harsh social and legal ramifications, Moses fled for Arabia.

## OF FLOCKS AND FAMILY

Something happened in Arabia that completely changed Moses’ trajectory. The Bible tells us that “the man Moses was very meek, more than all



# God desires to give us an external regulator—the Holy Spirit—to assist us in managing our emotions.

people who were on the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3, ESV). How was he transformed from a self-sufficient, impulsive murderer to being one of the humblest on the planet?

We readily recognize the first factor: Moses had ample time learning of God in the wilderness. It was the tending of sheep that taught him to be a shepherd of God’s people. The long days alone helped him tune his heart to God’s presence as a source of guidance and strength. As Ellen White writes so eloquently: “When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God.”<sup>6</sup>

While this relationship with God can’t be minimized, there is a second aspect that is easy for us to overlook. Before Moses was a shepherd of Jethro’s flocks, Moses became a part of Jethro’s family. Jethro, the priest of Midian, was a God-fearing man. He invited Moses into his home and eventually entrusted Moses with the management of his assets and even one of his own daughters to wed. In the household of Jethro, Moses found longed-for relational security and stability. He gained a father figure and a trusted confidant and advisor.

Was this a happy ending for the meek and humble Moses? In Numbers 20, just eight chapters after this glowing reference, he loses his temper so severely that God says, *I’m sorry, Moses, but I must hold you accountable. You misrepresented Me, and you can’t enter the Promised Land.*

What happened? By God’s grace Moses was able to largely recover from the implicit trauma of his earliest days and from the difficulties of his teenage years. But during a time of severe stress triggered by the death of his sister and ungrateful, argumentative people, Moses lost control of himself once again. Perhaps you know this feeling. In times of stress and exhaustion the well-worn

paths of unhelpful habits return without thought. The impact of childhood trauma seeps back into our adult lives.

But like Moses, God has made provision for our healing, even from traumas we may not remember. Jesus promises to give us the gift of the Holy Spirit, who functions as an external regulator to help guide us through emotional distress, providing us with a sense of peace that the world can never give (see John 14:27, 28). It’s also necessary for us to remember that no one heals in a vacuum. Developing deep, secure, and authentic relationships with God *and* His people is critically important. This experience isn’t as easy as flipping a switch. A slow and steady growth is part of God’s sanctifying work in us. It’s the work of a lifetime.

Do you sometimes feel that your life is out of control? that you act out emotional impulses unthinkingly? You are not alone. The Bible describes the champions of faith as having the same human frailties as we have (James 5:17). But through their example, God demonstrates His ability to redeem human sorrow and employ us as agents of His healing grace. He promises to do this in us as we develop a secure attachment to Him and His people, learn to commune with Him in prayer, and trust the guidance of His Spirit. 📌

<sup>1</sup> Gabor Maté, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters With Addiction* (Berkeley, Calif.: North Atlantic Books, 2011), chap. 22 (Kindle version), retrieved from Amazon.com.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from <https://drdaniegel.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/POSU-Refrigerator-Sheet.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> See Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1890, 1908), p. 248.

<sup>5</sup> Allan N. Schore, *The Development of the Unconscious Mind* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2019), pp. 98, 99.

<sup>6</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), p. 58.

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# MISSION REFOCUS: AN URGENT CALL

*It's time we  
did things  
differently.*

**ERTON  
KÖHLER**

*An urgent appeal was made to the Adventist international delegates attending Annual Council in October. It is not only a call to leadership, but also a call to members to embrace mission in a new way. This is an edited version of the presentation. Elements of the oral presentation have been retained.<sup>1</sup> —Editors.*

**W**hen one thinks of mission, the first image that may come to mind is reaching the world. But Mission Refocus should be understood as adjusting how we accomplish our mission to efficiently reach a world facing profound changes. Let me highlight some of these changes with four different scenarios that impact our church today.

## 1. Global Factors

**Pandemic.** The recent pandemic is still threatening us because it has changed our world to the point of creating what we now call the “new normal.” According to the World Health Organization, this tragedy killed 14.9 million people in 2020 and 2021 alone. Compared to the 15-plus million people killed in World War I, it means that in terms of fatalities, we’ve lived through the equivalent of another world war.

**War.** Recently a very complex situation affected the Middle East. But there is also the war in Europe that calls the world’s attention. That war is disrupting the food, energy, and fertilizer supply for developing and undeveloped countries. Many experts evaluate that we are facing catastrophic scenarios that would have been unthinkable a few months ago, including the possibility of using nuclear weapons. We can see growing political instability, preparing the way for more coups, violence, revolution, and other chaotic methods.

**Ecology.** Average temperatures are rising worldwide, and the earth is affected by one natural disaster after another. The global forest coverage has been reduced by more than 50 percent since the 1960s. Each hour forests the size of 300 football fields are cut down. By the year 2030 the planet may have only 10 percent of its forests left. Because of increasing temperatures of the earth,

**God’s people must awake to the necessities of the time in which they are living.**

sea levels are rising more than twice as fast as before. The United Nations said that by 2025 nearly 1.8 billion people will live in areas with absolute water scarcity, and two thirds of the world population could face water stress conditions.

## 2. The Social Scene

**The “Me Generation.”** Baby boomers are the generation born after World War II. They lived through challenging times of significant change, both social and political. According to *Time* magazine, the “Me Generation” prepared the way for their children—the “Me Me Me Generation,” also known as Millennials. They are the selfie generation born beginning in the early 1980s through to the beginning of the 2000s. The first generation to grow up with the Internet, Millennials have been described as the first digital natives and global generation. The Me Me Me Generation is emotionally weak but, at the same time, eager to defend justice and constantly seeking to live a meaningful life. This generation lives by defining what is right for them. It’s a challenge for them to worship a sovereign God, to interact with people in worship services, and to obey rules of conduct. It makes their ties to religious organizations a significant challenge.

**Human Sexuality.** We live in a time when everyone can claim their right to be any gender they want. Facebook currently lists 58 different genders available for its users, but others list as many as 67, 81, or 107 different genders to choose from. But human sexuality is much more than this. The Bible’s perspective and God’s plan are much broader than current trends and must be approached in a kind but biblically clear manner.

**Social Polarization.** We face social polarization daily in social media, politics, families, and unfortunately, also in the life of the church. It is the rise of an “us versus them” mindset affecting all human relationships. Acute cynicism toward all authorities, including the church, has led to a systematic deconstruction of the truth and common sense.

### 3. Technology

**Social Media.** Almost 60 percent of the world's population is on social media. There are 410,000 new social media users added each day. Each user spends an average of two hours and 24 minutes daily on social media. If we multiply that by the number of social media users, the result is an unbelievable 11.5 billion hours spent on social media per day, equal to approximately 1.3 million years on social media every day! One of the most damaging effects of social media can be seen in the spiritual life. It changes how our brain functions, reduces the ability to make decisions, attention, focus, impulse control, and short-term memory. The results are evident in the ability to concentrate, to attend services, to study the Bible, and to pray.

**Artificial Intelligence (AI).** AI is a recent and intense change in the technological landscape. Its impact on society is both exciting and challenging, but what does the future hold, and how will it impact religion? In June, in Germany, more than 300 Protestants attended the first church service generated almost entirely by artificial intelligence. A ChatGPT chatbot led the worshippers through 40 minutes of prayer, music, sermons, and blessings.

### 4. Mission

Missionary-sending patterns are impacting the Christian world today. Missiologists explain there is a shift from "old sending countries" to "new sending countries." Old sending countries are those that have sent missionaries for more than 100 years, such as Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States. New sending countries are those countries that have recently begun to send missionaries in significant numbers—Brazil, Costa Rica, Ghana, India, South Korea, Nigeria, Philippines, Singapore, and China. These now contribute 47 percent of the total of missionaries being sent. Comprehensive data is now available to help us to involve every organization and every level of the church in sending missionaries to reach the world.

#### SEEING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

We could spend hours discussing the changes and challenges our world is facing. We all understand the use of binoculars, but imagine turning them around, to change how we use them. If binoculars are used normally, they magnify what you

see. But if you hold them in reverse, they diminish what we can see. All things remain as they always were. But the difference is how we see and perceive. The challenge today is to see the changes in the world as opportunities for mission.

Mission Refocus is a change in how we use our binoculars. New methods must be introduced. God's people must awake to the necessities of the time in which they are living. Let us evaluate how the changes of this world can give us unique opportunities for mission.

**Holy Spirit.** The guidance of the Holy Spirit needs to be first. The more complicated the global scenario, the more the Holy Spirit is needed. Only the work accomplished with much prayer and sanctified by the merits of Christ will prove to have been efficient for good. Do you remember what happened with the disciples after the day of Pentecost? Before Pentecost, they found it difficult to do easy things. After Pentecost, they found it easy to do difficult things. This is the result of the Holy Spirit in challenging times.

**Financial Investment.** Thom Rainer, an American writer and church consultant, reports that the median church attendance in North America in 2023 is 60 people, down from 65 in 2020. But while the attendance is going down, finances are going up. The realignment of our finances is an integral part of Mission Refocus. The worst that can happen for God's church is that when Jesus returns, He finds all the extra money He sent to accomplish the mission earning interest in banks and not used in the field.

**Presenting the Message.** Amid polarization, war, and other tensions, people are looking for an anchor, a solid base, a stability, something different from what they see every day. People are looking for authenticity, for balance, for hope. Churches that lose their identity and their authenticity also lose their relevance. Identity is nonnegotiable. Ellen White wrote: "Conformity to the worldly customs converts the church to the world; it never converts the world to Christ."<sup>2</sup> Our problem is not that the boat is in the water, but that water is getting into the boat.

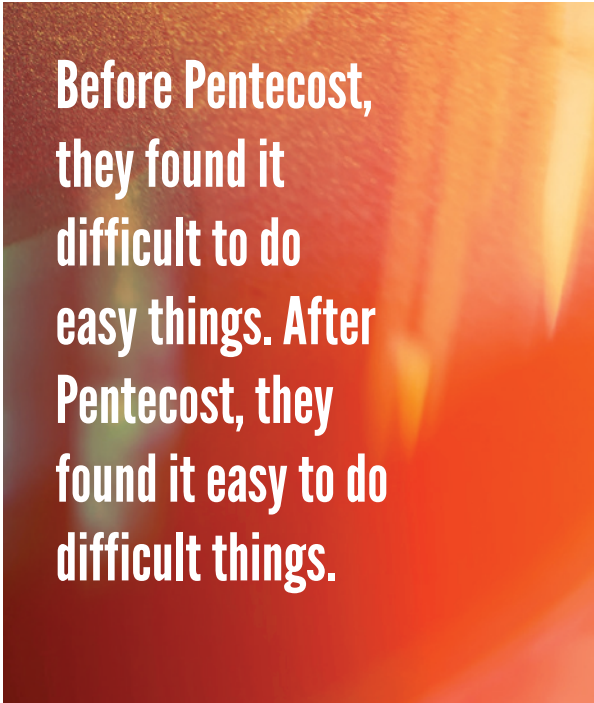
**Disciple-making.** Disciple-making is the best way to reach the hearts of people in the world. People today are centered on themselves. Their focus has shifted from the spiritual to the personal, from the group to the individual, from the soul to the self,

from salvation to self-fulfillment. They are eager for real people, real relationships, real love, and real hope. This is the perfect environment for disciple-making. People taking care of people. People transforming people. People multiplying people.

**Technology.** Technology is overcoming all borders and barriers. Today we have more connectivity, faster speed, and different platforms, many viewers, and tools. We have ways as never before to reach the 8 billion people in a world without borders. Technology can reach everybody, everywhere, at any time. We can be more aggressive using technology and social media for the mission. The Seventh-day Adventist Church pioneered print literature, radio, and television. But are we open and attentive to the new opportunities that lie before us? Social media, AI, ChatGPT, new systems, apps, and other technological resources can make a positive difference in the care of our members as well as accomplish the mission God entrusted to us.

**Sending Missionaries.** One of the biggest challenges for our mission is Asia. Do you know that when we talk about Asia, we're talking about a continent bigger than the surface of the moon? The moon has 14.6 million square miles of surface area, while Asia has a surface area of 17.2 million square miles! Asia is the world's most populated continent, with almost 60 percent of the global population. Of the 48 countries in Asia, 45 are part of the 10/40 window. More than half of the world's population is found in India and China. India, currently the most populated country in the world, is in Asia. Uttar Pradesh, the most populated state in the world, with more than 200 million inhabitants, is in Asia. Tokyo, the most populated city in the world, with 37 million population in the metro area, is in Asia. Java in Indonesia is the most populated island in the world, with a population of more than 140 million, and in Asia too.

We are facing the most complex crisis and changes in recent history, but at the same time, the most exciting mission opportunities are before us. Let us send missionaries from everywhere to everywhere! In 1882 Ellen White wrote: "Where are the missionaries who should be raised up at the heart of the work? From twenty to fifty should be sent out from Battle Creek every year to carry the truth to those who sit in darkness."<sup>3</sup> Do you know how many Adventists were in North America when she wrote this? Seventeen thousand. Ellen



Before Pentecost,  
they found it  
difficult to do  
easy things. After  
Pentecost, they  
found it easy to do  
difficult things.

White's request represented sending three missionaries per 1,000 church members at that time.

We have 22-plus million members. If we were to send three new missionaries for every 1,000 members worldwide, as Ellen White wrote, we would need to send 67,667 missionary per year. Friends, we are far, very far, from this reality. This is why Mission Refocus is an increasingly urgent priority. In 1911 Ellen White sent a special call for this church. She said, "When the members of the church of God do their appointed work in the needy fields at home and abroad, in fulfillment of the gospel commission, the whole world will soon be warned and the Lord Jesus will return to this earth with power and great glory."<sup>4</sup> Only when we understand our global needs and commit ourselves to this mission will the Lord return to this earth with power and great glory. ■

<sup>1</sup> To watch the full presentation, visit [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ah-jlay7XXwM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ah-jlay7XXwM), beginning at 1:55:22.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 509.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 5, p. 187.

<sup>4</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 111.

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# Gifts of Gratitude at Christmas

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*Putting that special touch on holiday celebrations*

**ELLEN G. WHITE**

**N**ot only on birthdays should parents and children remember the mercies of the Lord in a special way, but Christmas and New Year's should also be seasons when every household should remember their Creator and Redeemer. Instead of bestowing gifts and offerings in such abundance on human objects, reverence, honor, and gratitude should be rendered to God, and gifts and offerings should be caused to flow in the divine channel. Would not the Lord be pleased with such a remembrance of Him? O how God has been forgotten on these occasions. At the very time when His loving-kindness should be remembered, His mercy has been ignored. . . . Shall presents

be purchased, and money be expended for unnecessary things, and no wisdom be manifested in the outlay of God's intrusted means? Will parents come out from the world and be separate from its customs? Let them obey the injunction of God, and put forth judicious labor properly to train and educate the young in true knowledge and wisdom. Those men were called wise men who came from the far East to Jerusalem, led by a star in the heavens, to offer gifts of frankincense, myrrh, and gold to the infant Saviour. "Lo, the star, which they saw in the East, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother." Although Christ was the Majesty of heaven, He was born in poverty, and His cradle was a manger. But when the wise men "had opened their treasures, they

presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."

## **GIVE HIM YOUR BEST**

When you have a holiday, make it a pleasant and happy day for your children, and make it also a pleasant day for the poor and the afflicted. Do not let the day pass without bringing thanksgiving and thank-offerings to Jesus. Let parents and children now make earnest effort to redeem the time, and to remedy their past neglect. Let them follow a different course of action from that which the world follows. There are many things which can be devised with taste and cost far less than the unnecessary presents that are so frequently bestowed upon our children and relatives, and thus courtesy can be shown, and happiness brought into the home. You can teach your children a lesson while you explain to them the reason why you have made a change in the value of their presents, telling them that you are



## Like the wise men of old, you may offer to God your best gifts, and show by your offerings to Him that you appreciate His Gift to a sinful world.

convinced that you have hitherto considered their pleasure more than the glory of God. Tell them that you have thought more of your own pleasure and of their gratification and of keeping in harmony with the customs and traditions of the world, in making presents to those who did not need them, than you have of advancing the cause of God. Like the wise men of old, you may offer to God your best gifts, and show by your offerings to Him that you appreciate His Gift to a sinful world. Set your children's thoughts running in a new, unselfish channel, by inciting them to present offerings to God for the gift of His only begotten Son. Let a box be made to receive the gifts of the children. The intelligences of heaven are waiting to cooperate with human agents in every work of benevolence, that there may be means in the treasury of the Lord, and "meat in mine house," saith the Lord. . . .

In the days that were before the flood, men left God out of their

reckoning, and followed the imagination of their own hearts until violence and cruelty, selfishness and self-exaltation, were the order of the day. . . . We are living near to the coming of the Lord in the clouds of heaven, and let those who would escape from the doom of those who forget God be careful to maintain good works. God, the great moral Governor, has a law which is to be obeyed, and the angels of God are His officers, to witness to the deeds of evildoers, and to lay the rebellious under arrest. The transgressors of the law of God will meet a just retribution unless they repent before the Majesty of heaven, and by faith in Christ turn to allegiance before it is everlastingly too late.

### HONOR HIS BIRTH

A great work is to be accomplished through the instrumentality of man; for we are to cooperate with God in pressing back the tide of human woe. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we may be faithful, whole-hearted workers to stand in defense of truth and righteousness, and keep the Lord and His honor continually in mind. Let the perception be clear as to what is due to God for His benevolence in giving the gift of His Son to the human family. Let our liberalities flow toward God. Let thank-offerings be presented to Jesus, and as you gain clearer perceptions of your past deficiencies, let it be made manifest that you are seeking to make decided reformation in accordance with your faith.

For long years God has been robbed of tithes, and gifts, and offerings. Men have forgotten Him, and through ignorance of His claims, they have allowed their gifts and offerings to flow in a perverted channel. Let parents and children teach the world by self-denial how they may honor the birth of Christ. Parents will have need of patience and moral strength, in order that in the fear of God they may unlearn the customs of the world. Tremendous evils have come into the world through forgetfulness of God, and through the coming holidays Satan will gather a large harvest of souls, and reap a large revenue of means through enticing men to gratify the desires of the unrenewed heart. Many souls will be led into false paths from which they will never recover. Earnest Christian endeavor should be put forth to establish a new order of things, so that the professed people may work in harmony with His plans, and thus glorify God and bless humanity. ♣

Seventh-day Adventists believe that **Ellen G. White** (1827-1915) exercised the biblical gift of prophecy during more than 70 years of public ministry. This excerpt was taken from *Review and Herald*, Nov. 13, 1894.

# A Christmas Prayer



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*Taking another look at Zacharias' prayer*

**SIKHULULEKILE DACO**

Several years ago I heard a powerful sermon that I went on to repeat more than once with great appreciation from its hearers. I have recently come to realize, however, that what I was preaching was not completely accurate.

#### **THE SERMON I USED TO PREACH**

Based on Luke 1, the sermon was about persevering prayer. Despite their faithfulness, Zacharias and his wife had not been blessed with a child. The narrative begins by describing Zacharias and Elizabeth as “both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:6). In their day, as in



many contemporary societies, to have a child was viewed as a sign of God's favor. The opposite was also perceived to be true: that to go childless in marriage was a manifestation of divine disfavor. You would expect, then, that after reading such a glowing report of their attributes, the next verse would be that God showered them abundantly with the blessing of children.

"But," the text says, "they had no child." Not only did they have no child when the story begins in the book of Luke, but they are twice beyond the possibility of ever having children. First, Elizabeth is barren. Like Elkanah of old, Zacharias may have chosen to take another wife to bear him children (cf. 1 Sam. 1). Instead Zacharias remained faithful to Elizabeth. Together they endured the scorn of society. Together they weathered the tortured looks and fielded the painful inquiries of nosy neighbors advising them to have a child soon. I imagine Elizabeth weeping into the supportive arms of her husband as she saw other women distracted with the busyness of mothering—nursing their babies, taking them to sit at the rabbis' feet in the synagogue to learn of them, interrupting sibling squabbles. Their childlessness was not by choice, but they bore it faithfully; Zacharias remaining faithful to his one wife, and Elizabeth remaining faithful to the God who permitted her that lot in life.

Beyond barrenness, both Elizabeth and her husband are now "well advanced in years" (verse 7) when Luke begins his narrative. It was impossible for them to ever become parents. If they had been ostracized by some who perceived their childlessness as a sign of divine disfavor, they had done so into their mature years. Yet they were not bitter. They were blameless.

In their day it was not unusual for a girl to get married between the ages of 12 and 16. We could estimate that Elizabeth, now postmenopausal, was at least 50 years of age. Conservatively, then, she and Zacharias had spent 34 years in marriage with no child. For more than three decades they had prayed for a child, to no avail. So when Zacharias, a priest after "the division of Abijah" (verse 5), was selected to serve in the temple and burn incense, I imagined that he added his own personal prayer for a child to his generic corporate prayers for Israel. The angel who appeared as he burned incense, I surmised, heralded the answer of his personal prayer. "Do not be afraid, Zacharias,

## I needed to revisit the life of John the Baptist, so I started at the beginning of his story, in Luke 1.

for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John" (verse 13). What is the longest, I would go on to say, you have prayed for something? Praying perhaps for an unbelieving spouse to accept the faith? Praying for a broken relationship? Praying for a financial breakthrough? Praying for an adverse health situation? How many decades have you been on your knees with God about this issue? Have you persevered in that prayer beyond the point of objective possibility? You can have the assurance that God hears your prayers!

### REVISITING THE RECORD

In my interpretation of the text, I made a significant and unwarranted assumption. I assumed that having a child was paramount for Zacharias and Elizabeth, even at this late stage in their lives. Did not the angel say that they would now have a son although they were barren before? Had not Hannah, in the Old Testament, pleaded with God until He opened her womb? Since childlessness was an adverse situation in their lives, I assumed that they would have been praying about it. Kind of like how we assume that people who are experiencing persecution would be praying for it to end, and yet we often find them praying for strength to endure it. But when I looked more closely, I found that I did not need to make assumptions about the content of Zacharias' prayer as he ministered in the temple. The answer lay in the text. I'm thankful for God's graciousness as we fumble through our understanding and proclamation of His Word. It is a mercy that we continue to need.

# Through those who are eagerly waiting for His return, praying for His people, and living lives of full surrender to Him, He will raise up His end-time heralds.

So why did I revisit the story of the birth of John the Baptist? My appointment to the role of associate editor at *Adventist Review* prompted me to read the compilation *Counsels to Writers and Editors*. This statement in the final chapter gave me pause: “The publications sent forth from our printing houses are to prepare a people to meet God. Throughout the world they are to do the same work that was done by John the Baptist for the Jewish nation. . . . As John prepared the way for the first, so we are to prepare the way for the second, advent of the Saviour.” I needed to revisit the life of John the Baptist, so I started at the beginning of his story, in Luke 1.

As I reexamined the text, the most glaring thing I found was the absence of what I had thought was the substance of Zacharias’ temple prayer. To be sure, the fact that it does not say that they were praying for a child does not preclude that prayer. Yet the Bible does not mention it as the substance of Zacharias’ prayer, so why would I? It is, in fact, more likely that after all those years of barrenness, Zacharias and Elizabeth had accepted their lot in life. The Bible does, however, indicate what the substance of Zacharias’ prayer was.

Whatever Zacharias was praying about, John the Baptist was at least part of the answer. We know that Zacharias is offering corporate prayers for Israel in the temple, and the child promised by the angel would “turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God” (verse 16). Apparently Zacharias’ prayer included a petition for Israel’s spiritual renewal. The angel goes on to summarize John’s mission: “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (verse 17). Zacharias was praying not only for the people to return to the Lord, but also that the people would be ready when the Lord should come. John would prepare the people for the anticipated coming of the Lord.

Following the birth of John, Zacharias, filled with the Holy Spirit, declared that the Lord God had “visited and redeemed His people . . . as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets. . . . And you, child [John], will be called the prophet of the

Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways” (verses 68-76). In other words, Zacharias understood from prophecy that the coming of the Messiah was at hand and that John was to be His herald.

He was not alone in his anticipation of the Messiah. Following the birth of Christ we learn of Simeon, who was “waiting for the Consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25). Simeon apparently understood that the Messiah could potentially come during his lifetime, because after seeing Jesus in the temple, he declared, “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation” (verses 29, 30). He and God had an agreement that he could live until the fulfillment of the promise. Beyond Simeon and Zacharias, we learn that there was an untold number of others who were also waiting for the Redeemer to whom Anna bore witness of Christ’s arrival (verses 36-38).

Zacharias, then, is among those who understood, from the prophecies, that the coming of the Messiah was at hand. He was in the temple praying for Israel in the context of the anticipated first advent. It is in answer to these prayers that the angel promises him a son: a son who is part of the answer to the very prayers he is lifting up to God. Although he and Elizabeth are physically incapable of contributing to answering the prayer of their hearts, the angel proclaims that they shall indeed participate in heralding the coming of the Christ.

Jesus is coming soon. The signs all around us make it abundantly clear that His coming is near at hand. Before He returns, there will be a people, like John the Baptist, to herald His return. Through those who are eagerly waiting for His return, praying for His people, and living lives of full surrender to Him, He will raise up His end-time heralds. The question is: What are we praying for this Christmas? 🎄

\* Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1946), pp. 178, 179.

**Sikhululekile Daco** is associate editor of *Adventist Review*.

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The Adventist pastor's feet pounded soundlessly against the dusty, parched path that ran between thatched-bamboo huts of his fellow Khmer refugees in Nong Samet border camp [located on the Thailand-Cambodia border]. The whistling swoosh of Vietnamese rockets flying toward the camp interrupted his concentration. Would their enemy, the Vietnamese, invade the camp today, on Christmas—the day of peace and goodwill to all?

A shell screamed as it arched toward the camp. The pastor willed himself to ignore the fact that more artillery fire than usual was dropping toward his camp. He had work to do. He must concentrate on his church's Christmas play scheduled for this evening. He hoped this year it would persuade more refugees to join his Khmer Adventist congregation.

A rocket exploded nearby. It jolted his thoughts back to the Vietnamese. Were they moving their equipment closer to launch an invasion? Uncontrollable emotions welled up.

*Why do the Vietnamese have control of my country? he wondered. Why won't they go back home to Hanoi, where they belong? Is God allowing me and my people to suffer for our sins? Are Khmers, like God's people Israel in the Bible, being made to suffer at the hands of their ancient bitter foes, the Vietnamese? Couldn't God find a better way to bring us closer to Him than by making us suffer war and persecution? Why would God let Hanoi invade defenseless refugees on, of all days, Christmas?*

An invasion did not worry him so much for his own sake; he had almost nothing to lose. He had lost almost everything when he escaped from his home in Kampuchea. He had fled once; he knew

he would escape again.

He worried more for his wife. Pregnant, she had gone into heavy labor on Christmas Eve. He was excited about becoming a father—and, no less, a father of a Christmas child. But he wondered about his wife's condition. If the baby came today—if it did—and the Vietnamese did stage an invasion, would his wife be able to escape safely to Khao-I-Dang camp, across Thailand's border?

### **"ANY TIME NOW"**

Unconsciously he turned about-face to his tracks. The morning sun shone offensively in his eyes. The pastor tried to shield himself from the brightness by extending his hand to cover the obtrusive ball of light. His steps quickened on the dirt road toward the clinic. Would his baby be born today?

Inside the clinic the doctor forced a smile.

"How is she, Doctor?"

"Your wife's in heavy labor. You'll be a father any time now."

"What about the Vietnamese?"

"If there is an evacuation, your wife will be too weak to walk to Khao-I-Dang. You'll have to leave her behind. Maybe the Vietnamese won't destroy the hospital."

The doctor tried to end on an upbeat note, but he knew his

# THE CHRISTMAS BABY THAT WAITED

*If they would live, they must flee.  
But the baby was coming.*



words had not been comforting. “I’m sorry, Pastor,” he said. “Let’s hope there is no evacuation.”

“Could she make it to Khao-I-Dang if the baby didn’t come?”

“Her labor’s very heavy, Pastor. That baby is due very soon. But if she stops labor, the journey would be rough—I don’t think there’s much time left. Babies come when they want to come. Your baby won’t wait.”

“I will pray . . .” The pastor hurried out of the clinic.

He didn’t bother going to his church. The Christmas play was probably finished, or, more likely, canceled. Instead, he found himself heading toward home. He must gather his few belongings together, for the air was thick with doom. If he was to live, he must flee.

As he packed life’s essentials, he pleaded with God, “Lord, why do You let these unwanted and unfriendly guests visit us today on Your birthday? If it’s Your will, persuade the Vietnamese to stop attacking. But if they must invade us, please, if You want, perform a miracle for me today. Maybe I’m asking the impossible, Lord, but listen.” He realized he was praying aloud; his voice cracked, and his vision blurred from tears.

He stopped packing and knelt on his bamboo bed. “My wife will have a child soon. But if she delivers today, she and her baby will die at the hand of Vietnamese invaders. That baby makes a great Christmas present, Lord, but why take it away the same day? I’ve lost almost everything. Please, don’t take away my wife and child. Lord, let the baby wait until its mother is safe. This I pray in the name of Your Son, whose birth we celebrate today. Thank You. Amen.”

He stood on the packed-dirt floor, dried his eyes, and threw together his last few things. Time was running out. The Vietnamese approached. Their artillery fire was heavy. He could hear their tanks rolling.

On his way back to the clinic the pastor prayed silently. Would the Lord grant his prayer? Could his wife escape? Or must he flee alone?

### **“I CAN’T BELIEVE WHAT’S HAPPENED!”**

Crowds from the camp were already trekking out toward Khao-I-Dang when the pastor pressed his way into the clinic. The doctor was still there, but the clinic showed signs that he too planned to evacuate. He had already packed most of the equipment, and the clinic stood almost empty.

## **If there is an evacuation, your wife is too weak to go. You’ll have to leave her behind.**

The doctor saw the pastor and came over to him. “I can’t believe what’s happened. Your wife stopped having labor half an hour ago. Something like this has never happened to me before. I don’t know how to explain it.”

The pastor knew.

He saw his wife, large with child, smiling at him. “Can she make the trip, doctor?”

“I think she’ll be all right.” The doctor caught the pastor’s joy, and soon two smiles radiated from their faces.

A rocket’s sound reminded them they had better go. They bade the doctor goodbye and set off to Khao-I-Dang.

Their escape came none too soon. Soon Vietnamese tanks rolled in. Driving back and forth over the camp, they flattened every building. After the pastor and his wife crossed the border into Thailand’s safety, they looked back in time to watch their camp go up in flames.

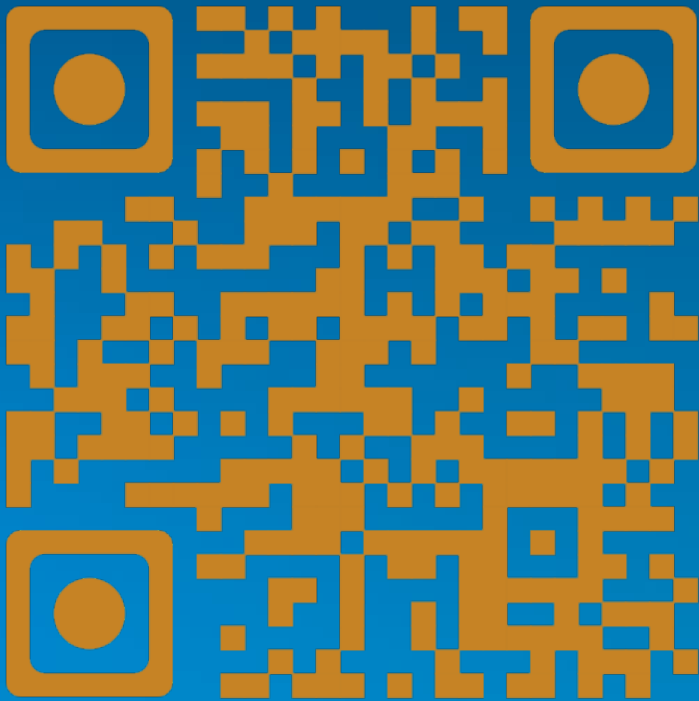
### **A CHRISTMAS TO REMEMBER**

So December 25, 1984, became a Christmas 62,000 Khmer refugees would never forget. That day they lost their homes, but all escaped safely into Thailand’s Khao-I-Dang camp.

The Christmas baby was born in Bang Phu. The pastor and his wife thought no family was ever happier to have a child than they. Together they prayed, “Lord, thanks for the belated Christmas baby. Making it come late was the best Christmas present You could give us. We thank You that we escaped safely, and that everyone else in Nong Samet escaped death. Thank You for building our faith, for showing Your greatness through the miracle of the Christmas baby that waited.”

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**Stanley Maxwell** lives in Michigan. When he wrote this story, he had recently spent two and a half years teaching English, drama, and Bible to Indo-Chinese refugees. This was first published in the *Adventist Review*, December 25, 1986. It details an event that occurred on December 25, 1984, when Vietnam military forces attacked and destroyed the Nong Samet refugee camp.



BETTER THAN PUMPKIN PIE

# RECEIVE

RAMONA GENNICK THOMPSON

I searched for gifts that He would like;  
I thought sure to gain His love.  
I gave money, time, and pleasures up,  
But it never seemed enough.

It seemed with each new gift I brought  
The bar was raised some more.  
Until one day I thought out loud,  
What am I striving for?

Ribbons and bows around me lay,  
Strewn like afterthoughts.  
"Receive!" He said to me,  
"What you seek cannot be bought.

"I AM the gift God gave to you.  
I AM eternal life.  
I AM the Savior that you need,  
The Way, the Truth, the Life.

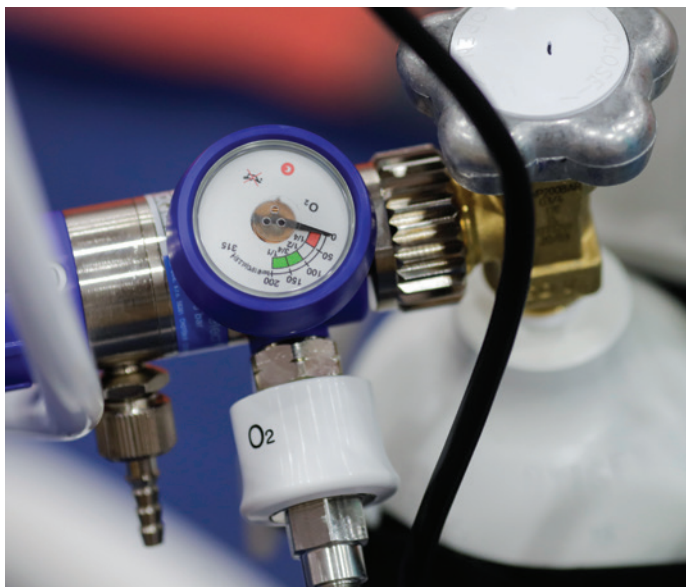
"In all your striving you forgot  
To open up your heart.  
You must receive Me, let Me in.  
That's where it all will start.

"Receive the gift I gave to you:  
Salvation from your sin,  
Forgiveness without limits, and  
Joy and peace within.

"Receive Me every day, My friend.  
Receive. Receive. Receive.  
It is only through My strength and power  
You can bring your gifts to Me."

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**Ramona Gennick Thompson** lives in Madison, Alabama, with her husband, Wayne Thompson, and attends the Grace Fellowship Seventh-day Adventist Church.



## OUR CHRISTMAS MIRACLE

*We watched helplessly as the level on the oxygen meter went down, down, down.*

I woke before dawn December 23, conscious someone was entering the house. I donned my housecoat and tiptoed downstairs, where I saw my husband's silhouette in the doorway.

Orie and I exchanged less than a dozen words before our children surrounded him, smothering him with kisses.

### FAMILY TIME

Ed Glause stopped by our home in Michigan to wish us season's greetings. We munched on cashews as we chatted. I gave an occasional nut to our 13-month-old daughter, Faith Ellen. As the supper hour approached, we invited Ed to stay.

While I started the meal, Marvel, our 16-year-old daughter, began setting the table. Before going into the kitchen, I placed the cashews far back on the buf-

fet and told the children not to take any more and not to give the baby any.

Before I had even turned the heat on the stove, I heard a piercing scream. I dropped everything and flew to the room. Faith was lying on the floor, and as I picked her up I asked what happened.

"She bumped her head!" my daughter Wanda told me. But it was obvious something more serious was wrong.

As Faith tried to scream again I saw a cashew in her mouth. Further searching revealed three small particles, all I removed.

Faith tried to scream again, but emitted only a gasp and stiffened in my arms. I slapped her between the shoulders as I called to Marvel, "Call Daddy! Baby's choking!"

"Pray! Pray!" I told Wanda. I never heard a 5-year-old pray more earnestly.

Faith was turning blue! Alarmed, I ran to the door, calling over my shoulder, "I am taking Faith to the hospital!"

### A MATTER OF TIME

The sidewalk was a glare of ice. I seemed to slip back two steps for every step I took forward. I rushed into the printshop around the corner as Harry Whitely was setting down the telephone. "Harry!" I cried. "Take me to the hospital—my baby's choking!"

Without waiting for an answer, I rushed out to the car. Harry managed to get there ahead of me and open the car door for me. As he climbed in, Marvel ran across the yard. "Tell Daddy we're taking the baby to the hospital."

As we drove, Harry inter-



jected bits of advice as he honked the horn to let people know this was an emergency. Arriving at the hospital, Harry took the baby and raced to the emergency room.

After a quick examination, Dr. Foley announced, "I'm afraid this child is gone; her right lung has collapsed."

"No, Doctor!" I cried in alarm. Half audibly I prayed, "Please, God, save my baby!" I could not—I would not—give my baby up without a fight.

"I'll call Dr. Cook in Bay City," the doctor said. "I don't have a child-sized bronchoscope to remove anything that far down."

*Bay City is nearly 200 miles away, I thought. We'll never make it!*

"Aren't there doctors in Petoskey who would have those instruments?" I asked. "That's closer."

"Maybe," Dr. Foley admitted, "but I know Dr. Cook!"

Just then my husband and Ed rushed in. I told Orie we had to take Faith Ellen to Bay City immediately.

Turning to the nurses, Dr. Foley asked, "How are we going to administer oxygen in the ambulance?"

"Doctor, my husband was a medic in the Army," I said. "I'm sure he can take care of the oxygen."

Dr. Foley welcomed the suggestion and proceeded to brief Orie on the equipment.

## **INTO THE NIGHT**

Orie and I took our places on either side of the stretcher in the rear of the ambulance. Mac, the ambulance driver stepped on the accelerator, and we were off! It was 7:00 p.m.

After what seemed like an hour I asked Mac, "Where are we?"

"Almost to Alpena."

"Is that all?" I fairly shouted.

Mac glanced back, then stepped harder on the gas. We were covering those icy roads at 90 miles an hour, yet it seemed as if we were crawling.

Several times Faith fought for breath, and we had to give her oxygen. We continued to administer oxygen shifting our positions to relieve our cramped muscles.

At last we reached Standish, 28 miles from our destination, and had to stop for gas. "Better give me that last oxygen tank, Mac," Orie called out the window as Mac paid for the gas. We had used what was left of one tank at the hospital, another full

one, and a third was nearly empty.

We never had time to hook up the fourth, however, as Faith began another mad fight for life just as Mac pulled out. To complicate matters, the mouthpiece suddenly disintegrated in my hands.

We fumbled frantically in the semidarkness to assemble the pieces properly, praying earnestly.

The oxygen in the tank was getting dangerously low, and with trying to keep the mouthpiece together and administer the oxygen, we watched helplessly as the level on the meter went down, down, down.

Then Mac announced, "The hospital's just around the corner." As we pulled into the emergency entrance, the meter on the oxygen tank registered one pound.

A nurse immediately took Faith and called the doctor, who arrived in a moment. Taking one shocked look at her blue face, he wasted no time.

Orie and I returned to thank Mac for his part in saving Faith's life. Laying an arm over our shoulders, he assured us, "Everything's going to be all right. Dr. Cook knows his business."

The nurse returned and informed us that Dr. Cook had removed two pieces of nut from Faith's bronchial tube and that she was responding nicely.

That's when Orie shocked me with this confession: "I've never operated an oxygen tank in my life." There's no doubt who supervised those three hours of our lives.

## **CHRISTMAS MORNING**

We relaxed, but did not sleep, in the hospital lobby that night. Faith Ellen's room was just off the lobby, so I checked on her frequently.

On Christmas morning X-rays revealed that Faith's lungs were clear and we had a perfectly healthy baby. We thanked Dr. Cook for saving our baby.

He looked at us and said, "You can thank God you've got your baby."

Of all the many Christmases I've celebrated since, that was the one I'll always remember as the one that showed me how much God risked when He gave the world His only Son. ♣

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This story first appeared December 25, 2008, in the *Adventist Review*. **Ora May Baker** lived in Harbor Springs, Michigan, when this article was written. From what we've been able to ascertain, the events occurred sometime in Michigan during the early 1950s.



# The Gift of Giving

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# “AND THE WORD BECAME FLESH . . .”

I often take the incarnation of Jesus for granted, yet it's perhaps the most profound act in universal history. That the infinite God, almighty and everlasting, took on human flesh, became a helpless babe, and limited Himself to our frail and finite condition—it's truly a thought that's beyond comprehension and demands our highest and humblest praise.

Among other things, it communicates the high value God places upon humanity. He deemed us worthy enough to take on our condition in order to redeem us. It tells us that God is, as I like to say, the universe's biggest humanist. He believes in humanity, seeing what we can become by His grace.

It also shows us the relational heart of God. He's not content with keeping us at a distance, but longs to be *with us*. It also means that salvation isn't something even God could accomplish from a distance. He couldn't send a committee, an email, or a handbill. He couldn't *preach* our salvation into existence. He had to take on our condition.

My favorite reflection on this stupendous act comes from John, who declared that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Even more incisively, I love how *The Message* renders this: “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.”<sup>1</sup>

The God of Scripture is someone who *moves into the neighborhood*. He places Himself right at the center of the human experience, drawing close to us in our sin and filth, instead of keeping us at arm's length. This posture is at odds with how we normally operate. We often run away from people who are different from us; we remove ourselves from the presence of those whose lives are sinful and unrighteous.

But not God.

## EMBODYING THE INCARNATION

The incarnation of Jesus should, of course, profoundly shape the way we live. If we're going to be people who celebrate the Incarnation, we should also be people who embody it.

Jesus Himself, later in John, told His disciples that “as the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (John 20:21). We're thus called to draw close to people, to see their inherent value and worth, and move toward them rather than away from them.

We're called to “move into the neighborhood” ourselves, instead of trying to separate ourselves from the sullied and sinful. We can't truly impact people from a distance. Just as Jesus couldn't merely announce salvation via proclamation but had to perform an embodied act to save us, so we too must embody the gospel if others are going to fully encounter the truth about God's saving love.

Indeed, as Ellen White says: “As Christ is the channel for the revelation of the Father, so we are to be the channel for the revelation of Christ. While our Saviour is the great source of illumination, forget not, O Christian, that He is revealed through humanity. God's blessings are bestowed through human instrumentality. Christ Himself came to the world as the Son of man. Humanity, united to the divine nature, must touch humanity.”<sup>2</sup>

So let us truly be people of the Incarnation. ♣

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<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), p. 40.

**Shawn Brace** is a pastor and author in Bangor, Maine, whose most recent book, *The Table I Long For* (Signs Publishing), details his and his church's recent journey into a mission-centered life. He is also a D.Phil. student at the University of Oxford, researching nineteenth-century American Christianity.

REIMAGINING  
FAITH  
SHAWN  
BRACE



GOD IS NOT  
CONTENT WITH  
KEEPING US AT A  
DISTANCE.



# DIVINITY JOINED WITH HUMANITY FOREVER

CAMERON JOHNSTON

In his devotional *My Utmost for His Highest* Oswald Chambers lists several examples of the joining of divinity and humanity. In the life of Jesus, the supernatural repeatedly appears in the everyday.

“The great marvel of the Incarnation slips into ordinary childhood’s life;

The great marvel of the Transfiguration vanishes in the devil-possessed valley;

The glory of the Resurrection descends into a breakfast on the seashore.

This is not an anticlimax, but a great revelation of God.”<sup>1</sup>

Because we are living in the time of Jesus’ soon return, it is vital that we understand that divinity sometimes appears in the mundane. Jesus, the Almighty Creator of the cosmos, miraculously entered humanity as a baby, fully divine yet fully human. Thus, divinity and humanity were united for eternity.

Unnoticed by most, the divine and human Messiah lived, died, and arose victorious over evil and death.

## THE ORDINARY MAY BE SUPERNATURAL

The miracle of Bethlehem is stranger than fiction. Without a human father yet through an ordinary woman, Jesus became Immanuel, God with us. This is unbelievable to the natural human mind, but spiritually revealed to all who are open to sacred realities. The extraordinary comes through the commonplace—the mundane.

## AN AMAZING STORY OF THE SEEMINGLY ORDINARY

The angel Gabriel appeared to a young woman living in Nazareth. A virgin, Mary, was pledged to be married to Joseph. Gabriel told Mary she was highly favored, and would conceive and give birth to a son, conceived of the Holy Spirit. The Holy One to be born would be called the Son of God.

Mary accepted the mission. Jesus, the divine Son of God and the human Son of man, was humbly born in Bethlehem. Angels and shepherds announced His birth. Later Wise Men followed a star and came to worship. Incarnation happens; divinity is joined with humanity.

Now everyone who receives Jesus as Savior and Friend becomes a Bethlehem, a temple of the Holy Spirit, a dwelling place for God. From this point on, divinity and humanity are so connected that it is easy to miss the divine as it quietly shines through humble followers of Jesus.

### THE TRANSFIGURATION FOLLOWED BY ENCOUNTERING EVIL

The Transfiguration of Jesus on a mountain manifests the relationship of the supernatural with the ordinary. One day Jesus took three disciples up on a mountain, where He met Elijah (who had been translated to heaven without experiencing death) and Moses (who had died but was resurrected). These men had come to encourage and strengthen Jesus for the crisis of the cross.

On the mountain the disciples fell asleep, and on waking, they saw Jesus transfigured, talking with Moses and Elijah. The disciples were overwhelmed. Then God the Father spoke: "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" (Luke 9:35).

The next morning, at the base of the mountain, evil was at work. A large crowd had gathered as the remaining disciples were unable to cast a demon out of a tortured boy. The father begged Jesus to heal his son as the boy screamed and convulsed. Jesus rebuked the evil spirit and healed the boy.

As the great miracle of the Transfiguration faded, Jesus descended into the valley. Divinity and humanity were joined together in Him. One moment Jesus conversed with heavenly beings, and the next He faced evil in a life-and-death struggle. So it is with every person who chooses to serve God in this life. Daily conflict with evil happens even while we fellowship with the divine. Victory is through our great High Priest, who sits on the throne of the universe.

### TRUTH AND HOPE BEYOND OUR REALITY

Jesus lived a difficult life on earth. He died a cruel death, but was resurrected. Let's be clear: no one took Jesus' life from Him. He gave up His life, He rested in the grave, and then as divine He took up His life again. In the process He redeemed humanity as only divinity could. This is truth beyond our reality. We know only death, grief, and trouble. Our hope of eternal life is well beyond us, but is in Jesus, who was and is the source of all life.

# The Incarnation was the pinnacle of God's self-revelation to His universe.

A few days after the resurrection, six disciples, along with Peter, decided to go fishing. All night they caught no fish. As morning approached, they noticed a fire on shore, and someone called out, "Have you any food?" They answered no. Then the voice said, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." They did, and suddenly the net was full of fish. Divinity flashed through the ordinary, and John said to Peter, "It is the Lord!"

They scrambled ashore, and Jesus served them breakfast by the Sea of Galilee. Then Jesus deliberately restored Peter as a leader in this motley band of believers who shook up the world through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The glory of the resurrection descended into breakfast by the sea. The Almighty Creator descended into and redeemed humanity. Miracle of miracles, divinity joined with humanity. Humanity would never be the same again. Weak, hurting, and lost humans could now be re-created and eventually given new bodies like Jesus' glorious body. That day is soon.

Any knowledge humanity has about God comes only through divinity revealing truth in a way we can understand, often through the ordinary. The Incarnation was the pinnacle of God's self-revelation to His universe. Scripture is clear: "There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5, NLT).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour Books, 1935), Nov. 16, see <https://utmost.org/still-human/>.

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**Cameron Johnston** is a retired pastor of the British Columbia Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

# MORE THAN WE CAN BEAR

*Why Paul  
delighted in  
difficulties*

## JEANINA BARTLING

**M**any people through the years have said to me, “God won’t give us more than we can bear.” But is this true? Haven’t you, at times, felt so overwhelmed with difficulties and heartaches that you sank in despair and complete inability to do *anything*? Or am I the only one that has sometimes become *overwhelmed* by my difficulties and sorrows? I don’t think so.

How encouraged I was, then, some time ago, to find that I am blessed to have the companionship of the apostle Paul in this “inability to endure.” Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 1:8, 9: “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death” (NIV).

### **BEYOND OUR ABILITY TO ENDURE**

Notice the phrase “far beyond our ability to endure.” It doesn’t sound to me as if Paul subscribed to the belief that God will give us only what we can bear. Looking at other translations, we find similar expressions of how Paul and his companions felt:

KJV: “. . . we were pressed out of measure, above strength, inasmuch that we despaired even of life.”

NKJV: “. . . we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.”

Amplified: “. . . we were utterly weighed down, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life [itself].”<sup>1</sup>

ASV: “. . . we were weighed down exceedingly, beyond our power, insomuch that we despaired even of life.”<sup>2</sup>

NLT: “We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it.”<sup>3</sup>

Reading these various translations actually encouraged me. They expressed exactly how I have felt many times, and this was somehow affirming.

So how *did* Paul and his friends endure those times? And *why* did God permit His faithful servants to experience such despair that was beyond what they could bear? Perhaps if we could answer those two questions, we could find our own light in our own darkness.

### LEARNING TO RELY ON GOD

In my own life I found an answer to the second question before I found an answer to the first question. In asking the second question, I was, once again, in good company. In Judges 6 I discovered that Gideon asked the angel of the Lord that very question: “‘Pardon me, my lord,’ Gideon replied, ‘but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?’” (verse 13, NIV). Why indeed? The Bible shines light on some very specific reasons for some crucible experiences, while in other cases the reasons might be unknown to us here and now.

One of the “whys” is clearly expressed in Israel’s case during Gideon’s lifetime, when God declared, “You have not listened to me” (verse 10, NIV). Scripture explains further that “the Israelites did evil,” so God “gave them into the hands of the Midianites,” and *then* the Israelites “cried out to the Lord for help” (verses 1, 6, NIV).

When we get into trouble, we often wake up and cry to the Lord. He wants us to know Him as our only true support and help. That’s exactly what Paul said in the last part of 2 Corinthians 1:9. “But this happened,” he wrote, “that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead” (NIV). The NLT puts it this way: “In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead. And he did rescue us from mortal danger, and he will rescue us again. We have placed our confidence in him, and he will continue to rescue us” (2 Cor. 1:9, 10, NLT).

**Sometimes it is only when we come to the end of our own devices that we think of looking somewhere else for help.**

In our human perversity some of us think we can handle our affairs quite well, and we go on depending on our abilities and resources or our wisdom and understanding or on other people. Sometimes it is only when we come to the end of our own devices that we think of looking somewhere else for help.

### DELIGHTING IN DIFFICULTIES

Amazingly, if we are willing, God can bring us even to the point of taking *delight* in our difficulties, as Paul expressed in 2 Corinthians 12:10: “That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (NIV).

Paul tells us that he pleaded with the Lord to take away that mysterious “thorn” in his flesh that tormented him so, but that God said to him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:8, NIV). God’s power is made perfect in our weaknesses.

So in exploring the second question of *why* we have so many distressing situations in our lives, I found the *how* to endure these times without succumbing to complete despair. We’re going to lean in some direction when accosted by difficulties and heartaches. Rather than leaning down into the pit of futility and hopelessness, we can choose to lean into the welcoming arms of our Savior and delight in His upholding power working in and through us. 🦋

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<sup>2</sup> Texts credited to ASV are from *The Holy Bible*, edited by the American Revision Committee, Standard Edition, Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1901.

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**Jeanina Bartling** writes from a background of experiencing God’s powerful love and tender wisdom to overcome earlier years of neglect, trauma, and heartbreak.

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Research shows that students who attend an Adventist university are 7x more likely to form a deep relationship with Jesus\* than their peers at public universities.

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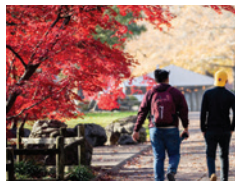
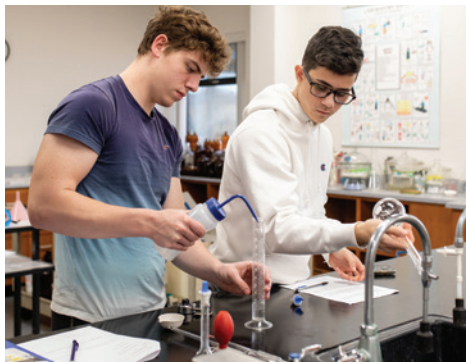
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Power for Mind & Soul

\*For more research, visit [southern.edu/100reasons](https://southern.edu/100reasons).



Collegedale, TN





# MY LAST COLUMN, WITH GRATITUDE

The spring day my mentor Bill Johnson died, I made a decision I'd been considering anyway: stepping back from my *Adventist Review* column.

Just as Elder Johnson once gave me a chance to write, it was time for me to do the same.

When I informed new *Review* editor Justin Kim, he invited me to continue through December. I'm excited for Editor Kim and his team—I love that the *Review* is now completely free online: accessible to all, like the leaves of autumn.

In my final column, a few final feelings:

First, gratitude. From the time I was 22, the *Review* has been a big part of my life: college internship, then a Growing Up Adventist humor column, then full-time as assistant editor, and later, a monthly column again.

It was actually the next editor, Bill Knott, who graciously invited me to write this column. Truthfully, when I worked at the *Review*, Bill and I sometimes clanked heads, like two kids on a playground. But sometimes when two kids clank heads, they feel oddly closer. (At least they have clanked heads in common.) As I've shared before, the often-quoted verse "Whenever two or three of you come together in my name, I am there with you" (Matt. 18:20, CEV)<sup>1</sup> isn't primarily about worship; it's about reconciliation.

Second, inspiration. I have loved this church for a long time, and a special Friday night in Jerusalem made me love it even more. Adventists, I realized, are simply Judeo-Christians; we celebrate treasures new and old, as Jesus asked us to (see Matt. 13:52). I love our church's renewed emphasis on verse-by-verse

Bible study, including the power-packed new *Seventh-day Adventist International Bible Commentary* series.

I also want to mention an additional treasure we've been given—but first some background. During this past year I've been working on a major book project—*Saved: The Story of God and Us*. I'm excited about this narrative of Scripture, and I hope it's a blessing. (You can see free excerpts at [facebook.com/MeetAtTheText](https://facebook.com/MeetAtTheText), where we also do inductive Bible study.)

But I have to tell you, as I've worked on this book, I've many times shaken my head with wonder at another set of books—marveling at the insights Ellen White was given by the Holy Spirit: the Spirit of Prophecy. If you're in doubt, try writing your own commentary on any story in the Bible, and then compare it with the Conflict of the Ages. Truly, we have treasures in jars of clay.

My third and final feeling is hope. In my five decades I've seen many seasons in the Adventist Church, and our latest one hasn't been our easiest. But I'm reminded of this statement: "The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall."<sup>2</sup>

As we get back to what Adventists have always done best—immersing ourselves in Scripture—I believe we'll soon see the renewal we pray for. And the Savior we long for.

From Growing Up Adventist to growing old Adventist, I thank you. 🍀

<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations identified CEV are from the Contemporary English Version. Copyright © American Bible Society 1991, 1995. Used by permission.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958, 1980), book 2, p. 380.

**Andy Nash** ([andynash5@gmail.com](mailto:andynash5@gmail.com)) is the author of the forthcoming book *Saved: The Story of God and Us*.

THE LIFE  
OF FAITH  
ANDY  
NASH



FROM "GROWING UP  
ADVENTIST" TO  
GROWING OLD  
ADVENTIST,  
I THANK YOU.



# THE TRAIN BUMS

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*How we show  
kindness to Jesus*

**M**y husband, Greg, and I pastored two small churches that were on Interstate 80 in a remote part of northern Nevada. We lived in Elko, which had a small congregation, but because it was on a main interstate crossing the country, we could always expect visitors. The church had pot-lucks once per month, so it was our habit to always invite the visitors to our home for Sabbath lunch. We had a large dining room table that could seat 12 to 15 people, and I always prepared large meals for the Sabbaths when Greg preached in Elko. We enjoyed inviting people to our home and looked forward to spending time getting to know our visitors.

One Sabbath there were several visitors at church, and we invited them over for lunch. They all accepted our invitation. One couple in particular caught our attention: Darrel and Kate. First, they did not have a car. This was strange for visitors on Interstate 80. They were not dressed very well, either. They were not exactly dirty, but they had a bit of a musty smell, as if they had not had a shower in a while. We gave them a ride to our house, where we were joined by the other visitors. We all sat down to lunch and began with introductions. Since all of us were strangers, we began by saying our names, where we were from, what our occupations were, and what brought us to Elko, Nevada.

When the introductions came around to Darrel and Kate, we could hardly believe what we heard. They introduced themselves as not really from anywhere in particular, because they were “train bums.” They rode the train to Elko and jumped off to come to church. They knew they could get



## They knew they could get a good, hot, free meal at any Adventist church, so they came to church.

a good, hot, free meal at any Adventist church, so they came to church. In amazement that we were meeting two train bums, we asked how they got on and off the trains. They replied that they would wait until it stopped, and at just the right time they would climb on the back of the train so that no one would see them. We asked them how long they had been train bums. “More than 10 years,” they replied. They would stop in some city and work as carpenters for a month or two to get enough money to buy food; then they would travel again.

They were a delightful couple to talk to, and we enjoyed our time with them. They knew the time for the arrival of the next train and asked us to take them to the train depot. Since they were living with such little means, we wanted to do something for them to make their lives better. We offered and they accepted two Army sleeping bags and some dried food that would be easy to carry. Putting together a large bag of trail mix with nuts, chocolate chips, and anything else we had on hand, we gave it to them. They were very happy to

receive our gifts and grateful to have been invited to our home for lunch. This was the first time they had been invited to a pastor’s home for a meal.

Greg took them down to an apartment parking lot that was about a half mile away from the train depot. He walked with them to the edge of the Humboldt River. Right on time the train arrived, as Darrel and Kate had expected. Greg watched them wade across the river, lifting their new sleeping bags and food above their heads; then they climbed onto the back of the train and waved goodbye as the train pulled out. Two years later they looked us up and found us in Truckee, California, where Greg and I were pastoring the Truckee and Quincy churches. We invited them home for Sabbath lunch again, and we had a delightful time with them. About 28 years have passed since then, and we don’t know whatever happened to Darrel and Kate. Who knows if they are still riding the trains. Maybe you will see them at one of your church services when the train comes through your city.

God wants us to treat others with kindness and acceptance, even if they are train bums. In Matthew 25:40 Jesus says, “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.” According to this Bible text, the way we treat the marginal members of society is, in essence, how we are treating Jesus. When we gave Darrel and Kate love, acceptance, food, sleeping bags, and a ride back to the train, we were treating Jesus well. Is this not what it means to love your neighbor as yourself? 🍴

**Laura Hamilton** is a chemical engineer who worked for the federal government. She is retired with her husband, Greg Hamilton, in Grand Junction, Colorado.

# Called to Serve: Lyrica Bandao

Thailand, a country known as the “land of smiles,” holds a special place in my heart. It was here where I spent the majority of my 20s, where God led me to meet my spouse, and where I found a second home. I found purpose and fulfillment in my work at the Royal Thai Air Force Nursing College. It was a life of stability and contentment. The place offered me countless opportunities for ministry work, a cost of living that allowed me to thrive, and an abundance of fresh and affordable fruits and vegetables that nourished my body and soul. I also had the privilege of exploring Thailand’s rich culture, forging lifelong friendships, and embarking on unforgettable journeys. Each day was a celebration of life, a testament to the wonders that this land had to offer.

However, our path took an unexpected turn when my brother-in-law shared about a job opportunity in Arizona. My sister had already embraced this new chapter and was preparing to relocate. Intrigued by the unknown and driven by curiosity, I seized this chance and submitted my application to the school principal in May 2022. It was a leap of faith—a step toward a future that held excitement and uncertainty. In June 2022, I had preliminary and final interviews, still unsure of what lay ahead. Yet, I chose to surrender and trust that God would guide me toward my true calling.

When the principal told me that I was hired as the science teacher at Holbrook Indian School, joy surged and illuminated my spirit. It was a moment of triumph, a testament to the power of faith and trust in God. The school requested my presence as the new school year commenced in August 2022, and I eagerly embraced this new chapter that awaited me. I could not help but look back at the life I would miss in Thailand, but we believe in following where God is leading us.

We hit a snag when our work visa interview was scheduled for January 3, 2023, but I refused to give up. I tried to secure an emergency appointment but was denied. This situation triggered a surge

of anxiety, doubt, and fear in my mind. I began to worry that the school might release me from my employment since I wouldn’t be available when they required my presence.

Before the start of the school year, all the staff gathered for a pre-conference at the school, which I attended online. It was challenging for me to participate due to the time zone difference, but I made an effort to join. As I listened to the pastor’s message, I realized that I had been trying to manufacture my own blessings instead of surrendering to God’s will. I prayed for forgiveness and let go of my fears. When the pastor finished praying, I refreshed the embassy’s website and found an opening for an interview on August 15, 2022. Overwhelmed with emotion, I started crying and shared this news with the staff, expressing my joy and amazement at what had just happened.

The next day, I asked my husband if we should pray again and ask for an earlier date to minimize the number of school days I would miss. Surprisingly, God granted our request again and we got an appointment on August 8, 2022. God has consistently answered our prayers, even those that seemed impossible. Every day, we specifically prayed for a smooth journey to the embassy, free from traffic or accidents. We also prayed to hear “Congratulations, your visa is approved” directly from the consul...



To read the full story, visit [HolbrookIndianSchool.org/staff-stories](https://HolbrookIndianSchool.org/staff-stories)



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PETER N. LANDLESS ZENO L. CHARLES-MARCEL

## RESTLESS NIGHTS, ANXIOUS DAYS:

*The Sleep Anxiety Connection*

**Q:** I was divorced eight months ago and have two teenagers at home alone at night because I accepted a rotating night shift for better pay. I am so irritable these days and can hardly sleep or stay asleep. Now my sleepiness is affecting my work. How can I be anxious and sleepy at the same time, and what can I do?

**A:** It seems very likely that you are suffering from an anxiety disorder with maybe depression as well. Because it is interfering with your daily life, you **must** see your doctor and a mental health specialist to help you with your situation. Here are some suggestions that may help as you immediately seek direct care.

You probably have ample reason to be anxious and depressed: a recent divorce, teenagers alone at home at night, financial challenges in the new single-income situation, poor sleep because of shift work, and no end in sight. You may also be experiencing a condition called shift-work sleep disorder, which negatively affects sleep and, in turn, may cause anxiety. But you may have other conditions that contribute to your current anxious state that your doctor will address if present. A knowledgeable Christian mental health professional (e.g., a certified social work counselor) may be able not just to help put your mind at ease about what you may be inappropriately anxious but also to help you navigate your life situations for which there is no obvious relief.

Here are some things you can do while attending to the urgent situation:

- Talk with your employer to see if it is possible to be on a permanent nonrotating schedule. Such a change along with developing a workable daily sleep routine even on your days off will

be helpful. Rotating shifts are difficult to adjust to. Also, if possible, plan a nap before or during your shift break to improve your alertness at work. Try to set up a safety net with trusted relatives, friends, family, and church family to supervise your teens. It may also be helpful to get some financial advice to see if there are better ways to manage your finances.

- Helpful lifestyle adjustments include being intentionally more physically active (e.g., 30 minutes of moderately intense exercise in outdoor sunlight daily). This can reduce anxiety and depression, a natural stress reliever. After

**Your health is not a trivial matter.**

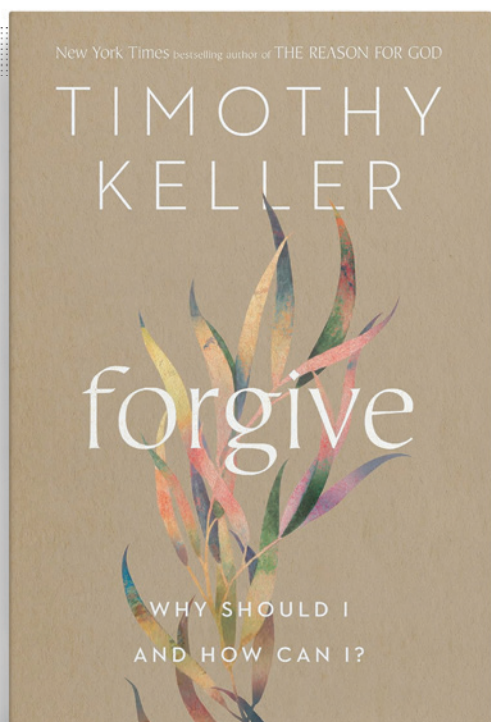
your night shift, avoid exposure to sunlight in the morning, use blue light-filtering sunglasses when you travel home, and use dark shades in your bedroom to help you sleep better during the day. Eat a balanced, whole-food diet at regular intervals with no snacking. Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and sugary foods and drinks.

Your health is not a trivial matter. Act with some urgency, and by God's grace make the necessary changes.

Our Reminded™ and YouthAlive® resources may be informative and helpful for you and your teens. We pray that God will help you find workable solutions and protect you and your family. SHALOM! 🕊

**Peter N. Landless**, a board-certified nuclear cardiologist, is director of Adventist Health Ministries at the General Conference. **Zeno L. Charles-Marcel**, a board-certified internist, is an associate director of Adventist Health Ministries at the General Conference

# EDITORS' PICKS



## Forgive: Why Should I and How Can I?

Timothy Keller, *Forgive: Why Should I and How Can I?* (New York: Viking, 2022), ISBN-13 978-0-525560-74-6 (hardcover), 272 pages, US\$23.40. Reviewed by Josephine Elia Loi, chemical engineer, Houston, Texas.

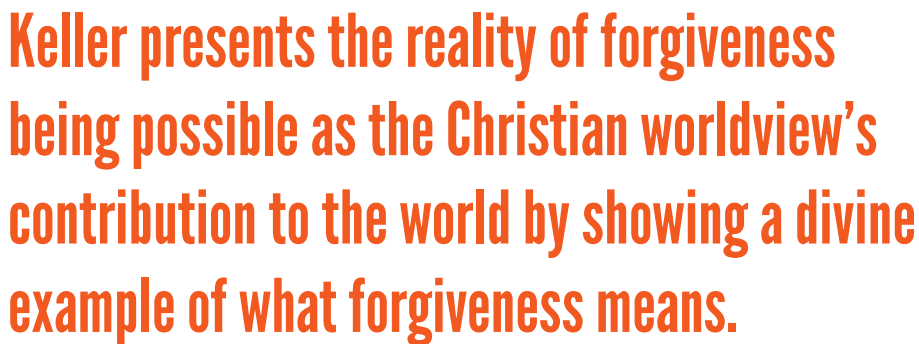
**W**hen Timothy Keller died in May of 2023, the global Christian community mourned the loss of a singular voice in the world—one that was thoughtful, generous, principled, and anchored in the Bible. Tributes flowed in from those who had experienced his gracious character, testimonies of a life that had been sustained by the gospel that he preached. *Forgive*, the last book that Keller wrote at the end of his life, carries a certain import and gravitas as his final benediction and appeal to the world; one that sounds like “My children, forgive one another.”

Keller’s most admirable qualities as a speaker—the way he presented biblical teachings in a “culturally sophisticated” way—saturate his written ministry as well. In his writings he judiciously addresses subjects that resonate with some of the deepest sources of angst in our current culture, including objections against the Christian faith. He provides insights into how Christianity offers the most satisfying, even if not all, answers to our personal and collective anxieties. *Forgive* is no exception.

The book opens with the biblical parable of the unforgiving servant, found in Matthew 18:21-35. The servant, whose immense debt was forgiven by his merciful master, proceeds to exact payment from a fellow servant who owes him a fraction of his original debt, and punishes him for not being able to pay. The collective supervision by the community of servants which witnesses this injustice results in the master’s awareness of the matter, and subsequently in the unforgiving servant receiving his dues.

In other words, the book begins by addressing head-on the elephant in the room, namely, the abuse of forgiveness. Further, Keller tackles the hardest objection against forgiveness, namely, what to do with the unrepentant and persistent abuser of said forgiveness.

As a society, we occupy a cultural moment when many are skeptical about the power and need of forgiveness, perhaps justifiably so. The back-to-back-to-back unveiling of rampant and continued abuse in various institutions, including (and especially) in communities of faith, strikes at the very core of this teaching. Do we really believe in forgiveness? What does true forgiveness look like?



## Keller presents the reality of forgiveness being possible as the Christian worldview's contribution to the world by showing a divine example of what forgiveness means.

Keller does not reserve this question as a punchline at the end of book. Instead, he opens with it and invites his readers to a conversation about forgiveness that does not diminish the hurt of the wronged or release perpetrators easily with impunity.

Exhibiting the depth and breadth of his reading selections, Keller breaks down the most prevalent narratives on forgiveness in our contemporary culture—the unconditional forgiveness model, the transactional forgiveness model, and the no forgiveness model—and expounds on the background beliefs and assumptions upon which these models stand. You will find that he engages the differing perspectives in a manner that is thoughtful and respectful, a hallmark of Keller's ministry. He demonstrates, in this work, a principle that he taught and lived by—that in every engagement with culture, there is always something to affirm and something to challenge. For Christian readers, this is a model worth contemplating.

The meat of the book is an exposition of the biblical model of forgiveness, a model that is ultimately aimed at redemption, communal reconciliation, and true healing. Keller presents the reality of forgiveness being possible as the Christian worldview's contribution to the world by showing a divine example of what forgiveness means. Adopting a conversational tone, there's an implicit understanding that forgiving someone is hard soul work. But always, unabashedly, he points

to the cross as the Christian's beacon and source of forgiveness, yes, even forgiveness on repeat.

Keller's longtime readers will recognize echoes of his other works spread throughout this book: God's generous justice, how mercy and justice marry each other in the person of Jesus Christ, how the gospel leads us to self-forgetfulness, and Keller's affirmation and critique of secular society (i.e., secular culture's tendency to embrace aspects of teachings rooted in the Christian worldview while leaving God behind). Seen in the context of the author's life, *Forgive* reads like a synthesis of Keller's core teachings applied to the tender subject of forgiveness, a subject requiring much more than mere intellectual analyses.

*Forgive* is a worthwhile read if you are open to hearing pastoral wisdom from someone who, from all appearances, led a faithful life. For the cerebrally prone, you will find, in the volume, an exemplary model for developing and organizing thoughts when presenting biblical truths, and for engaging with different worldviews. For those needing healing and forgiveness, it will encourage you to rely on God's abundant supply of mercy and move forward in pursuing forgiveness from others. For those seeking justice, it will encourage you to trust in God's justice and to draw on His strength to grant forgiveness. After all, *we* are the forgiven servant. May we extend that forgiveness to others, too. ♣

# Bill and Jill

## now realize more than ever that life is not guaranteed

and want to ensure that their kids would be taken care of if something were to happen to them. But life is busy, and they don't know the costs and time considerations of creating a will.



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# LOOKING BACK

CONTINUED FROM P. 72

to return to Europe to help with the small growing group of Adventists.

## BACK TO EUROPE

In the decades that followed, Erzberger was instrumental in establishing Adventism in Switzerland and Germany. In the winter of 1872-1873 Erzberger held evangelistic meetings in La Chaux-de-Fonds and Le Locle, Switzerland. In La Chaux-de-Fonds the auditorium was so full that many listeners had to stand. In the end Erzberger baptized several people and started a church in Le Locle with 18 members.

When John N. Andrews, the first official Adventist missionary, went to Switzerland in 1874, Erzberger assisted him, traveling to Elberfeld, Wuppertal, Germany, in 1875, where they met a group of Sabbathkeeping Baptists. They were similar to the Adventists in believing and practicing the Sabbath. Andrews was not fluent in German, so he preached in English while Erzberger translated for him. While Andrews returned to Switzerland, Erzberger remained in Germany and continued holding lectures in Hilden and Solingen (1875), as well as in Langenberg (a district of Velbert today) in 1876. The group formed there became the first official Adventist church in Germany.

In the next months Andrews was called on by Erzberger for assistance in Germany. The duo visited Solingen, where a congregation of 16 members had been established by Erzberger. It is important to note that Erzberger also produced the first German Adventist tracts (probably printed in Solingen, Germany), which the young church distributed.

## DISCOURAGEMENT AND BACK TO MISSION

After eight arduous years of labor, Erzberger succumbed to discouragement. Church members accused him of pride, and unable to bear this accusation, he left the mission call. Between 1878 and 1883, there was a pause in the mission and ministry of Erzberger. It was during this time that Erzberger got married to Marie Yersin (in 1882). The couple had two sons: Heinrich (born in 1884) and Jakob (born in 1886).

Erzberger returned to mission sometime later, possibly because of the untimely death of John

N. Andrews in 1883, which left the Adventist mission in Europe without a leader. When Ludwig Conradi arrived in Europe in 1886, Erzberger assisted him with the first evangelistic efforts at Lausanne and Basel, Switzerland. When Conradi moved to Germany, Erzberger was left as the only Adventist preacher to care for all the German-speaking churches in Switzerland for several years.

After some years, Erzberger's eyesight began to fail. Still, he did not let that deter his passion for the Advent movement. He continued visiting and encouraging churches. Eventually, however, in 1920 Erzberger was worn out by sickness. He was taken care of by his second wife, Marie Pauline Kaufmann (19 years his junior), from Lahr, Germany, whom he married in 1905. While living in Basel, Jakob H. Erzberger died on July 13, 1920, bringing the efforts of an Adventist giant, one of the founding fathers of European Adventism, to rest.

In a memorial, Ludwig Richard Conradi, another pioneer of the Adventist movement in Europe, praised Erzberger as a humble soul seeker. According to Conradi, Erzberger, though a senior worker, "was always willing to work under a younger man. He did not seek his own; he was no position seeker. . . . Leading people to Jesus was for him the most important holy work."\*

Ultimately, Erzberger's legacy did not die with him. It lived on and grew through his two sons, Heinrich and Jakob, who inherited the mission and ministry legacy of their father. Heinrich Erzberger was a missionary to the Middle East (Syria, Turkey) and Bulgaria, while Jakob Erzberger (junior) worked in the Adventist Sanitarium in Gland, Switzerland. ♣

\* Daniel Heinz, "Jakob Erzberger: The Forgotten Pioneer," *Adventist World*, May 2010, p. 25.

**Chigemezi N. Wogu**, Ph.D., pastor of the New Life SDA Church in Berlin and the Adventgemeinde Spandau, is a mission historian with experience in researching Adventism in Nigeria and Germany.



To learn more about Jakob Erzberger, follow the QR code.

# JAKOB ERZBERGER

*Recommitment despite discouragement*

A torn pair of trousers led Jakob Erzberger, the first ordained European Seventh-day Adventist pastor, to the church. But let's start at the beginning of his story.

Jakob Heinrich Erzberger was born on March 31, 1843, in Seltisberg near Liestal in Switzerland. Young Jakob and his three brothers grew up in poverty following the early death of their father. This, however, did not prevent his mother, Anna Erzberger, from exerting a godly influence on her children, and young Jakob made a commitment to God's work from an early age. Being Catholic, after his confirmation at the age of 16 Jakob went to work as a porter at the cantonal hospital in Liestal.

**"HE DID NOT SEEK HIS OWN; HE WAS NO POSITION SEEKER..."**

Later, at 21 years of age, Erzberger entered the St. Chrschona seminary near Basel. While at the seminary, Erzberger often doubted his vocation because he did not consider his heart pure. Despite his doubts and personal struggles, he was able to grow and mature spiritually.

## MEETING ADVENTISTS

While on a preaching tour for his seminary in 1867, Erzberger met a group of Adventists led by Michael Belina Czechowski. How did Erzberger meet this group? Near Tramelan, Erzberger discovered that his only pair of trousers was torn. The tailor he found to repair his trousers introduced him to the Adventists and gave him a Bible study on the end of the world, the imminent return of Jesus, and the validity of the Sabbath commandment.



The very next year he was baptized and decided to minister to the small group of Adventists in Tramelan. The group thought they were alone in the world in their beliefs until Albert Vuilleumier read a copy of Czechowski's *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* and discovered that an established Seventh-day Adventist Church already existed in North America.

They promptly sent Erzberger to Battle Creek, Michigan, in the United States, in 1869, to establish contact with the Adventist Church. Erzberger became the first official overseas delegate to a General Conference session. He was welcomed into the home of James and Ellen White. In 1870 Erzberger was ordained and commissioned

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 71**



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