

# ADVENTIST REVIEW

NOVEMBER 2021: THE RIGHT SIDE + POPPING  
THE BUBBLE + YOUR AMBASSADOR + OUR SECRET  
SAUCE + SCRAPS OF FAITH



## Getting Beyond

# HIS Impact On Me

## A Strong Claim for the Gospel



The Holy Spirit was working miraculously in the group pictured above, not only in the hearts of the students but to their parents/guardians as well. In addition to the **sixteen students** that were baptized, **three parents** were also baptized along with **two graduate students**, and **five staff children** for a total of **twenty-six** souls.

Pastor Ludy Mahinay is the school's Bible class teacher, chaplain, and Pastor. He spends a lot of his time in the spiritual area of our students. However, he would be the first to tell you that these baptisms are the result of a collaborative work of Divine power and a staff that loves their students.

"I did a random survey in class, asking our students what inspired them to accept God or get baptized," he said. "The multiple-choice options included: various specific teachings/doctrines or topics of the bible and a space for an 'other' response." The responses are heartwarming.

"Some answered with specific topics that convinced them," Pastor Mahinay recalls, "but generally, they wrote what convinces them is how all the staff here treated them, cared for them, and loved them. To me, this is a perfect reflection of God's love through action and not just in words."

This is how God works: He utilizes a network of human vessels, from the supporters of Holbrook Indian School who help make the resources and staff possible, to the staff who in turn provide direct education, love, and care.

"The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian."  
— Ellen White

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# TRENDING

## THE MOST SHARED STORIES ON ADVENTISTREVIEW.ORG LAST MONTH:

- 1 Adventist Mother and Daughter Are Centenarians
- 2 Adventist Church President Makes Clear-Cut Appeal to Live According to God's Word
- 3 Vaccinated Yet? So What?
- 4 Adventist Leaders Reflect on How to Conduct Mission During Crises
- 5 GC Secretary's Report Outlines Adventist Church's Challenges and Extensive Blessings

## 125 YEARS AGO



Reading the *Review* in 1896, you would find a recurrent theme. In November 1895, a 380-acre former slave plantation was purchased by the Seventh-day Adventist Church with the intent to build a school to educate African American slaves freed 30 years earlier by the Emancipation Proclamation. The plantation had towering oak trees, giving the school its first name, "Oakwood Industrial School."

O. A. Olsen, General Conference president, was greatly involved in this endeavor, visiting the school site frequently, and even spending some months there working to get it ready. The *Review*, through letters and messages from Olsen and others, regularly kept readers apprised of the school's development. These updates would typically request funds or donations, often thanking those who had given gifts in kind, such as an organ or sewing machine.

After some delay the school opened officially on November 16, 1896, with 16 students.

The school's name changed in 2008, when it reached university status. Today Oakwood University serves nearly 2,000 students, offering majors in many academic fields.

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BILL KNOTT



*"It takes only as long to forget a thing as it did to learn it."*

## A Distinction With a Difference

More than 15 years ago I asked a question in this space that seemed initially to resonate with readers: *"Who discipled you?"* Handwritten and emailed responses flowed in during the next three weeks, full of details—dates, times, occasions, and even names of prominent evangelists—somehow related to each writer's story of salvation.

Unfortunately, not one letter writer actually answered the question I asked. To them, "discipled" meant "convicted" or "converted" or even "baptized." But nary a one described the patient, durative process by which a new believer is "formed in Christ" (see Gal. 4:19), or pointed to someone who had patiently journeyed with them while that transformation occurred.

In hindsight, I shouldn't have been surprised at how little my question was understood. As a lifelong Adventist, the assumptions—and yes, the vocabulary—of my Adventist culture taught me to equate Jesus' command to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19, NRSV) with another task He also clearly urged: "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15, NRSV). Discipling and proclaiming were assumed to be just slightly different expressions for the same phenomenon. Indeed, that conflation is still evident as many church leaders, evangelists, and pastors use the terms.

Because the proclaiming task is more easily measurable, both in the number of sermons preached and in results that appear to follow (3,000 baptized in one day at Pentecost; 30,000 baptized in one day in a sports stadium), the takeaway is that the "telling" is significantly more important than the "showing." We applaud the bright, telegenic evangelist whose charisma and persuasive gifts bring persons down the aisles to commit their lives to Jesus. We say almost nothing—and certainly devote almost no comparable resources—to the equally vital process by which a convert learns the life of Christ (see Eph. 4:20).

All of this might seem only a semantic distinction—a question of emphasis—were it not for the alarming reports emanating from the church's world headquarters about our increasing inability to retain members. At the General Conference Executive Committee's most recent meeting, data were presented that surely made every leader and delegate wince: of 41,225,021 persons who joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church since 1965, at least 16,804,656 have left, a staggering 41 percent of the total. Every pastor, including this one, will testify that the number who have "officially" departed is only a portion of the actual total.\* As we have all learned to say, "Actual results will vary"—have varied, are varying.

It's thus no mystery that we

are beginning to hear a new drumbeat among us from some concerned leaders, pastors, and evangelists. While we justly celebrate the moment when a new believer steps into the water and rises to newness of life, the essential task—and the one to which we must bend our best thought and a rapidly increasing share of our resources—is still ahead of us. We must teach and model to that new believer the attitudes of Jesus; the clarity of His truth; the habits of prayer and study of the Word; and yes, the responsibility to live, work, and worship as a witness.

An adage from a long-ago Greek class still chastens me: "It takes only as long to forget a thing as it did to learn it." Because of the unstinting activity of the Holy Spirit, a person may be convicted and decide to make a life-altering choice to affiliate with God's remnant people during a three-week campaign—or even because of a single, well-preached sermon. But until we build ongoing, multi-year discipling classes; until we learn to pair new believers with mature, steady members for a minimum of at least a year of walking together, we will find ourselves not only wincing, but genuinely in the shaking. ♣

\* <https://www.adventistresearch.info/wp-content/uploads/2021-Annual-Council-statistical-report-slides-copy.pdf>

## SEPTEMBER ADVENTIST REVIEW

The articles on the Reformation in the September AR were timely and appreciated. First, as Nikolaus Satelmajer stated, the Word of God must be central in any reformation movement! It was my privilege to visit the church in Wittenberg where Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses, as well as the chapel in Prague where Jan Huss preached to bring the Word of God to the people. As incredible as it may seem, as a teenager in 1948 I saw a Bible for the first time. And as the Reformers fought for it, it changed the lives of people. My parents and I were transformed by the power of the Word of God as well! As Jesus approaches in the turbulent times we live, it is time to follow in their footsteps and take the Word of God to our people. It will be a revived church!

**Leo Ranzolin, Sr.**  
*Estero, Florida*



candor and pointedness in applying a lens to this issue. As accurately posited: “Histories of the Seventh-day Adventist Church have not yet adequately noted the African American experience in Adventism.” A case series in the *Review* or a standing column, for that matter, would be most appropriate given the prevailing modern-day issues of race relations in our country and within our church. I am quite confident that there is more than sufficient fodder for such a work.

**Robert A. L. Blake**  
*Normal, Alabama*

## COMMENTS FROM ADVENTISTREVIEW.ORG

### FRUITFUL CONVERSATIONS

Thanks for the excellent article “Fruitful Conversations” (September 2021). Your statement “Our opinions are less important than our willingness to reflect the character of Christ” led me to question my opinions and their relationship to Jesus. I was not happy with the answer. Time to reprioritize and refocus and make sure Jesus and reflecting His character is more important than what I think.

**Bruce McClay**  
*Battle Ground, Washington*

### WHY WE DIG

Thank you for an outstanding issue and for recognizing the valuable contributions made by Seventh-day Adventist archaeologists (August 2021). Adventist archaeologists have helped me to have a better understanding of the Bible. These individuals have also impacted many others outside the Adventist Church.

**Nikolaus Satelmajer**

### AN IMPORTANT WORK TO TAKE ON

I read with great interest the article on James Kemuel Humphrey. Thank you for the

### TIM POIRIER AWARDED HONORARY DEGREE FOR SERVICE THAT HAS HONORED E. G. WHITE'S LEGACY

Congratulations to Tim Poirier! He deserves this honor and has given the years of his life to this church. Bless you, Tim!

**Ruth Hoffer**

Wow! I remember visiting the White Estate back in the 1980s. I don't remember the conversation exactly, but what I remember was that as a young man, Tim took a genuine interest in our questions and field of interest. Now I see



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“[It’s] time to reprioritize and refocus and make sure Jesus and reflecting His character is more important than what I think.”

BRUCE MCCLAY

---

him again so many years later. I also remember Brother Olsen back in the Takoma Park location and how kind and accommodating he was. Good memories.

**Gordon Jura**

#### **PROPHECY FULFILLED**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church today would not be what it is, absent the gift of God to us in the ministry of Ellen White. However, the role of Ellen White and the manner of her ministry can be subject to honest reflection that does not throw out the principles that God gave us.

**Gregory Matthews**

#### **MARVIN MOORE, EDITOR OF**

#### **2022 SPECIAL GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION**

Official notice is hereby given that a Special Session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists will be held January 18, 2022 in the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists World Headquarters Building, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States. The meeting will begin at 8:00 AM, January 18, 2022. All duly accredited delegates are urged to be present at that time.

*Ted N C Wilson,  
General Conference President  
Erton C Köhler,  
General Conference Secretary*

#### **SIGNS OF THE TIMES, PASSES TO HIS REST AT 84**

So sorry to hear of Marvin Moore’s death! I have read books authored by him and always thought of him as a great gospel hero of the Word and inspiring others to reach for something a little deeper and something more compelling to bind their souls to God and all that He has. I will plan to visit with Marvin Moore in the great new life God has planned—eternal life! I extend my condolences to his family and friends and assure you that God’s heaven is real, and you will see Marvin Moore again full of life!

**Barbara Marsh**

So bittersweet. We, his many friends, miss him now and will until the sweet morning when we can say an eternal hello to Marvin on the other side!

**Ken McFarland**

#### **HOW TO DIG DEEP INTO SCRIPTURE**

The Bible presents a unified message—it does not teach one thing in one place and the opposite thing in another place. We should also put our emphasis on the preponderance of the evidence, not on the rare outlier text that we may not understand. We should confer with a good concordance, Bible commentary, and Bible dictionary to help explain things we do not understand. All these tools help us to come to an objective, rather than subjective, understanding of the meaning of the passage. It is important to understand this objective meaning before we try to apply the message to a contemporary setting, which may be more subjective. “For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little” (Isa. 28:10).

**Connie Dahlke**

#### **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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one child, one family, and  
one village at a time!***



**Esther started her small vegetable shop (behind) as a result of her FARM STEW training**

Esther (*in pink*) now has the chance of a future as bright and beautiful as her smile!

Esther says "I joined FARM STEW in early 2020 and since then, I have benefited from the training and group activities. I now practice the low-cost, yet efficient farming practices FARM STEW has taught us. Before Safina (*in green*), a FARM STEW trainer, came to our community, farmers used to plant crops only during the rainy season." During the dry season, farmers harvested and then waited for rain, hoping their food would last. Usually, it didn't and they and their children suffered hunger.

Esther reports a big change since gifts from FARM STEW donors (like you) sent Safina to train in her Eastern Ugandan Village. "Now we've extended the season by applying what FARM STEW trainers taught us such as mulching, composting, and using discarded water bottles for drip irrigation. We can now plant all year round!"

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**“Several areas on [the Adventist Church] financial statement show positive trends year over year, for which we can only give God the glory.”**

**—Paul Douglas, General Conference treasurer, p. 11.**



Erton Köhler, secretary of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, presents the Secretary's Report during the 2021 Annual Council meetings.

## SECRETARY'S REPORT OUTLINES CHALLENGES AND BLESSINGS

**ERTON KÖHLER SAYS THE PANDEMIC HASN'T STOPPED THE CHURCH.**

BY MARCOS PASEGGI, ADVENTIST REVIEW

In the next few minutes I want to share with you more than data and analyses,” Erton Köhler, secretary of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, said in his opening remarks of the Secretary's Report to the members of the General Conference Executive Committee on October 10. “[I want to share] the vision of a church bigger than the crisis of the pandemic.” Köhler, who was elected to his new position six months ago, is still awaiting visa clearance before taking up his full responsibilities at the General Conference headquarters and is carrying out his worldwide responsibilities from Brazil.

Köhler acknowledged that during the past 18 months the Adventist

Church has suffered, but that it has reinvented itself and, “by the grace of God, overcome its challenges.” He noted that the world after the onset of the pandemic is a new world. But “as a church, we are learning to deal with this reality, looking for the best opportunities to serve, minister, and fulfill the mission in this context.”

Köhler also observed that the consequences of the pandemic on the church and membership are vast and cannot be described thoroughly in a brief report. Reports from the world church divisions have led leaders to conclude that so far, the Adventist Church has lost more than 17,000 members to COVID-19. By all

estimates, it is a conservative number. The figure includes at least 773 pastors, retirees, church workers, missionaries, and church leaders.

### CHALLENGES AND BLESSINGS

The pandemic also affected how Adventists do evangelism, Köhler said, and how they minister to members and those in need. At the same time, the pandemic triggered great resilience and helped Adventists change the way they do things. “We adapted, but most important, we kept serving the world,” he said. “We kept evangelizing; we kept witnessing; and God blessed all our efforts.”

Part of those blessings is seen in the fact that despite extensive lockdowns and ever-present restrictions, in 2020 the Adventist Church planted 1,736 new churches and baptized 781,389 people.

**“TECHNOLOGY  
CAME TO STAY IN  
THE CHURCH’S  
LIFE BUT NOT  
TO REPLACE  
THE LIFE OF  
THE CHURCH.”—  
ERTON KÖHLER**

In his report Köhler shared the vital role of Adventist hospitals, which in many places were at the front line of the fight against the pandemic. He also referred to the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), the humanitarian arm of the church, which in 2020 increased funds invested and the number of projects and people positively impacted. With an increase of just US\$4 million in donations (from US\$324 million in 2019 to \$328 million in 2020), ADRA supported 325 more projects (from 1,184 to 1,509) and reached out to 6 million more people (from 14 to 20 million). This figure includes

422 projects directly related to the pandemic.

The pandemic also marked an impressive increase in communication reach, primarily through official online media outlets. According to Köhler, people reached through the Adventist Church website managed by the General Conference Communication Department went from less than 5 million a month to almost 10.5 million, a 113 percent growth. Hope Channel’s *Unlocking the Prophecies* series reached 5 million views and resulted in many baptisms, “the largest evangelistic event the ministry has ever held,” he said.

The Adventist Church also launched various regional initiatives to support the mental health of churches and communities. One of them, the Experience God project, offers counseling by phone and receives more than 6,000 calls a month in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.

#### **PUBLISHING AND EDUCATION**

Köhler reported that the Adventist Church’s Publishing Department quickly adapted to the new reality to fulfill its mission. Adaptation included rapid development of digital platforms in various regions of the world to increase offers of Adventist literature. The sale of literature was supported by additional activities, such as healthy cooking webinars, which increased traffic and the purchase of resources.

The Adventist educational system was severely affected by the pandemic in many places around the world. “The need to adapt was enormous,” Köhler said, “requiring schools at all levels to switch to virtual classes almost overnight.” Some schools had to battle tremendous odds. Among the most affected was Middle East University in Beirut, Lebanon, which faced a terrible nearby explosion in August 2020 and suffered the effects of a national economic crisis. The Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIAS) in the Philippines has also been severely affected. International students, who made up a sizable part of its student body, have not been authorized to enter the country. Enrollment is down 57 percent.

Primary and secondary schools have also been forced to adapt. In South America an e-class school system has been offered free of charge to Adventist institutions. The system now has more than 672,000 active users.

The pandemic also affected those church workers who serve the church as missionaries in places far from their home countries, many of them in very challenging areas.

#### **CHALLENGES AT LOCAL LEVEL**

However, the most significant challenges were faced at the local church level. “Our ability to worship was the first and the main problem when the pandemic

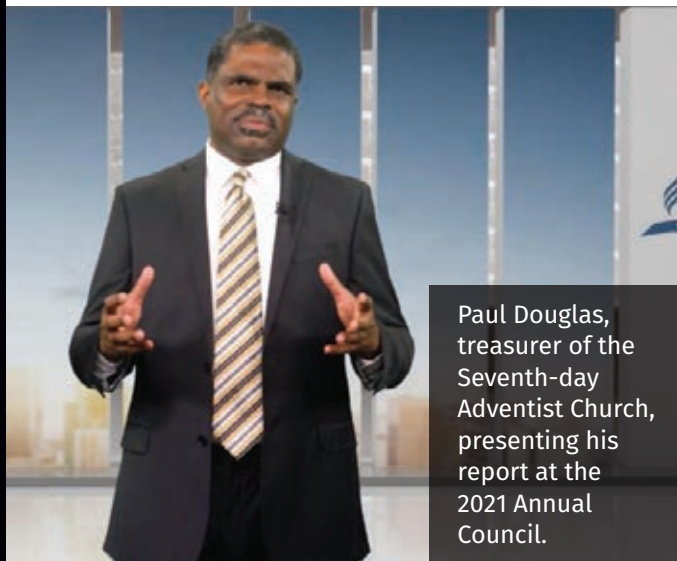


started,” Köhler said, “but our members immediately switched to technology.” He acknowledged that in many areas of the world, people quickly got tired of online services and expected a rapid reopening of churches. But since it took longer than expected, they found new ways of being together. After just a few weeks, some churches introduced the concept of drive-in churches, conducting services in church parking lots as they followed social distance protocols from their cars.

Local Adventist churches also stepped up to support those members and community residents who lost their jobs. In the South American Division, from March 2020 to March 2021, local churches distributed food and clothes to more than 2 million people. In Bangladesh, church workers donated 10 percent of their salaries to support lay members in need.

Despite the increasing role of social media in the life of local churches, Köhler emphasized that face-to-face interactions are important and should not be replaced. “Technology came to stay in the church’s life but not to replace the life of the church,” he said.

Another word that needs to be at the top of our agenda is commitment, he said. “We need to find ways of bringing members together, understanding they are the main asset of the church. Jesus came for people, led people, died for people, and will return to take people to heaven.”



Paul Douglas, treasurer of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, presenting his report at the 2021 Annual Council.

## CHURCH FINANCES SHOW IMPROVEMENT, TREASURER SAYS

**PAUL DOUGLAS CALLS TO ALIGN CHURCH RESOURCES WITH MISSION.**

BY MARCOS PASEGGI, ADVENTIST REVIEW

The treasurer of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Paul Douglas, told members of the General Conference Executive Committee (GCXCOM) that he was happy to report that the state of church finances at the end of August 2021 is much stronger than it was a year ago.

“Several areas on our financial statement show positive trends year over year,” Douglas said, “for which we can only give God the glory.” Douglas’s report, his first since he was elected to his new position in April 2021, was part of the second day of business sessions of the denomination’s Annual Council on October 11.

### POSITIVE TRENDS

Among the positive signs, Douglas mentioned a 26 percent increase in cash and investments (to US\$53 million) and a 31 percent and a 66 percent decrease in accounts and notes receivable, respectively. Other trends include a 17 percent decrease in accounts payable (\$4 million).

Douglas also emphasized that tithes are 5.2 percent ahead of August 2020 (7.4 percent over the amounts budgeted). Offerings are ahead 14.2 percent, he added (30.4 percent over the amounts budgeted). Support expenses (those needed to operate the GC headquarters and conduct activities to serve the world field) are 8.4 percent less as of August 2021 than they were a year ago (16.9

## “Three priorities (mission, spiritual growth, and leadership) must guide our spending decisions, both large and small.” —Ray Wahlen

percent less than budgeted). He acknowledged that these figures had benefited from a sharp decline in traveling. Nevertheless, Douglas said, “I extend credit to my colleagues in the various departments and services in managing their allocations to make the most out of limited resources.”

Looking toward the end of this year, Douglas said he and his team believe the positive trends will continue. “Many of the treasurers from our world divisions are reporting year-over-year increases in tithes and offerings,” he reported. Douglas explained that those increases are to be expected because 2020 was a very unusual year. Yet, he said, those increases are positive compared to 2019, which would generally be seen as a typical financial year. However, after the disruption brought by the pandemic, “even with the positive indicators, we see that the most prudent approach is for us to make plans to come out of it slowly,” Douglas shared.

### A CONSERVATIVE BUDGET

Undertreasurer Ray Wahlen then discussed the budget for 2022, which, according to Douglas, follows a conservative approach while keeping a focus on the church’s mission.

In his opening remarks Wahlen said he believes God has undoubtedly brought the General Conference through some challenging financial times “to a position that we didn’t even dare to dream about at this time last year.” It is some-

thing, he acknowledged, that has eased the picture for the 2022 budget, though some challenges remain.

“One lesson we did learn from financial stresses of the past 18 months is that . . . three priorities (mission, spiritual growth, and leadership) must guide our spending decisions, both large and small,” Wahlen said. “Projects that are efficient and inexpensive, even though successful, could be a waste of scarce resources if they are not in alignment with agreed-upon priorities.”

According to Wahlen, one of the items that will most impact the 2022 budget is that the percentage of funds the General Conference receives from the North American Division is projected to decrease from 49 to 46 percent (equivalent to \$13.5 million), primarily because of scheduled tithe percentage reductions.

Regarding appropriations, or funds the General Conference sends to various world church regions and institutions, Wahlen shared that within the next 12 to 18 months leaders will launch the required quinquennial review to determine what changes, if any, are advisable.

The office operating budget, or the money the world church headquarters spends to fund programs and activities onsite and around the world, has been capped at \$45.6 million, which, according to policy, is 2 percent of gross world tithe from the previous two years. As a percentage,

it has remained constant, Wahlen reported.

Finally, he explained that the result of the income and expense allocations is a projected loss of \$16.4 million, which results in a deliberate plan to absorb from GC reserves (or net assets) a significant portion of the negative impact of the recent financial disruption. It represents, however, a \$5.3 million improvement from 2020. “The projected loss—if incurred—will be covered from the budget reserve,” Wahlen explained.

### MISSION, A PRIORITY

In the last part of his presentation, Douglas reminded Adventist leaders and church members that amid uncertainty and turmoil, the mission stays the same. “All church leaders and members must remain faithful in their support of God’s mission with their means,” he emphasized. “We must mobilize all the resources He provides to accomplish the work that He has set before us.”

Douglas then appealed to every treasurer at every church level to work with their fellow officers and committees. The goal, he said, is to embrace the objective of aligning church resources to make the greatest impact to achieve God’s mission. “We will work tirelessly to ensure that resources are aligned to make God’s mission our number-one priority,” he said. “When we make God’s mission our number-one priority, He [will send] tokens of blessing to encourage our efforts.”



Adventist leaders share a video to honor church workers who passed away from COVID-19.

## LEADERS REMEMBER CHURCH WORKERS LOST TO COVID-19

**THEY HONORED THE MEMORY OF THOSE WHO FELL IN THE LINE OF DUTY.**

BY MARCOS PASEGGI, ADVENTIST REVIEW

Members of the General Conference Executive Committee (GCEXCOM) paused during Annual Council meetings on October 8 to remember scores of church workers and missionaries who became infected and ultimately lost their lives to COVID-19, starting in August 2020.

At the Adventist Church headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States, leaders invited members attending the 2021 Annual Council in person or following the procedures online to stand for a moment of silence to reflect on the lives of those who paid the ultimate sacrifice for their service.

Adventist Health Ministries honored those workers at Adventist hospitals and clinics who lost their lives to COVID-19 while serving others. Members of the GCEXCOM observed 30 seconds of silence to pay their respects to the commitment and sacrifice of those who died.

The Adventist Mission office put together a video that included the names, ages, and positions of some of the workers who passed away

during the pandemic. “As we know all too well, COVID-19 has killed millions, and we have also lost many Adventist believers and church workers, our colleagues in mission, to the pandemic,” the video’s narrator said. “These dedicated workers fell in the line of duty, carrying a message of hope to a dying world, a message of hope in [Jesus’] soon return.”

The nine-minute video, which Adventist Church president Ted N. C. Wilson described as “an amazingly touching presentation,” opened by showcasing the experience of missionary Manuel Bellosillo. Bellosillo, a 67-year-old Filipino physician in Cameroon, was the first Adventist missionary to become infected and die from the virus in August 2020.

Adventist Church Health Ministries director Peter Landless said at the time of Bellosillo’s memorial that the experienced Adventist missionary spent his life “in service to a broken world, for which he paid the ultimate price.”

The video message also hon-

ored the memory of church workers such as 67-year-old Daniel Reband, Media Ministry Department director in the Euro-Asia Division, who passed to his rest on October 5, 2020. It included 59-year-old Ervin González, who was Inter-American Division publishing director when he died from COVID-19 complications on December 31, 2020; and 45-year-old Pablo Carreño, treasurer of the East Venezuela Union Conference, who passed away on April 22, 2021.

The showcase list also included pastors, evangelists, health workers, teachers, literature evangelists, and office workers. The disease affected many seasoned workers but also young missionaries. Among the workers were 42-year-old David Apu Baroi, an Adventist mission volunteer in the Bangladesh Union; 31-year-old Levi Hernandez, a pastor in the Central Tabasco Conference in Mexico; and 20-year-old Ingrid Garcia, who was women’s and children’s ministries director in the East Andean Venezuela Mission.

The tribute’s closing included an invitation for church members to look forward to the day when, according to the Bible’s teachings, those who died in the Lord will be raised to new life and welcomed to live with God. “Well done, good and faithful servant,” the video’s narrator read, quoting Jesus’ words in Matthew 25:23. “Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (KJV). The video ended with “Until we meet again on that glorious day.”

# WHAT ADVENTISTS CAN LEARN FROM ECONOMISTS

**TIPS ON HOW TO DEVELOP RESILIENCE IN MOMENTS OF CRISIS.**

BY MARCOS PASEGGI, ADVENTIST REVIEW

In what ways are economists like Seventh-day Adventists? According to Adventist economist David Beckworth, in several significant aspects.

“Adventists have been told to watch and warn. Economists have a very similar task. They are also called to watch and warn,” he told General Conference Executive Committee (GCEXCOM) members gathered for Annual Council on October 8.

Beckworth, a senior researcher, author, and former international economist at the U.S. Department of the Treasury, shared a video presentation at the Leadership and Education Development (LEAD) Conference at the Adventist Church’s headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States. He offered his perspective as an accomplished economist and a church member on finding resilience through crises.

## PRACTICE HUMILITY

Using the acronym POD, Beckworth discussed principles for resilience. The P, he said, stands for practicing humility, an important quality to develop resilience.

“It keeps us from getting caught in the latest fads,” he said. “Thinking that can occur during a crisis

can lead us to poor decision-making. It can also lead us to lose sight of our mission, to get so caught up in the moment that we lose sight of the fact that we are here to warn the world.”

Beckworth reminded leaders and members that as Seventh-day Adventists, we know where we are in prophetic history. Still, we need humility to understand every turn in human history, especially during crises. “As Seventh-day Adventists, we are given prophecy; we look at signs, then we give warnings to the world,” he explained. “It is essential to find balance in how we do this.”

Economists have a similar task, Beckworth said. They use forecasts: “We look forward; we try to see where the economy is going.” They use indicators to know the current state of the economy and warnings or guidance to those who need the information. However, “as economists,” Beckworth acknowledged, “we do not always do a great job.”

As Adventists, we can learn from the experience of economists who have fallen short, he suggested. As Adventists, “we should practice humility in our watching, and we shouldn’t forget that it is easy to get caught up in the moment, and in doing that, it distracts us from the task at hand.”

## LESSONS FROM THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Looking at an example of history in the twentieth century, Beckworth acknowledged that practicing humility would have been good for economists and also for some Seventh-day Adventists.

The 1920s, he explained, were a decade of jubilation, euphoria, and good times. “There were lots of innovations, cars, appliances,” he shared. “Spirits were high, and people were feeling great.” The stock market kept going up, and unemployment was under 1 percent.

“What were economists thinking during the 1920s? Were they watching and warning? Did they see the dangers ahead? Or were they caught up in the moment as much as anybody else?” Beckworth asked.

He provided two examples. Famous economist John Maynard Keynes said in 1927, “We will not have any more crashes in our time.” “It was a very bold statement, and also a very wrong statement,” Beckworth said. Also, renowned and widely read economist Irving Fisher wrote in 1929, “Stock prices have reached what looks like a permanent high plateau.”

## CAUGHT UP IN THE MOMENT

According to Beckworth, “these economists were not practicing humility; they were also caught up in the times and the seasons around them.” Many argue that the financial crash and the catastrophic events of the next decade could have been avoided had economists



Adventist economist David Beckworth shares a prerecorded presentation at the Leadership and Education Development Conference on October 8.



done their job.

“So how were Seventh-day Adventists during the Great Depression? Were they any better? Or did they too get caught up in the moment in their own way?” he asked.

“At the beginning of the economic crisis, Adventists were beginning to wonder whether this was it,” Beckworth shared. “Adventist publications were very sure the end was here. They were very certain the end was coming.” But decades before, Ellen White had warned, “Do present duties” “instead of exhausting the powers of [your minds] in speculations in regard to the times and seasons.”\*

Beckworth said that it’s easy to get caught up in the moment. “But we need to have the humility to know we don’t have it all figured out,” he emphasized. “We need to practice humility in what we do.”

### **OCCUPY TILL HE COMES**

The second principle Beckworth mentioned was to be “occupied till He comes,” a notion based on

the Bible parable of the talents recorded in Matthew 25. In the parable the master goes away and leaves responsibilities to his workers. But one worker is terrified. “Maybe he was caught up in the moment; maybe he was not practicing humility,” Beckworth said. As a result, he didn’t do what he was told.

“We each have been called to different occupations, different callings in life,” he said. “But whatever God has called us to do, God tells us to occupy till He comes [Luke 19:13]. He’s given us a task, and we need to fulfill it.”

According to Beckworth, in the biblical example of Noah we see a perfect example of balance we could follow. “Noah was occupied for 120 years in a perfect balance of watching, warning, and working. He didn’t let the latest fads or movements distract him from the task at hand,” he said.

### **DAILY SURRENDER**

Beckworth suggested that the

first two principles do not come naturally. It is something, he said, that should lead us to the third principle, which is daily surrender. He suggested that Daniel is a great biblical example of an individual who daily surrendered despite all the crises he saw in his life. “Daniel endured the destruction of his homeland, Judah. He went through five kings, and he survived the destruction of Babylon. And he survived the palace intrigue during the Persian rule,” Beckworth told Adventist leaders and members. “Somehow Daniel persevered during all these crises.”

He asked, “How did Daniel do it?”

“Daniel daily surrendered, three times a day.”

By daily surrender, Beckworth explained, Daniel could be seen as a wise, stable aid to the leaders of the various empires.

But the greatest example of all, Beckworth emphasized, is found in the life of Jesus. “He endured many crises when He was here on earth, but His most intense crisis was the cross,” he said. He emphasized that even though Jesus knew what would happen to Him, He had the serenity to face it with confidence and composure.

“I want to have that faith,” Beckworth said. “I want to live my life like Jesus so I can be resilient through crises. It is my prayer for all of us.”

\* Ellen G. White, “It Is Not for You to Know the Times and the Seasons,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Mar. 22, 1892.

Afghan evacuees boarding American aircraft during Operation Allies Refuge in August 2021



## WISCONSIN ADVENTISTS GIVE AFGHANS A WARM WELCOME

**MEMBERS PURCHASE AND DISTRIBUTE CLOTHES AND BABY FOOD.**

BY LAKE UNION HERALD

**T**he desperate airlift out of Kabul, Afghanistan, had barely kicked into gear in August when a call went out to the state of Wisconsin's Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) group. The collapse of the Afghan government meant there was an urgent need for clothing to help the displaced Afghans who were arriving in the U.S. with only the clothes they were wearing.

Wisconsin Adventist Community Services (ACS) director Alice Garrett learned that 12,600 migrants were arriving at Fort McCoy, an army base some 175 miles (280 kilometers) from Milwaukee. In this location the refugees would be processed before most were dispersed to other states. Garrett emailed the Wisconsin pastors and Seventh-day Adventist churches, asking for new clothes for men, women, and children. A decision was made to collect such necessities as underwear, socks, and other new clothing by September 9, which was very short notice.

"The response was overwhelming," Garrett said. "Pastors and members responded, and we delivered 95 boxes with an estimate

of 2,000 items. What a blessing!"

Since the need for clothes remained high after the first effort, Garrett decided to request another clothing drive, this time for a longer period. On September 10 she dashed off another email to pastors, ACS leaders, and certified volunteers to start another collection, this time focusing on winter clothing, such as jackets, boots, and warm sweatshirts. They closed the drive on September 27 and delivered three days later.

Once again, a crush of items came in. Volunteers sorted about 1,300 items and packaged the goods in 94 boxes labeled with the contents. This brought the total to 189 boxes and 3,300 items collected in just one month.

Garrett noted, "When we look at the vast number of 12,500 people, we ask, 'How can we possibly even make a dent in this vast endeavor? Our 189 boxes were just a drop in the bucket.' But when we take the attitude that each one of us will reach one, the job was finished in a month! We serve a big God!"

During this period more than US\$10,000 in monetary donations

was received from Wisconsin church members, as well as from individuals in Michigan and Minnesota. "Every penny will go to help these people," Garrett said. "We have and are continuing to purchase what is the immediate need, and that includes a lot of winter coats, underwear, toddlers' clothes, and infant formula."

Garrett and the other ACS volunteers have drawn the attention of others.

"As we finished unloading the trailer at the armory," Garrett said, "the volunteers [from another organization] came over to us and said, 'Thank you for your load. It is all sorted and labeled, and we can send it on to Fort McCoy right away.'"

The North American Division (NAD) has noticed the smooth operation in Wisconsin. Derrick Lea, NAD ACS director, said that Garrett and her team continue to lead ACS efforts in this area. "It's the relationships that have been developed previously that enable us to be engaged within our community when crisis events take place," Lea said. "I rely on Alice and her team of dedicated team members to rally our church members to respond when calls for help go out. It's a privilege to work with those willing to be the hands and feet of Jesus in their local communities."

As of September 29, more than 300,000 clothing items had been processed at the armory, with a value of about \$2.8 million. No more clothing will be collected, as Fort McCoy is transitioning into resettlement and relocating the refugees. ▀



**ENGINEERING PROFESSOR AT ANDREWS UNIVERSITY WINS PRESTIGIOUS AWARD.**

Jay Johnson, professor of engineering at Andrews University, was recently awarded the Shen Kuo Award for Interdisciplinary Achievements from the International Association of Geomagnetism and Aeronomy (IAGA). His research stems from a calculation performed during his time at Princeton University. His findings have become foundational for studies relating to the acceleration and heating of ions in the auroral region, magnetosheath, and solar wind.



**THIRTY ADVENTIST MEMBERS LOSE THEIR HOMES AFTER FIRE IN HONDURAS BAY ISLANDS.**

As fire engulfed the Bay Island of Guanaja off the northern coast of Honduras during the early-morning hours on Saturday, October 2, Seventh-day Adventist leaders and members on the island moved quickly to prevent damage to its school, churches, and community. The fire destroyed or damaged more than 200 homes and businesses. The school sustained damage to its third floor, while 30 church members lost their homes and properties, church leaders said.



**POLISH CITY NAMES SQUARE AFTER ADVENTIST MISSIONARY.**

The city of Krakow, in Poland, has named a public square after the first Seventh-day Adventist missionary to Europe as part of the 100th anniversary celebrations of the Adventist Church in the city. City officials inaugurated the square in honor of Polish native Michał Belina Czechowski at a ribbon-cutting ceremony. Czechowski, who was born near Krakow in 1818, became a Seventh-day Adventist after immigrating to the United States. On his own initiative, he returned to Europe in 1864, becoming the first unofficial Adventist missionary to the continent.



**IN RUSSIA, ADVENTIST UNIVERSITY OPENS VOLUNTEERING SUPPORT CENTER.**

On September 14, Zaosky Adventist University celebrated the grand opening of the new Zaosky District Volunteering Support Center. Alexei Davletshin, minister of youth policy of the Tula region, noted the importance of the event for the region. "The opening of the Zaosky District Volunteering Support Center will support regional government efforts to develop the volunteer movement throughout the district," he said.



**SOUTHERN ADVENTIST UNIVERSITY CELEBRATES GRAND OPENING OF NEW STUDENT CENTER.**

Southern Adventist University held a ribbon-cutting opening ceremony of the Bietz Center for Student Life. This addition to the campus brings together many student-focused services and resources under one roof. At more than 40,000 square feet (more than 3,700 square meters), the center also features lounge areas, an eatery, study rooms, a prayer room, a chapel, and more.



**IN JAMAICA, ADVENTIST FOOD BANK WILL FEED AT LEAST 500 FAMILIES EACH MONTH.**

The Food Bank initiative was launched virtually on September 25, at the Adventist Conference Center in Mount Salem, St. James. This new initiative will collect food and distribute it through the five conferences in Jamaica. "There are persons in our churches and persons in our wider community who are hungry today. As a result, the church must respond, and . . . we have decided to [launch] the Food Bank," said Everett Brown, president of the Jamaica Union Conference.

# THE RIGHT SIDE



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*Not the left; or the wrong, or . . .*

**LAEL CAESAR**

**S**he had been an active youth leader in her church until extremely painful life events assaulted her faith and left her, in her own words, “incapacitated, numb, and lifeless.”

**MORE OF HER STORY**

She continued: “The shame associated with my divorce made it difficult for me to leave my home, impossible to pray, let alone attend or enjoy a traditional church service. There was too much hurt, and disappointment that God had not protected me from such a painful experience.” Compounding her tragedy, she could find no Adventist programs of help. There may have been some, but she couldn’t find any.

Her note to me continued: “It has taken years to be able to return to prayer, Bible study, and regular church life. I owe that mainly to the love, support, and prayers of my church family and close friends who never stopped checking in on me, even when my church attendance was sporadic at best. I am grateful for online church. I found a small-group Bible study that let me be a part of them and did not require me to participate. I floated on their faith, their prayers, their hope, when my own faith was on life support. Friendship has been the salve to heal my faith wounds.”

It isn’t always clear, to us humans at any rate, who is on which side. Speaking

## Jesus is not to be boxed in by any of our logical premises.

of the group she found, my friend said, “They saved me.” She loves her church, and says so. But it was not her church that she spoke of when she said, “They saved me.” It was just a bunch of Bible-studying youth who apparently loved and supported everyone who came along.

I have wondered much since hearing that story. Did her group all live up to the standards of her church? I do not know. Neither does she. But she knew whose side they were on.

### DEFINING SIDES

Being right, rather than left, or wrong, perhaps, is very important to the little or grand binary conceptions of Christian moral reality (what else is there?). So we turn to Jesus often enough to resolve the problem of “sides” as we encounter it. Sure, we turn to Him because He knows everything: “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” reside in Him (Col. 2:3, NIV). And yes, we turn to Him because He can do everything: He is the “Lord God Almighty” (Rev. 19:6, NIV)—stated more mightily for some in the King James Version: “the Lord God omnipotent.” But sometimes we’re particularly glad because His omniscience and omnipotence will prove that we are right, or at any rate that I am, and they are not.

Now, our turning to Jesus is no guarantee that the problem that brings us to Him so desperately needs resolution. Or that a problem truly exists; or that Jesus Himself thinks of it as a problem. We have been known to turn to Him for answers because of our philosophical ignorance, exposed by His responses, if not by the questions themselves: there’s Peter, interested in justice, or rather, fairness, or reasonableness, or spiritual realism, perhaps, inquiring, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” (Matt. 18:21).

And there’s the Sadducees, who deny the resurrection, probing with “Teacher, Moses said that if . . .” (Matt. 22:2, NIV). Their introduction indicates their point of departure: it is sacred writing, the word of the Lord through His servant Moses. Planted on this firm foundation, they launch their assault on truth in the form of a question on something they see as problematic. Their dilemma? Seven brothers, following Moses, successively marry a woman. None of these seven marriages is blessed with children, the Lord’s heritage (see Ps. 127:3). This detail, though incidental to them, is crucial to their question. The frustrations of barrenness or impotence; the bitterness of emotional loss bereaved survivors in the family must continue to suffer; the anxiety of successive spouses haunted by biology and mortality, and damned by the fate of their failed and faded siblings—such matters are of nothing but neutral consequence to them. These matters do count, but only for the validation of their question. The Sadducees’ real care is allegedly about what happens at the resurrection: if in this life a woman successively loses seven husbands in death, then, “in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her” (Matt. 22:28, NKJV).

The Holy Spirit has already explained to readers the true interest of these questioners. They have approached Jesus after the Pharisees, a rival Jewish leadership group, has challenged Jesus and failed “to trap him in his words” (verse 15, NIV). Trapping Jesus in His words

now would be its own sensational accomplishment. It would also mean that their “side” went one better than the Bible-obsessed Pharisees. But theirs is a strategy devoid of all virtue. Their trivialization of pain and suffering as incidental betrays their disconnection from human compassion. And the insensitivity heard in their phrasing exposes the disgrace of their effort just as well. Their rhetorical climax is not about the unsatisfied, God-implanted craving to have a baby of one’s own, or about a woman numb from the unimaginable grief of losing her husband again, six times again. It is not about the misery of knowing that this one poor woman has had to bury seven husbands. Rather, it is the declaration “They all had her.”

The Sadducees’ sharp focus on some conceivably intellectually titillating hypothetical question, with the wretched blindness that attends it, is a warning on the potential imbalance of scales of rightness among the most proper and Christian of humans, a comment on the undying yearning to be on the side that wins. For our noble interest in standing “for the right [not the left, or the wrong] though the heavens fall”<sup>1</sup> is capable of inspiring its own disastrous alignments, if only by implication of the labels we wear on our sleeves or paint across our placards: the 47 percent of US adults who identify as pro-life<sup>2</sup> must be dismayed by the rest of their nation’s anti-life, yea, pro-death position. And the 49 percent who are “pro-choice”? They must surely be outraged that in the land of the free and the home of the brave they live the damnation of coexistence with citizenry willing to submit to tyranny and dictatorship. Pollsters play games with words, we say, dismissively: they phrase questions to get the results they want. And statisticians play games with numbers, we accuse: they manipulate them to get whatever results they want, to prove whatever point they wish.

Still, our dismissals of social research and its numerology, designed to demonstrate our commitment to some transcendent accuracy, run the risk of belittling the big, of minimalizing the major point. That big, major, unyielding truth remains completely true regardless of how much manipulation may actually be practiced by pollsters answered or rebuffed, by statisticians loved or despised. The truth is that whether educated or unlettered, manipulated or tyrannized, humans can come to the place where their fellow humans,

and notably, even fellow Christians, based on thoughts that differ from theirs, are identified as the adversary.

### SHARING GOD’S INTEREST

Our interest in resolving the problem of right versus left, and standing with the right though the sky caves in, is hardly whimsy: we know for a fact that God cares about our being on the right side. The vast majority of *Adventist Review* readers care about what God cares about. Readers who may not necessarily care about a Higher Power still cherish many good humanistic reasons for choosing better over worse. They respect the nobility of my caring God who has repeatedly stated how much right matters to Him.

Apart from His repetition, He has announced His preference in language of certainty where the consequence of choosing incorrectly is final and drastic. In the book of Deuteronomy Moses gives Israel a summary review of their recent experience. They also hear, again, God’s exhaustive counsel for them once they enter and become established in the land long promised. As He speaks, they have already begun to occupy this land, already conquered and occupied multiple Amorite cities (Num. 21:25). But the successes of their present and the brightness of their future are conditional, something Moses urges the people to appreciate. They must make the right decision for tomorrow, not the least of reasons being that it will affect their children.

Having laid out the options before them, Moses begs, “Choose life, so that you and your children may live” (Deut. 30:19, NIV). Choosing the right side matters, both for the present and ultimately: “I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse” (Deut. 11:26, NIV) is how he put it at an earlier point in his farewell communication. And Joshua, his chief lieutenant and chosen successor, will also lay the options out before the nation in his own farewell presentation. Interestingly enough, Joshua’s offer acknowledges the frustration that parents and mentors—and God, too, though overlooked—may experience because they allow their protégés to choose sides. He says: “If serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve” (Joshua 24:15, NIV).

What God has never required of us, though, is determining who is actually on which side in the ultimate sense of things; who deserves His affir-

mation or shall receive His denunciation. All of our obligation to find and know and be liberated by the truth (John 8:32) still does not give us the responsibility or even permission to consign any to heaven or hell. There is individual responsibility: “Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12, NIV). There are stories of miraculous doings by solo operators filled with the Holy Spirit bringing instant death on sinners by the word of their mouth (Acts 5:1-11). And there is work to do in consultation that brings rewards for consultation, for “victory is won through many advisers” (Prov. 11:14, NIV; also Prov. 15:22; 24:6).

And there is church duty: responding to the news of distorted sexual conduct by someone in the Corinthian congregation Paul admonishes: “When you are assembled . . . , hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord” (1 Cor. 5:4, 5, NIV).

But except you personally determine yourself to be now filled with the Spirit—and you do not—neither the individual nor the team of advisers nor the church in session will ever become the arbiter of any human’s destiny. Paul enquires: “Why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt?” (Rom. 14:10, NIV). And summarizes: “Each of us will give an account of ourselves to God” (verse 12, NIV).

## THE DIVINE RESOLUTION

Jesus’ interaction with His disciples is sufficiently instructive upon the idea that I can determine your side, or that you on your own may declare mine. Two small stories suffice. In the first episode the group is in Capernaum, second most featured city in Jesus’ ministry after Jerusalem. As often through the years of their discipleship, the group has been haggling about their great- and greater-ness, drawing up line-and-staff charts on superior and inferior in the imminent kingdom. As before and subsequently, Jesus exposes the stupid haggling they have tried to keep secret from Him, and tries to lay out the rules of humility, in contrast with their rules of conceit, that will actually prevail in the kingdom.

Jesus’ definition triggers John. We know him to be of the more explicitly ambitious and aggressive, still nearer to the beginning than the end of his learning curve. Jesus’ comment on humility puts him down, but does not knock him out. He of the indomitable spirit, pride, finds a comeback that

will still privilege him above someone else: “‘Teacher,’ said John, ‘we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us’” (Mark 9:38, NIV). John will be nonplussed by Jesus’ expansive reply: “‘Do not stop him,’ Jesus said. ‘For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us’” (verses 39, 40, NIV). The Bible study group may not share your uniform, logo, T-shirt slogan, or pom-pom-practiced cheer. None of this is proof that they aren’t on the right side.

But because Jesus is not to be boxed in by any of our logical premises, the Holy Word preserves another of His life’s stories, in which He does not silence His ambitious young disciple, but rather smothers and stifles His critics. They accuse Him of working with—through the agency of—Beelzebul. To which He hurls at them multiple rejoinders all at once: 1. Beelzebul would be destroying his own kingdom then. 2. If that’s what I’m doing, then that must be what your kids are doing! 3. You may be seeing, in Me, the evidence that God’s kingdom has come to you. 4. The kingdom of evil is collapsing before My greater power! 5. Whoever is not on My side is doomed (Luke 11:14-23). Or, in the NIV statement: “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters” (verse 23).

## THE BLESSING OF FINITUDE

The reason humans can’t see, don’t know, and aren’t capable of everything is that God in His wisdom created us finite. Finitude is natural, of original sinlessness, of our God-given first state. He means for us to love and embrace it; to embrace the other who thinks and knows differently and who by that very token is a statement of sharing in my divine heritage of limitedness. Our Christian passion for moral definition has lost its way when it excludes those whom Jesus includes.

I’m wondering: Whose side are you on? Are you more familiar with your church’s fight song than with the song of the Lamb? ♣

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1903, 1952), p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> <https://news.gallup.com/poll/244709/pro-choice-pro-life-2018-demographic-tables.aspx>, “Pro-Choice’ or ‘Pro-Life,’ 2018-2021 Demographic Tables,” report of the latest of a series of Gallup Values and Beliefs polls conducted every May, 2018-2021.

Lael Caesar is an associate editor of the *Adventist Review*.



# BLIND, DEAF & ORPHANS

## SPECIAL NEEDS MISSION SCHOOLS

There is an urgent need for funds to recuperate from the pandemic's effects.



Child Impact International and its supporters totally fund three special needs mission schools operated by the church in India. **They have reopened and have an urgent need to ensure these special needs children have HOPE!**



### **Bobbili Blind School**

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# ELLEN WHITE'S VIEW OF

**WILLIAM FAGAL**

**T**he *Great Controversy* is one of Ellen White's best known and most powerful books. Among other things, it offers some pointed critiques of Catholic teaching and historical behavior, as well as the tendency of Protestant denominations to abandon their earlier fidelity to Scripture. Recalling also that young Ellen Harmon and her family had been expelled from the Methodist Church because of their belief in the soon coming of Jesus, some might conclude that she took a dim view of Christians whose beliefs and practices differed from hers.

But that would be wrong.

## **ELLEN WHITE ON CATHOLIC BELIEVERS**

Seventh-day Adventists believe that Ellen White was a messenger of the Lord, exercising the biblical gift of prophecy. So we take her writings seriously. What can we find in them about how to view and relate to people of other faiths? As we look at some of her statements, we might even find her content—and her tone—surprising.

"There are many among the Catholics who live up to the light they have far better than many who claim to believe present truth [i.e., Seventh-day Adventists], and God will just as surely test and prove them as He has tested and proved us. . . . From that which God has shown me, a great number will be saved from among the Catholics. There has been but little done for them except to make them appear in the worst light."<sup>1</sup>

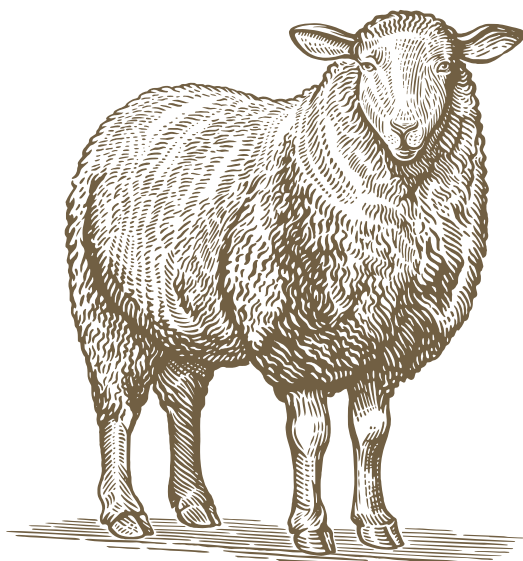
Those words were part of a talk Ellen White gave to believers in Basel, Switzerland, in 1887, when the Catholic faith was strong in various parts of Europe. But her message was not just for Europe. More than 20 years later she published a similar remarkable statement for the church at large in the *Testimonies*. Referring to the "cry aloud" message of Isaiah 58:1, she wrote:

"This message must be given; but while it must be given, we should be careful not to thrust and crowd and condemn those who have not the light that we have. We should not go out of our way to make hard thrusts at the Catholics. Among the Catholics there are many who are most conscientious Christians and who walk in all the light that shines upon them, and God will work in their behalf. Those who have had great privileges and opportunities, and who have failed to improve their physical, mental, and moral powers, but who have lived to please themselves and have refused to bear their responsibility, are in greater

# OTHER CHRISTIANS

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*What kind of  
enemy is  
Babylon?*



**She made fervent appeals to us to reflect the spirit and wisdom of Jesus in our contacts with others.**

danger and in greater condemnation before God than those who are in error upon doctrinal points, yet who seek to live to do good to others. Do not censure others; do not condemn them.”<sup>2</sup>

#### **TEACHING WITH THE RIGHT SPIRIT**

This was part of an article titled “Words of Caution,” in which she warned that “Satan’s attacks against the advocates of the truth will wax more bitter and determined to the very close of time.” In the face of this escalating conflict, she wrote, “What course shall the advocates of truth pursue? They have the unchangeable, eternal Word of God, and they should reveal the fact that they have the truth as it is in Jesus. Their words must not be rugged and sharp. In their presentation of truth they must manifest the love and meekness and gentleness of Christ. Let the truth do the cutting; the Word of God is as a sharp, two-edged sword and will cut its way to the heart. Those who know that they have the truth should not, by the use of harsh and severe expressions, give Satan one chance to misinterpret their spirit.”<sup>3</sup>

What spirit do we bring to our encounters with those not of our faith? We have a message—a crucial message—to give to the world, and we are not to compromise it. But in what spirit do we give it, and in what order? Ellen White was attuned to such issues as these, and she made fervent appeals to us to reflect the spirit and wisdom of Jesus in our contacts with others. Surely this must begin with a recognition of *where* the true followers of Jesus may be found. In *The Great Controversy* Ellen White made this remarkable statement:

“Notwithstanding the spiritual darkness and alienation from God that exist in the churches which constitute Babylon, the great body of Christ’s true followers are still to be found in their communion.”<sup>4</sup> Whether speaking of Catholics or Protestants, Ellen White was able to distinguish between true believers and the false systems they might have joined.

Listen to Ellen White’s appeal for us to recognize true believers among those not of our faith: “The Lord has His representatives in all the churches. These persons have not had the special testing truths for these last days presented to them under circumstances that brought conviction to heart and mind; therefore they have not, by rejecting light, severed their connection with God. Many there are who have faithfully walked in the light that has shone upon their pathway. They hunger to know more of the ways and works of God. All over the world men and women are looking wistfully to heaven. Prayers and tears and inquiries go up from souls longing for light, for grace, for the Holy Spirit. Many are on the very verge of the kingdom, waiting only to be gathered in.”<sup>5</sup>

What a positive view of people of other faiths! How, then, shall we approach them? Ellen White wrote that we are “to call the attention of the people to the truths of God’s Word. There are many of these which are dear to all Christians. Here is common ground, upon which we can meet people of other denominations; and in

becoming acquainted with them we should dwell mostly upon topics in which all feel an interest, and which will not lead directly and pointedly to the subjects of disagreement.”<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that we should never get to “subjects of disagreement,” but that in general we should not begin there.

All the while, “in bearing the message, make no personal thrusts at other churches. Speak the truth in tones and words of love. Let Christ be exalted. Keep to the affirmative of truth. . . . Let the truth tell the story of the inconsistency of error.”<sup>7</sup>

### WORKING WITH OTHER CHRISTIAN MINISTERS

Ellen White had a special burden for the ministers of other denominations. “We have a work to do for the ministers of other churches. God wants them to be saved. They, like ourselves, can have immortality only through faith and obedience. We must labor for them earnestly that they may obtain it. God wants them to have a part in His special work for this time. He wants them to be among the number who are giving to His household meat in due season. Why should they not be engaged in this work?”<sup>8</sup>

“Our ministers are to make it their special work to labor for ministers. They are not to get into controversy with them, but, with their Bible in their hand, urge them to study the Word. If this is done, there are many ministers now preaching error who will preach the truth for this time.”<sup>9</sup>

It may not be only ministers who are called to try to reach other ministers: “The wisest, firmest labor should be given to those ministers who are not of our faith. There are many who know no better than to be misled by ministers of other churches. Let faithful, God-fearing, earnest workers, their life hid with Christ in God, pray and work for honest ministers who have been educated to misinterpret the Word of Life.”<sup>10</sup> Who are those “faithful, God-fearing, earnest workers”? Those terms are not necessarily limited to the professional ministry. Might not the devoted nonclergy also share in this work?

### SEEING WITH JESUS’ EYES

In any event, we are called to work alongside our Savior in reaching those around us. We need to see others through Jesus’ eyes. Notice what Ellen White calls some of those not of our faith:

“God has jewels in all the churches, and it is not for us to make sweeping denunciation of the professed religious world, but in humility and love, present to all the truth as it is in Jesus. Let men see piety and devotion, let them behold Christlikeness of character, and they will be drawn to the truth. He who loves God supremely and his neighbor as himself will be a light in the world. Those who have a knowledge of the truth are to communicate the same. They are to lift up Jesus, the world’s Redeemer; they are to hold forth the word of life.”<sup>11</sup>

Do these concepts apply only to Christians of other faiths, or is there even a broader embrace in them? “Among earth’s inhabitants, scattered in every land, there are those who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Like the stars of heaven, which appear only at night, these faithful ones will shine forth when darkness covers the earth and gross darkness the people.”<sup>12</sup> She mentions places of mission interest in the early 1900s, such as Africa, China, India, the islands of the sea, as well as Catholic-influenced areas, saying that in these places “God has in reserve a firmament of chosen ones that will yet shine forth amidst the darkness, revealing clearly to an apostate world the transforming power of obedience to His law.”<sup>13</sup>

Jesus said, “Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:16). Let us seek Jesus’ sheep, wherever they may be, doing nothing by word or spirit to push them away, so that Jesus can bring them into His fold with rejoicing! ♣

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Sermons and Talks* (Silver Spring, Md.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1994), vol. 2, pp. 40, 41.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 9, p. 243.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>4</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 390.

<sup>5</sup> E. G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 70, 71.

<sup>6</sup> Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), p. 144.

<sup>7</sup> Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Oct. 7, 1902.

<sup>8</sup> E. G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 77, 78.

<sup>9</sup> E. G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 562.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Jan. 17, 1893.

<sup>12</sup> Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1917), p. 188.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

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**William Fagal** is a former associate director (now retired) of the Ellen G. White Estate.

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# REDEMPTION

**H**ermann Cohen, a nineteenth-century Jewish philosopher, believed that despite persecution, the Jews should forget about establishing a homeland in the Middle East. Instead, he argued, they should take the great legacy bequeathed to them from the Hebrew Scriptures, ethical monotheism, and better their communities, wherever they were. For Cohen (who died in 1918), one country in the heart of Europe offered the perfect environment for his utopian vision—a country where the Jews, having already had a long history there, would not only be fully accepted but could play a pivotal role in creating a just and prosperous society, one that could stand as a model for all the world.

Which country?

Guess.

“These are the most hopeful times in all the years since Christ was born in Bethlehem. Today, as never before, man has in his possession the capacities to end war and preserve peace, to eradicate poverty and share abundance, to overcome the diseases that have afflicted the human race, and permit all mankind to enjoy their promise of life on this earth.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus spake President Lyndon Baines Johnson, in 1964, as he was about to escalate the Vietnam War.

One of the most popular tourist attractions in Washington, D.C., is the Tidal Basin, especially the cherry trees that annually flower during the National Cherry Blossom Festival. These were gifts from Japan in 1912, a symbol of the “eternal friendship” between the two nations. In 2004 a new memorial went up, only 200 yards away—to (among other things) the horrors of Pearl Harbor.

In his Vietnam memoir Philip Caputo wrote about the idealism of his youth, Responding to President Kennedy’s call to “Ask not what your country and can do for you, but what you can do for your country,” Caputo believed that he could do something for his country by fighting against Communism in Vietnam. Before long, Army officers were offering beers to every “grunt” for each Viet Cong soldier they killed. “That is the level to which we had sunk from the lofty idealism of a year before,” he wrote. “We were going to kill people for a few cans of beer and the time to drink them.”<sup>2</sup>

We are all fallen creatures. “As it is written: There is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10). Nothing we touch, no matter how innocently we touch it, is not corrupted by our sin. We have ruined almost everything earthly.

And yet Christ died for us anyway. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6). The Hebrew phrase for “all we” (*culanu*) at the start of the verse is repeated at the end, “us all” (*culanu*). That is, no matter how deep the problem, the solution was deep enough to solve it.

History may be beyond redemption, yes; but none of us as individuals, are. 🗡️

<sup>1</sup> Kevin M. Schultz, *Buckley and Mailer: The Difficult Friendship That Shaped the Sixties*, Kindle Locations 2192–2196 (W. W. Norton & Company, Kindle Edition).

<sup>2</sup> Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War: The Classic Vietnam Memoir*, fortieth anniversary edition (Henry Holt and Co., Kindle Edition), p. 311.

**Clifford Goldstein** is editor of the *Adult Bible Study Guide*. His latest book is *Risen: Finding Hope in the Empty Tomb*.

CLIFF'S  
EDGE  
CLIFFORD  
GOLDSTEIN



**NO MATTER HOW  
DEEP THE PROBLEM,  
THE SOLUTION WAS  
DEEP ENOUGH TO  
SOLVE IT.**



VASYL DOLMATOV AND VADIM GUZHA / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS

# WHEN OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

*Making Jesus an everyday invitation*

**MERLE POIRIER**

**A** man walks into a bar . . .” Not exactly an opening line for a *Review* article, is it? And yet it is an apt beginning for this story.

To meet Stephen (Steve) Colfax\* is to meet someone who is friendly, open, and genuine. He falls into one of those categories of people who has yet to meet a stranger—only friends not yet introduced. There is, though, one more thing about Steve that everyone will attest to that has had the privilege of even a modest acquaintance: he’s passionate about Jesus.

“I’m obsessed with Jesus,” says Steve. “I cannot be in a conversation long before I talk about something that has a Christ angle to it. It’s just who I am.” And this is why our story, for at least today, includes a bar. Steve can’t keep Jesus to himself. If in church he’s talking about Jesus, it would be expected. But even in a store, the community, or, in this case, docking his boat in a marina to



stop for lunch, there's always a Jesus opportunity around the corner.

Steve takes a seat at the bar because he's dining alone. After ordering a soda and a meal, he strikes up a conversation with the guy on the next stool, who is doing what people do in bars—sipping a drink and now, chatting with the guy that just walked in. What began as a friendly hello turned into a several-hours-long conversation, leading to a several-years-long friendship.

One day the barstool friend has a spiritual awakening. A natural place to turn is Steve, the guy that won't stop talking about Jesus. What does Steve do? Not what you think. He doesn't start a Bible study. He doesn't offer him a link to an evangelistic meeting. He invites him to his Sabbath School class.

That's probably not what the average Adventist might do, but it was a natural for Steve. In fact, he's done it before. "If a person is responsive, intrigued with Jesus as well as the opportunity to talk about Him with other like-minded people, I invite them to class. And some of them stay," says Steve. Between his invitations and those of other members of his class, there's a growing percentage of nonchurch members attending regularly to meet with this small group and study the lesson quarterly.

This particular Sabbath School class has a long history. It began about 40 years ago with a group of people who not only enjoyed studying the lesson quarterly but liked discussion. Members have come and gone through the years, but the class continued on with its unique take on teaching the quarterly. Then COVID struck. But this doesn't become one of those COVID-came-and-we-all-changed stories. The members simply moved to Zoom like everyone else. But *one* thing did change. Suddenly those that had moved away—loyalists who missed the interaction and style of this class—were able to return. The numbers increased to a steady group meeting from several states across the country and also Canada.

Because the opportunity to expand beyond the walls of a church building was now available, it became a natural step for Steve and his fellow class members to start inviting people they met in the community to join them. The guy from the racetrack, the teenagers from the youth group that suddenly did not exist, the former bank executive, the friend from the bar, including his mother, whom *he* invited.

## It's about blurring the lines between the church and the world; making Jesus part of our everyday lives.

Inviting nonmembers to a lesson study doesn't come without its challenges. Members need to remind themselves to make the Bible understandable, not to drift into Advent-speak, and to be careful how they speak about their church, whether local or corporate. Teachers frame questions in a way that does not lead toward negative or critical language. It has been a great experience for all involved. They pray for each other, sharing their common concerns and individual problems.

The class participants range from administrators to doctors to teenagers to retirees whose great desire is to listen to God's voice through one another as they study the lesson quarterly. Some of the nonmembers are quiet. Others speak up and challenge the members as they discuss Bible topics, searching for ways of understanding for all. And the friend from the bar? Doesn't say a word. But afterward he has been known to call to debrief on all he has heard.

"This class means so much to me," he says. "It's providing me with guidance as I begin learning how to walk with Christ."

One individual with a fairly high-level world profile states, "I have friends all over the world, but you [the class] are among my best friends."

So the story is still unfolding. It's about blurring the lines between the church and the world; making Jesus part of our everyday lives so that He frequents our daily conversations, eventually opening the possibility of invitation. As Steve says: "You never know. Sometimes they show up, and sometimes they stick!" And that is exactly as it should be. 🦋

\*Name is a pseudonym.

**Merle Poirier** is the operations manager for Adventist Review Ministries.



DANIEL A'VARD / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS

## PROJECT DUNAMIS

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*Taking the idea of church to a new place*

In March 2020 the world was brought to existential limbo by a virus, a thing we couldn't see. No one knew what would happen next or how it would all play out. Amid lockdowns, Adventist families around the world were quickly adapting to serve and minister to each other and to those outside the church. Many used this time to join distant Sabbath School classes or watch sermons from locations far from home. In most cases, not meeting in person meant losing the personal contact and relationships we crave.

A friend, new to the St. Albans, United Kingdom (UK), area, where I live, managed this early pandemic period well through her job, exercise, and joining an online video conferencing Sabbath “family church.” She said her online church was excellent.

She knew a couple of the people attending, and the rest were extended family and friends of the leader. She invited me to join. I did, and was more than surprised to find it being led by Daniel Bruneau, a coworker of mine at Adventist Review Ministries!

This was more than a Sabbath Bible study. Over time I realized many of those in attendance were not Christians, and in addition to those in the United States (US) and the UK, many were joining from around the world, countries including Austria, France, the Philippines, Cyprus, and Australia.

Online meetings every Sabbath were personal, covered significant biblical topics, and provided inspiration and a few questions.

**Sharon: What started these Sabbath studies, a time you referred to as “family church, brunch, and afternoon tea”?**

**Daniel:** Since I am originally from England and my wife is from the state of Georgia, where we now live, we saw this online video call as a way to bring our families and friends from across the globe together to support each other and ease the inherent anxiety and uncertainty of the early days of the pandemic. We also wanted to make sure that the invitation was open to whoever wanted to join. As I prepared the first remote session, a thought occurred to me. *Wouldn't it be wonderful to open God's Word during our time together, share a devotional thought, as well as pray and fellowship together?*

I gave that first gathering a lighthearted and hopefully inviting name—Family and Friends Church: Brunch and Afternoon

**SHARON TENNYSON  
WITH DANIEL BRUNEAU**

Tea—to cover as many of the different time zones as possible for those attending. The name has since morphed to Project Dunamis. In the Bible, *dunamis* is the underlying Greek word for physical power—God’s power. My hope and prayer was that from week to week, God’s power would manifest itself in our gatherings, that the messages being shared and the time set aside for prayer and fellowship would affect the hearts and minds of those attending.

**Your presentations were done in a storytelling, narrative style and not simply a presentation of facts. What model were you using?**

I didn’t have a specific model in mind other than to follow the story of Scripture from beginning to end, connecting every message to the big picture of where we came from, where we are now, and where God intends to take us in our journey with Him. The beauty of our Adventist message is encapsulated in the life-changing biblical narrative, a grand story arc that paints the picture of a loving God who pulls out all the stops to win us back to His heart. The bottom line is this: God has wired our brains for stories. It’s how we make sense of the world around us. I felt impressed that our underlying story theme through every Bible study should be to paint the beautiful picture of God’s character and reveal to those attending that God is not vindictive, stern, and distant, as He is often portrayed, but rather is a God utterly in love with His creation.

**Precisely how long has this group been meeting now? How do you sustain the passion and energy needed to meet week after week?**

The group has been meeting close to 80 weeks now, a testament to the work of the Holy Spirit rather than any one individual. Personally speaking, because we have people joining who represent Seventh-day Adventism, those who have stepped away from the church, those of other Christian faiths, those of other religions (such as Hinduism), and still others who simply don’t identify with any religious belief, the drive to keep crafting messages with universal appeal has been strong. It reminds me of the truly profound statement that Jesus made in looking ahead to the cross: “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself” (John 12:32). The gospel truth is univer-

## God has wired our brains for stories. It’s how we make sense of the world around us.

sally attractive. Whether an unbeliever regards it as simply an intriguing story or a believer revisits the wonder of God’s selfless, sacrificial love, it has the power to transform. I am superprivileged to have this opportunity to potentially plant a seed.

**Has anything surprised you about those attending?**

There have been things that have both surprised and warmed my heart. Lifelong Christians were grateful to understand topics that had been perplexing before. Others, who are nonbelievers, have made such statements as “When you put it that way, I can see the logic, in just needing to believe.” Others have spoken about the strength the group provides them as they deal with the heartbreak of losing a spouse or loved ones during the pandemic.

**What is the future of this gathering?**

When I look back at the nearly 80 weeks together, I am reminded how in the midst of unusual and challenging times God still finds a way to draw us to Him. I am not sure how long we will continue to meet together. I am certainly praying for God’s leading on that front. In the meantime we continue to adapt and build on the epic story of God’s eternal love for us. Right now we are doing a series of TED-style devotions. TED talks have a core tagline: “Ideas Worth Spreading.” They are all about sharing one powerful idea within an 18- to 20-minute time frame. In light of that, we have called these new devotions “Truth Worth Sharing,” a biblical play on the TED tagline, with the same goal of sharing one core truth that people can walk away with.

**Joining this online “family and friends church” early in the pandemic was more than a blessing for me; it was sustenance. We sang together, cried over personal losses, and connected as human beings in such a sweet, meaningful way. It was an absolute joy to see God actively at work in this group.** 🙌

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Sharon Tennyson lives in England and works as distribution coordinator for Adventist Review Ministries.

# POPPING THE BUBBLE

*When language can reach the heart*

## GERALD A. KLINGBEIL

**C**an you make sense of the following sentence? “GC HR invites you for an ARM presentation, followed by a GCLC meeting. Be sure to check in via UltiPro.”

If you’ve ever worked in the building on 12501 Old Columbia Pike in Silver Spring, Maryland, also known as the headquarters of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, you should be able to make sense of the example. Almost anyone else will struggle to understand the sentence. Here is the annotated translation: “The General Conference human resources office invites you for an Adventist Risk Management [i.e., the insurance arm of the church] presentation, which will be followed by a General Conference Leadership Council meeting [which includes all department directors, associate and assistant directors, senior leadership, etc.]. Participants

should check in online using the software employed by the human resources office.”

## THE FUNCTION OF LANGUAGE

Language, any language, is an important factor of group identity. That’s neither positive nor negative. Soccer fans or baseball fans speak a different language to one another than computer geeks, video game aficionados, or avid gardeners—even though they all may communicate in English. Language helps to define who is part and who isn’t part of a particular group.

The jargon and language we use in groups also helps to create and reinforce ties and relationships. When we speak and understand the right lingo, we feel that we belong—and also recognize others who belong or do not belong. Close-knit communities often share similar language and values. Germany boasts many regional dialects that sound distinct from the High German taught at school. I remember the feeling of not belonging when we first moved to the small village in southern Germany where I grew up, because my language sounded different from everybody else’s. Language can be inclusive or exclusive.

We often use jargon and abbreviations as shortcuts for more complex messages—with the risk that shared language doesn’t really coincide with shared meaning and convictions. Religious groups often develop very specific terminology that may be unintelligible to those not belonging to the group.

## LANGUAGE AND MISSION

For many of us, church is a place of safety. We enjoy friends, familiar routines, well-loved hymns or worship songs, fellowship luncheons, and so much more. The pandemic has reminded us of the importance of many of these shared experiences we often take for granted. At the same time, everything familiar to us, everything that thrills our souls, can at the same time also become a deterrent to others.

# Five Suggestions for Unlearning Church Talk

- 1 Practice paraphrasing religious terminology so that a 10-year-old child would be able to understand it, guaranteeing that your visitors will be able to understand it too. It may be a faith-renewing experience for you as well.
- 2 Introduce yourself to a visitor and offer to explain any questions about Adventist church life.
- 3 Cultivate an atmosphere in which it's OK to ask questions, recognizing that there are no stupid questions. This may be particularly helpful in Sabbath Schools.
- 4 Use the announcement time to build a sense of welcome inclusion by explaining concepts or why we do something or don't do something in a particular service or way.
- 5 Relook at your bulletin through the eyes of a nonchurched person (include instructions and explanations).

Adventist Church talk, also known as the “language of Canaan,” can become a hindrance to mission. It may lead to a “bubble mentality,” where members enjoy the safety and comfort of familiar phrases more than the joy of sharing Jesus in a way that can be understood by outsiders not familiar with “Canaan’s language.”

Here are some examples of how we often talk with each other: while visitors may have heard the “Old Rugged Cross” before entering an Adventist church, they may wonder about the meaning of *the three angels’ messages* or *the great controversy* or *the pen of inspiration*—to mention just a few phrases. The challenge becomes even more relevant when we look at Adventism in more secular contexts beyond the still relatively “Christianized” United States. How can people living in secular Europe or Australia even relate to basic Christian vocabulary and concepts such as grace, salvation by faith, the Trinity, or our need to “fall—or stand, or be planted—on the Rock of Ages”?

Jesus Himself offers us a paradigm that may point us in the right direction as we try to “pop” the bubble. He didn’t speak like other rabbis and scribes. His parables were taken from real life and connected to the reality of people living in an agrarian society. People were astonished when they heard Him, “for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matt. 7:29). People walked for hours and stayed days to be able to listen to Him. His language was an extension of His gentle, kind, and caring character. Children felt drawn to Him (Mark 10:13-16)—and He enjoyed having them around.

Ellen White offers some additional insights: “Jesus met the people on their own ground, as one who was acquainted with their perplexities. He made truth beautiful by presenting it in the most direct and simple way. His language was pure, refined, and clear as a running stream. His voice was as music to

those who had listened to the monotonous tones of the rabbis. But while His teaching was simple, He spoke as one having authority. This characteristic set His teaching in contrast with that of all others. The rabbis spoke with doubt and hesitancy, as if the Scriptures might be interpreted to mean one thing or exactly the opposite. The hearers were daily involved in greater uncertainty. But Jesus taught the Scriptures as of unquestionable authority. Whatever His subject, it was presented with power, as if His words could not be controverted.”

Perhaps the most important language skill we may learn from Jesus as we attempt to pop our often-self-centered bubbles is the ability to communicate complex eternal truths in a way that doesn’t require an academic degree while pointing the audience again and again to the grace and compassion of the living Word.

## WRAP-UP

Language is powerful.

Language is transformative.

Language is divisive.

Language is disruptive.

Language is all of this—and so much more. Poets shape lines that communicate much more than the sum of the meaning of the individual words—and, like them, we are invited to find, day after day, refreshing, clear, and understandable words of comfort, consolation, encouragement, and renewal that can function as bridgeheads for God’s Spirit, who is in the business of transforming hearts and minds.

As we strive to reach this ideal, we may just discover that these “words of life” will also refresh our own parched hearts and hard-edged minds. ▀

\* Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898, 1940), p. 253.

**Gerald A. Klingbeil** serves as associate editor of *Adventist Review*.

# WHATEVER BECAME OF FAITHFULNESS?

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*Living and dying for Jesus*



## ALAREECE COLLIE

I am passionate about traveling. When I was in seminary, I took a trip to the Middle East with a group of seminarians. It was my first visit. I was extremely excited. My childhood fantasy of being like Indiana Jones was becoming a reality.

We went to Jordan: visited places like the ancient city of Petra. We went to Israel, took a dip in the Dead Sea, enjoyed a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee. We went to Turkey: visited the cities of the seven churches in Revelation, including Smyrna, the focus of this article.

### INTRODUCING SMYRNA

Smyrna, now the modern-day city of Izmir, can trace its roots to Alexander the Great. Also, many believe that it is the birthplace of the poet Homer. In Smyrna one of their main streets was called the Street of Gold. Other interesting data on the city include the meaning of its name: “Smyrna” means “myrrh,” an aromatic potion that thrice figures in the Gospel records of His life: first as a fragrant spice given to the baby Jesus, then twice in relation to his crucifixion and burial (see Mark 15:23; John 19:39).

Ancient ruins can seem outdated and irrelevant. We relegate them with “That was then; this is now!” But Smyrna does have lessons for us. Such as faithfulness: “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

I read these words and wonder: whatever became of faithfulness? In a world of frantic busyness, increased skepticism, and broken vows, faithfulness sometimes seems outdated, like ancient ruins.

### LEARNING FROM SMYRNA

The message to the church of Smyrna reminds us that faithfulness is fundamental to the Christian journey, a lesson learned by looking at the cross, the church, and the crown.

First, the message to Smyrna reminds us about the significance of the cross: “These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life” (Rev. 2:8). Jesus was faithful unto death, death on a cross (Phil. 2:8). In faithfulness to His mission, He is an example for us today. The cross remains a symbol of hope for us because of His substitutionary sacrifice, and a source of inspiration because of His example of unflinching faithfulness. And He speaks with unique authority: as the First and Last. Alpha and Omega. Beginning and End and everything in between; Lord of the past, present, and future.

Hear His voice in Isaiah: “Listen to Me, O Jacob, and Israel, My called: I am He, I am the First, I am also the Last” (Isa. 48:12). He speaks with the authority of someone who has experienced persecution and was called to be faithful to death. His commitment and love sustained Him through intense sacrifice, rejection, and pain. Likewise, in every generation His followers are called to be faithful, enduring until the end (Matt. 10:22).

The church of Smyrna knew persecution well. They experienced it from Jews who lived there, and from the Romans. Jesus warned that it would worsen (Rev. 2:10). Polycarp, once Smyrna’s Christian bishop,



## How do we learn from Smyrna, when many today never even dream of persecution for our faith?

understood the cost of his refusal to call the emperor his Lord. He left us memorable lines: "For eighty-six years I have been his servant, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"<sup>1</sup> And, "I bless you, Father, for judging me worthy of this hour, so that in the company of the martyrs I may share the cup of Christ."<sup>2</sup>

For some Christians, persecution for our faith may seem distant. However, in other parts of the world, our brothers and sisters are losing their lives because they want to remain faithful to Jesus. In India several Adventist pastors have been beaten or killed. In China a recent law has forbidden the sale of online Bibles,<sup>3</sup> and there continue to be new laws that restrict religious freedom for Christians.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, the light of hope burns even in Jesus' call to faithfulness. For faithfulness "until" means that a time is coming when Smyrna will no longer have to suffer. And the promise is for all who reach that point: faithful until death? Here's your crown of life (Rev. 2:10). Smyrna will share the victory of their Lord, He who was dead and came to life again. Years before John wrote, the city of Smyrna had been destroyed and rebuilt. Smyrna's saints could understand that though there is death, there will be life again.

### A MAJOR QUESTION

How do we learn from Smyrna, when many today never even dream of persecution for our faith? I'm free to express my beliefs and not be persecuted. How can I show faithfulness to faith in the absence of threat? It seems that the real question is not about willingness to die for Jesus, but about commitment to Him whatever the circumstance. Polycarp came to martyrdom only because of who he was in life. Am I as committed as Polycarp to living for Him?

A friend of mine told me of sailing from the island of Cozumel in Mexico to the mainland. A sign on her boat said, "Warning. Waters could get rough." And just as the sign said, the waters got rough. She,

along with many other passengers, was throwing up. She felt so bad that she wished she could jump off the ship. Her husband, not nearly as sick, leaned over and said, "Keep your eyes on the horizon." She did. Staring at the horizon restored her sense of equilibrium, and she was able to complete the journey with no more seasickness.

We need to keep our eyes on the cross. We will be tempted and tested daily, but we, with Smyrna, may remain faithful, and emerge victorious. Jesus, our Savior and Guide, has been here before: He has experienced the tests, tribulations, and temptations; He can bring us through. With Him, after life and death, there is life again, a more abundant life. Keep your eyes on the cross, symbol of love and faithfulness.

### THE CHURCH

The message to Smyrna reminds us that we are called as a community. Attachment to, dependence on a community, is becoming rare. Loud praise of individualism seems to drown out the beckoning call of community. And yes, the choice to follow Jesus is personal: no one can choose for us. But our call also has collective significance. We're in this together, a togetherness that further molds, and yes, tests our faithfulness. Community can be frustrating at times. It can also spur growth, strength, and healing. There is something about people gathering together with one focus and mission. We strengthen each other to be faithful.

Smyrna had much to inspire. Science and medicine flourished. A library, stadium, and theater that seated about 20,000 people testified to prosperity. However, many believers were financially poor as a result of the persecution they were experiencing. Jesus knew of their struggle: "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich)" (Rev. 2:9). His message was that despite material poverty, they were succeeding where it mattered: they were spiritually rich. And they were because they had chosen to be faithful. Amid daily challenges, they supported each other, and rose



together above their difficult circumstances.

Jon Cole, a colleague of mine, lived and taught in Izmir for a year. Recently, as we reflected on community, he shared a story. He needed to find the landlord to pay his rent in person. He found him playing backgammon with a group of friends, and apologized for the interruption. His landlord smiled and said, “No problem; an uninvited guest is God’s guest.” His message was that people and relationships are not an inconvenience.

The gift of community is celebrated in the “We” of one of my favorite songs, “We’re Marching to Zion.” As the chorus says: “We’re marching to Zion, beautiful, beautiful, Zion; we’re marching upward to Zion, the beautiful city of God.”<sup>5</sup> We’re marching; I’m marching, you’re marching, we’re marching. Nobody’s doing it alone. We’re a community of faithfulness—to Jesus, to His cross, to our individual integrity, and to our church, the family of faith, in which we journey together and are faithful together. And we are not together to compete against one another: Who’s holiest? Who’s most faithful? Rather, we support each other all the way to “until,” when there’s no more because we’ve reached the finish line. And everyone who covers the distance by faith in Jesus will receive a reward, the crown of eternal life.

## THE CROWN

Whether we experience turbulent skies or troubled seas, we are assured not only by each other’s presence, but, supremely,<sup>6</sup> by the competence of the Captain of our salvation (see Heb. 2:10).

Some years ago I was heading to Puerto Rico from The Bahamas to take some classes at Antillean Adventist University. I flew to Puerto Rico’s capital, San Juan, via Miami, Florida. Getting to Antillean Adventist University then required catching a connecting flight from San Juan. Arriving there late, I ran to the waiting area for my connecting flight to Mayaguez. There were four people there. I thought, *Praise the Lord, I made it . . . Seems like I’m earlier than most of the other passengers.*

After some waiting, they called the flight. There were still only five of us. I wondered, *Strange . . . Where’s everyone? Perhaps this isn’t a full flight . . .*

We walked out to the plane, and there it was, so small: *This looks like a toy; a paper plane.*

Five of us quite filled the plane. We strapped in, and off we went, flying over beautiful Puerto Rican beaches, some of the best beaches in the world.

The skies were clear, and it seemed like a good day.

But then the winds picked up. The plane began to experience turbulence. It began to shake.

You could feel it struggling against the wind. I held on because that’s all you could do. You can’t always predict turbulence, and you cannot control it. It comes.

Then I saw a red light on the captain’s dashboard. The plane was so small, and I was sitting so close to the captain—all the passengers were! I could easily see the dashboard. Then we heard a beeping sound. As if on cue, my seatmate and I both turned and looked at each other, communicating without words: *What is that light? Why is there a light? What is that beeping noise? I’m afraid. Are you afraid? OK, we’re both afraid.*

For me, it’s one of the great reassurances in being on an airplane. I’m never alone. There’s company—fellow passengers who feel the turbulence, who are afraid at times, just like me. And there’s a competent captain. There, thousands of feet up in the air, in the midst of turbulence, we’re in community.

The flight continued: smooth skies; rough bumps; occasional terror; and a safe landing, eventually.

Whether the Christian journey involves troubled seas or turbulent skies, we are never alone. We have an expert Captain and fellow passengers on the journey: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross” (Heb. 12:1, 2, NIV).

What joy? The joy of us for company, not just for a while, but throughout the victory celebration when the promise of our text finds its total fulfillment, as the Captain of our salvation crowns us all with immortality, “the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Chris Stevens, “Polycarp, Martyrdom of,” in John D. Barry et al., eds., in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, Wash.: Lexham Press, 2016).

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Hartopp, “Faithful in the Fire: The Christian Legacy of St Polycarp,” Feb. 23, 2017, [https://www.christiantoday.com/article/faithful\\_in\\_the\\_fire\\_the\\_christian\\_legacy\\_of\\_saint\\_polycarp/104969.htm](https://www.christiantoday.com/article/faithful_in_the_fire_the_christian_legacy_of_saint_polycarp/104969.htm).

<sup>3</sup>Ian Johnson, “China Bans Online Bible Sales as It Tightens Religious Controls,” Apr. 5, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/05/world/asia/china-bans-bible-sales.html>.

<sup>4</sup>Shen Hua, “China Conducts Two Trials in Crackdown on Audio Bibles,” Dec. 14, 2020, [https://www.voanews.com/a/east-asia-pacific\\_china-conducts-two-trials-crackdown-audio-bibles/6199571.html](https://www.voanews.com/a/east-asia-pacific_china-conducts-two-trials-crackdown-audio-bibles/6199571.html).

<sup>5</sup>Isaac Watts, “Marching to Zion,” *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1985), no.422.

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BEN WHITE / LIGHTSTOCK

## YOUR AMBASSADOR

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*Making Jesus “better known and better loved”<sup>1</sup>*

**T**hree weeks into my first solo pastoral district, and brimming with zeal, I phoned the local Chamber of Commerce in the Massachusetts mill town where my wife and I had settled.

“Hello,” I said in my best Chamber-of-Commerce voice. “I’m the new Seventh-day Adventist pastor in this area, and I’m checking to see if there’s a ministerial association in town that I might join.”

The voice at the other end grew grave and cautious. “Well,” he said, as though trying to

avoid saying something unpalatable, “there is a ministerial association here in Southbridge for . . . [long pause] *Christian denominations.*”

I pretended I hadn’t heard the caveat, and plunged ahead. “Wonderful!” I said. “Could you give me the contact information for whoever coordinates that group?”

Slowly, as if fumbling for something he didn’t want to find, he eventually offered the name and phone number of a priest from the largest parish in town. I thanked him for his help,

and settled into my second call of the morning.

The receptionist at the Notre Dame church connected me to Father Daniel, who eventually joined the call with a warm, Bing Crosby-sounding voice.

“How can I be of help?” he asked, probably assuming that I was one of his flock seeking pastoral care.

“I’ve been directed to you by the Chamber of Commerce as the leader of the local ministerial association,” I informed him. “I’m the new pastor of the two Seventh-day Adventist congregations in this area, and I’d like information about when the association gathers and at what location.”

The silence was uncomfortably long. “Well,” he said as slowly as he could in drawing out a four-letter monosyllable. “It’s true that there is a ministerial association in town, but it’s for . . . [long pause] *Christian churches.*”

“That’s wonderful,” I enthused. “How often does it meet, and where?”

He seemed disappointed that I hadn’t immediately disqualified myself and my denomination, but ultimately yielded up the information: at the Notre Dame parish hall, every third Tuesday of the month, at 10:00 a.m.

Two weeks later, buffed and shiny, I opened the door of a too-hot parish hall that smelled heavily of old coffee and older tobacco. A dozen clergy milled about, talking quietly with each other, periodically adjusting their clerical collars or pendant crosses as the perspiration slid down their noses.

Father Daniel soon spotted the newcomer, and carefully made his way to the corner where I had ensconced myself. “You must be the new Seventh-day Adventist pastor,” he said as he held out his hand, and his face wrinkled in a practiced smile. “It’s good to have you with us. Would you be willing to offer the opening prayer for our convocation today?”

After agreeing, I slowly began to realize the dimensions of the long examination that was just beginning. “*Will he pray as a Christian—in the name of Christ?*” “*Does he believe in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?*” “*Are Adventists actually Christians?*”

Every newcomer to a professional organization recognizes how longtime members place responsibilities on the “new guy,” and I cheerfully took my turns. But during the coming months, as I continued to attend association meetings every

third Tuesday, my “turns” were coming up with disproportionate rapidity.

“*Bill, would you offer the devotional at next month’s meeting?*” Father Daniel would ask. “*Could you lead a breakout group when we talk about how the ministerial association will address the hunger issues in our community?*” “*Would you have the benediction at today’s meeting?*”

My wife soon greeted me upon my return from each month’s meeting with a cheerful laugh: “So what did they ask you to do today?”

I began to understand that though Adventists had been present in my community and that region for decades, we were barely known at all. As I met other clergy, civic leaders, medical personnel, and businessmen during the next three years, I found myself sharing a simple and yet carefully framed explanation of the faith in which I had been raised: “Seventh-day Adventists are a Christian denomination that gathers chiefly around the two biblical ideas featured in our name. We observe the seventh-day Sabbath as found in Scripture, and we believe in the literal soon coming of Jesus to this world.” Elementary as they were, those lines were more than any of the influencers and decision-makers in my community had previously known about my faith.

**An ambassador explains the identity and character of the government he or she represents.**

**T**he rotary dial black phone on the office desk of my suburban Grand Rapids congregation startled me from my early Tuesday afternoon drowsiness.

“Hello,” announced the gravelly voice at the other end. “This is Dr. Anthony Hoekema from Calvin College.”

I sat bolt upright in my chair. On the other end of this phone line was the man whose well-known volume *The Four Major Cults* had deplorably misidentified Seventh-day Adventists as a cult, lumping Adventists with Latter-day Saints, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Christian Scientists. Millions of Christians around the world had been influenced by his volume.

“How can I be of help?” I asked carefully, wondering why this well-known scholar and critic of Adventism would be calling a thirtysomething Adventist pastor in a midsized suburban church.

“I’m wondering if you could give me the address

## I preached better sermons because they were listening—and even taking notes.

of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists?” he asked. “I need to contact them.”

I suppressed the thought that came immediately to mind: how would evangelical Protestantism’s most intense critic of Seventh-day Adventists be unaware of the physical location of the movement he so strongly criticized? Deciding that was a question for another day, I began reciting the address, 12501 Old Columbia Pike . . .

He thanked me briefly and then ended the call. I stared out the window at the early May blooms and foliage, wondering if I had naively accepted an invitation to minister in a place where nearly 70 percent of the population were churchgoing Christians, and almost half were adherents of Hoekema’s Dutch Reformed tradition. This was going to be more challenging than I knew.

Since there were no active ministerial associations on the southern side of the city, I began looking for opportunities where the Lord might bring me in contact with ministers of other faiths. The racquetball court at the nearby gym opened the first opportunity. Jeff was a tall, lanky associate pastor of a local independent charismatic church with a broad smile and a fierce “kill shot” I could never quite handle. We began playing every second Wednesday at 6:00 a.m., often praying together before we played, and later again over breakfast after showering and shaving at the club.

Jeff had a seminary textbook awareness of Adventism, though mostly gained to counter its call for Sabbathkeeping, the state of the dead, and the Bible’s dietary requirements. He would look at his breakfast plate of bacon or sausage at the diner, smile broadly, and then say, “You won’t be offended if I eat this, will you?”

“Not at all,” I would assure him, secretly imagining that my Vegeburger-and-vegetables diet might one day help me master his unconquerable kill shot. The differences in our culinary habits

and doctrines soon took second place, however, as we discovered how much each of us was seeking a closer journey with Christ. Even in the diner Jeff would place his hand on my shoulder and pray earnestly for my life with Christ as no Adventist colleague had ever prayed for me in 10 years of ministry. Our families shared meals and conversations, joys and sorrows, during the next three years. We talked about the Sabbath, God’s call to holy living, and the necessity of heart preparation for the soon coming of Jesus. And we prayed—always—multiple times on each occasion we met.

**An ambassador explains the identity and character of the government he or she represents, while making friends for its purposes and aims.**

The cordless phone beside my desktop computer chirped cheerfully, and my assistant spoke softly at the other end.

“Bill, Reverend Franklin from the Episcopal church is here to see you. I didn’t have him on your schedule: I hope this is OK.”

“Please send him in,” I urged, puzzled at what would bring an Episcopal priest from the other side of the valley to the large collegiate church I served.

Jim Franklin walked in slowly, shook my hand, and waited a moment to explain his errand. “Bill, we’ve had our eye on you,” he said, no doubt secretly delighted at the consternation evident on my face.

“And would you like to tell me about it?” I managed, knowing nothing of what was coming.

“You probably don’t know this, Bill, but within our valley ministerial association there is another group of six of us who meet each Thursday afternoon for conversation and prayer. I don’t mean to sound exclusive, but it’s an invitation-only group. We’re not trying to grow, and we don’t invite anyone new to join until we’ve all prayed about it—until we’ve all agreed to make an invitation. And I’m here to ask if you’d consider joining us.”

He quickly named the other group members, most of whom I had met in monthly meetings of the area ministerial association. “I don’t need an answer today,” he said slowly, “because it’s not a casual commitment we’re asking you to make. When I say that we meet each Thursday, I mean *every* Thursday, without fail, unless you’re on vacation or in the hospital. This weekly appointment

to meet with each other takes priority in our lives and ministries.”

“Oh, and one other thing,” he added as he turned toward the door. “We hold one 24-hour retreat every quarter up in the mountains where there are no phones and no media. I know you have a wife and two small children, so perhaps you’d like to ask your wife how she feels about your being part of this group.”

That night I explained the invitation to Debby. “I think you should take it,” she said quickly. “You know how much you’ve treasured relationships like these in the past. And don’t worry about me or the boys. We’ll be fine for 24 hours once a quarter.”

And so the next Thursday at 2:00 p.m. I parked in front of the Episcopal church—apprehensive, but also certain this was of the Spirit. The conversation was gentle, warm, supportive. The prayer was intense, focused, and deeply personal. After one week, I rearranged my sermon preparation schedule to be available every Thursday afternoon. Within a month, I would miss the occasional subcommittee meeting when there was a scheduling conflict, but never my gathering with six stalwart believers who loved me and encouraged me with the healing kindness of Jesus.

On that first overnight retreat in the nearby mountains, the others waited until I had chosen my spot on the carpeted cabin floor and unrolled my sleeping bag. “Come over here, Bill,” they said with knowing smiles. “We have a tradition with the new guy on these retreats.”

They pointed to a single chair in the center of the circle where they stood. “Sit here, Bill,” they said. “We’re going to pray for you. Don’t get worried: it’s going to take a while. So just be quiet as we lay our hands on you and pray.”

And so a Baptist, a Methodist, an Episcopalian, an Independent, a Pentecostal, and a nondenominational pastor laid hands on me and prayed for the next 45 minutes—about my health; my marriage; my friendships; my professional life; my daily walk with Jesus.

Every Sabbath as I preached on live radio from an 1,800-member church, I knew that Ron and Rick and Jim and Carl and Mike and Don were listening to me open the Word of God—praying I would do it well, that the Spirit would speak through me. I preached better sermons because they were listening—and even taking notes, as

they sometimes laughingly admitted to each other. Explaining my beliefs so that pastors of other faiths could understand them taught me a skill that never would have grown if I were preaching only to Adventists. And when I ultimately announced that I was leaving that congregation to be an editor of the *Adventist Review*, my Thursday prayer group surprised me on my last Sabbath, sitting directly in the center of the sanctuary where I couldn’t—and wouldn’t—miss them. The tears in parting were reverent and real.

**An ambassador explains the identity and character of the government he or she represents, while making friends for its purposes and aims, extending its reach and influence.**

**M**ore than 120 years ago God’s inspired messenger to this movement wrote of the important role Adventist ministers play as ambassadors for this faith: “Our ministers should seek to come near to the ministers of other denominations. Pray for and with these men, for whom Christ is interceding. A solemn responsibility is theirs. As Christ’s messengers we should manifest a deep, earnest interest in these shepherds of the flock.”<sup>2</sup>

It is, like too many other messages given by God to His remnant, a message that has frequently gone unheeded. Intent on building that fraction of God’s kingdom we can see, we have often forgotten the kingdom we have almost no part in producing: “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how” (Mark 4:26, 27).

Nothing is ever wasted in God’s economy. The friendships formed, prayers shared, and truths discussed with ministers of other faiths will one day yield in “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (Rev. 7:9, NIV).

Support—no, actually encourage—your pastor in using the gifts the Spirit has given them as an ambassador for your congregation and your faith. ♣

<sup>1</sup> This lovely expression is drawn from the motto of the Spencerville Seventh-day Adventist Church in Spencerville, Maryland.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 6, p. 78.

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Nicole Johnson and Pastor Evan Knott (inset) were interviewed as part of a focus on mission for the 2021 Annual Council Leadership meetings. You can watch the entire interview at [vimeo.com/624244855](https://vimeo.com/624244855).



## FINDING GOD AGAIN, AGAINST PANDEMIC ODDS

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*Nicole's story of coming back to God*

The last time Nicole had attended church was a long time ago.

### **NICOLE'S CHALLENGE**

But now she felt a strong urge to reconnect with her childhood church. "I realized something was missing," she says. "It was my relationship with God and knowing that I wasn't completely living life to His plan."

But doing something about it would be a challenge all its own. Churches in the state of Delaware, where she lived, like churches, businesses, entertainment venues, and other locations of meeting in many other states, were all closed. It was March 2020, the start of a shut-

down because of a state-of-emergency order, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. But Nicole remained undaunted. She remembered the Dover First Seventh-day Adventist Church, where she occasionally attended as a child. She couldn't visit in person, but maybe she could find an online broadcast.

### **MEANWHILE, AT DOVER FIRST**

The Dover First church leadership team did not let the pandemic shut them down when in-person services had to be halted. Instead, they quickly pivoted to improving their live-streaming capabilities.

"When the pandemic started and everything was shutting

down, my first priority was making sure our church stayed connected as a church family," says Evan Knott, former pastor of Dover First, and now communication director of the Chesapeake Conference. "Even though we couldn't meet in person, I wanted to make sure I was still in the church every week with our AV team, preaching the gospel online."

The church purchased new lighting equipment and expanded from a one-camera broadcast to an enhanced three-camera streaming setup. "Streaming went from being a secondary element to being what church was for a while," says Knott. "We wanted the worship experience to be good quality and feel familiar for our members, but as an added benefit, upgrading our streaming setup made our service more engaging for people who were seeking online."

#### **A BLESSING TO EACH OTHER**

And that's how Nicole discovered them, present and alive on Facebook. She began following services each week online. She wanted Dover First because as a child she had always loved the services. But she stayed because of the great sermons and valuable spiritual lessons each week.

She watched throughout the summer, even after the church resumed limited, socially distanced indoor worship services in June 2020.

But then she knew she couldn't remain anonymous anymore. God was calling her to move out of her comfort zone and take another step. "God does not want us to live in isolation," she says. "I felt the Holy Spirit's pull and knew that God had big plans in store for me." She had no idea how God would use her "Yes" to His call.

The 2020 hurricane season found its way to Dover, Delaware, producing a tornado that damaged both the church and Dover First Christian School, which the church operated.

As Pastor Knott reviewed the destruction the next day, he was, by his own account, extremely discouraged: "First there was the pandemic, and now there was a tornado. It felt like it was just one thing after another, and our church couldn't catch a break."

Then he checked his phone. There was a letter there:

*Dear Pastor Evan and others @ Dover First,  
I wanted to take a minute to introduce myself  
and to thank you for your livestreaming of  
church services. I have been watching and lis-*

*tening from home. I attended Dover First many years ago. I am being called to start my journey with Christ and put Him first again. Or perhaps, for the first time ever. . . .*

*Sincerely, Nicole J.*

For Pastor Knott there could be nothing better than getting an email like that. "Even when it felt like everything was going wrong, God was still working behind the scenes." He replied to Nicole's message and invited her to begin taking Bible studies and attend Dover First in person. She decided to visit the church the next Sabbath, and was thrilled from the start: "I remember being greeted at the front door. I was immediately welcomed and offered a quarterly Bible study plan. It was awesome!"



On August 4, an EF-1 tornado touched down in Dover, Delaware, knocking down trees, fencing, as well as an exterior brick wall, exposing underlying structures.

She worked through a set of It Is Written Bible study lessons week by week during a virtual Bible study appointment with the pastor via Zoom. After completing the 25 lessons and asking many questions, she decided to be baptized into the church she had attended as a child decades earlier.

"I enjoy my church family so much!" Nicole says. "From bonfires to lunches and great sermons, I would say the fellowship has been incredibly impactful. My church family is the best!"

Nicole understands that her spiritual journey is only getting started, and that baptism isn't the end of the road. "The most rewarding part of this journey is knowing that I am not doing it alone," she says. "I have Jesus, who is always with me; He guides me and understands me. He is my best friend, and His grace is sufficient. I take comfort in knowing that this earth is not my home." 🕊

# OUR SECRET SAUCE

*A typical church finds atypical ways to reach others.*

## JARED THURMON

Into all the world? Really? C'mon, there has to be another way, a Revelation remix, something to let us know the Great Commission has a software update. How in the world do you get a message into all the world today? The buffet of content consumption options today is unprecedented. Oh, and let's sprinkle in some pandemic and *bam*, you have a recipe for . . . well, something.

I've learned a lot through the past year, but what I have learned most are the following:

- 1 One pastor, one method, one style, will not take the gospel story into all the world.
- 2 We need to start preaching to the guests—to those who have never heard the story—and escape the echo chambers that are so tempting to stay in where we all know the inside language, i.e., SDA, SOP, GYC, LLU, NAD, etc., etc.
- 3 Go with what you know. Excel in a space you can feel comfortable in and stop comparing yourself to everyone else.

OK, now that we've got all that out of the way, let me tell you about how at my local little rural church in northwest Georgia I saw God use us in an audacious way over the past year. I want to talk specifically about how we used podcasts to share the good news with a whole lot of folks.

We have tried a lot at my little church—outreach in the local community, use of video, writing content, sermons, series, youth activities, and so much more. There are valuable stories in each of these areas that I'd love to share with you, but here I want to talk about podcasts.

This was an area in which, based on our limited resources, we felt we could excel. Here

is why: with video you are competing with, whether you like it or not, a \$200 million Marvel movie. All I can say to that is—good luck!

But our little audio production from the church—with a microphone, a free jingle download off the Internet, a cheap audio editing program, and a few minutes each week with a little secret sauce—allowed our little church to see hundreds of testimonies come in from around the world about how we were doing our little part to share the story in this amazing world.

The secret sauce? When the idea hit me, I pivoted in my preaching ministry: stop talking to the members. Talk to their friends, talk to their family, talk to the guests who may hear this message, hear the amazing Advent-flavored message for the first or last time. Why? Because if we are ever to grow, especially in the dying West, we must speak to people who have never heard our message. I was impressed in a dumpster fire of a world to not take tomorrow for granted. So every moment, every week, I preached to the guests. I tried to not use fancy lingo;

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I assumed they didn't have a clue where Malachi was located or what the *Testimonies* or *The Desire of Ages* meant. But I didn't shy away from using all those tools in my toolbox.

We also tagged every message we uploaded to the various podcast platforms with keywords so that when someone was searching to listen to a specific topic, they would find us.

One more ingredient to our secret sauce: three years ago the average age of our church attendance was around 54 years young. Today I would push

that closer to 44 years young. Why? Along the way I decided to start speaking contextually to someone—me, actually—a near-40-year-old male in North America. If I had made a few decisions differently in life, I would not be in the church, but perhaps I would have friends who would be. How would I talk to me if I wasn't talking from the front but barely listening from the back?

### **THE TESTIMONIES**

We have about 3,000 people each week who listen to our podcasts across all platforms. I'm nothing special as a preacher. Our church is pretty typical: 100-member rural church in small-town America. What we have experienced can be experienced by any church in the world with minimal input.

Just recently I had my new friend Oscar reach out and ask me to meet him for lunch. So we met, and he told me about how in the past year or so he found himself driving his truck and looking to listen to something. He searched one of those keywords that we had tagged our content with and found us. Oscar is from Arizona and drives



## I mean, Joe Rogan can keep people's attention for four hours, so long-form audio content is alive and well.

across country. He shared that after listening to some 130 of our podcasts, he wanted to be a member of our church. He is now a member of our church—remotely. He tunes in; he gives tithe and offerings; he has a community.

Another story (in fact, another trucker): *“Just wanted to let you know I really enjoy your podcast. I found it by accident last week. I’m an over-the-road truck driver from Virginia, so I have plenty of windshield time. Your messages are very encouraging and practical. If I’m ever in the area, I will visit your church. I’m not an Adventist, but I am Christian. Thanks again, and God bless.”—Ron.*

Another story: my new friend Louis. Louis is rich. I don’t really know how else to say it, but he’s like the rich young ruler: very wealthy, successful company, amazing family, and yet as the world started crumbling in 2020 he had a friend share with him a message that changed his life. That wasn’t one of our messages. He then got into some occult experiences and felt they weren’t for him. So he began searching for some of those keywords that we had been using to tag our podcasts.

Here was his note to me out of the blue:

*I recently found the truth of Jesus Christ, and I have been enjoying your podcast from the West Coast. Since I found Jesus the local Adventist church has been closed because of coronavirus, and I have not been able to get in touch with anyone there, so I have been supplementing my studies with your podcast (currently on episode 23), . . . Ellen G. White’s writings, which have been very helpful in furthering my understanding of the Scriptures. I can’t get hold of anyone. I’m willing to fly to your church—I would be truly honored to be baptized at your church. Would this be possible?*

*I am also looking forward to sharing my testimony with you because I didn’t find God first, I found Satan.—Louis.*

Louis flew down and was baptized and is actively taking the message into circles that I never could.

### THE BACK STORY

We didn’t have a lot of technical skill in trying to figure out what we needed to do this, but we knew people like to listen, and especially to content that makes them think. I mean, Joe Rogan can keep people’s attention for four hours, so long-form audio content is alive and well.

Some of the data on podcasting skews toward younger demographics. People can be multitasking—listening to podcasts at work or while they drive to work—and that’s OK. With a highly consumable form of content such as a video, you need to be sitting there watching it. You have to give it your time and attention. However, with podcasts, you could be doing the dishes, walking the dog, exercising, etc.

The size of the file doesn’t matter, and that’s remarkable. Many demographics listen to podcasts. *Podcasting* is another term for audio transmission, like old-school radio that’s now on the Internet and on demand.

We had listened to a few podcasts such as TED Radio Hour and others and thought they were quite good, then asked, “How do we do this?” Here is what you want to do: You’re thinking about the brand of your church. What do you want people to hear and feel as they engage with videos, audio, branding posts, etc.?

We started to think about that and realized, “You know what? We’re in the South. We just want people to feel a down-home, Southern-cooking vibe. We have a great potluck at our church all the time.”

What is amazing is that only half of our listeners are local. Therefore, this is how a small, rural church in the middle of nowhere, can have a global reach and large impact. A small but nice benefit is seeing our local giving go up even from new friends who join us remotely each week.

### CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER?

There’s a good chance that a sermon is preached in your church every week. The “foolishness of preaching” is still relevant. Find a way to record that message; spend a few dollars each month to push it out to as many platforms as possible, and watch the Lord work. 🍌

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**Jared Thurmon** began serving as a lay pastor a few years ago in Adairsville, Georgia. You can listen to their podcasts here: <https://adairsvillesda.org/messages>.

# LIFE HACKS AND PATHWAYS TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH

**W**hat is a life hack (LH)? A life hack is a convenient piece of useful actional advice. It is a helpful shortcut, innovation, or method that increases productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness. LHs are often clever tips or techniques for making a familiar task intuitively easier or more manageable and desirable.

The best LHs are doable and often disarmingly obvious. A LH can be a neat way of folding clothes, making the bed, or being successful. Or it can be applied in more complex contexts, such as losing weight, investing money, or leading organizations. LHs can be applied to anything from skills, smarts, and scholarships to spirituality.

One can get misled with LHs, however, if they become manipulative, unethical, or obsessive. Their usefulness is that they can facilitate a positive and moral outcome. LHs can lead to desirable results for progressive believers. They can help us to better understand and practice principles to actively improve our Christian walk.

So how can we utilize the LH concept and positively apply it to the principles of Christian living? Here are at least three ways the LH concept may be useful to Christians:

**1. Create Spiritual LHs:** Everyone has their own unique way of knowing, loving, and serving God. Paul says: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12, 13). Understand what’s effective in your spiritual walk, work it out in life, and make it a spiritual LH. Whether it is Bible study, prayer, prophecy, or dealing with death and doubt, figure out what works and how you can share it with others.

**2. Develop Strategic LHs:** Creatively demonstrate how spiritual truth can lead you deeper into the things of God. This is not a superficial biblical perusal. Rather, it is the thoughtful meditations of mature Christians who have experienced the deep insights of the Word under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They have come through spiritual warfare and developed stratagems for victory. David understood this when he said: “Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!” (Ps. 34:8).

### 3. Extract Practical LHs:

The Adventist Church is blessed with the gift of prophecy (Rev. 19:10), evident in the ministry of Ellen G. White. Her writings are filled with practical LHs that reveal the richness of the Christian experience. Read these writings and make your own list of LHs that you can gather from her writings. Here are a few Ellen White quotes that can be considered LHs:

- » Delete pride and selfishness, and five minutes can solve most difficulties—*Early Writings*, p. 119.<sup>1</sup>
  - » Follow eight natural health habits as an antidote to disease—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 127.<sup>2</sup>
  - » Pray daily to release providence in your life—*Steps to Christ*, p. 70.<sup>3</sup>
  - » Relate to others as Christ did for cross-cultural ministry success—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.<sup>4</sup>
- May your life hacks be a means of drawing others to Christ. 📌

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1882, 1945), p. 119.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), p. 127.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> E. G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

**Delbert W. Baker, Ph.D.**, a minister and educator, has recently returned to the United States from a five-year tenure as president/vice chancellor of the Adventist University of Africa in Nairobi, Kenya.

TRANSFORMATION TIPS  
DELBERT W. BAKER



EVERYONE HAS  
THEIR OWN UNIQUE  
WAY OF KNOWING,  
LOVING, AND  
SERVING GOD.



## THANKSGIVING IS COMING!

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*A better celebration of gratitude*

**W**e want this Thanksgiving to be all it implies. Do not let it be perverted, mingled with dross; but let it be what its name implies—giving thanks. Let our voices ascend in praise. Let our hearts lay hold on the Exalted One; for the train of His glory fills the temple.

### APPROPRIATE FOCUS

We should individually aim for a higher and holier standard. The mind will surely become dwarfed if it is continually occupied with earthly things. But if trained to dwell upon heavenly, eternal themes, it will be expanded, elevated, and strengthened. . . . We fail to obtain the wisdom God has brought within our reach.

Suppose we change this order of things, and begin from today to train the thoughts to dwell upon the great plan of salvation, devoting less time to self-serving. Suppose you try to count all your blessings. You have thought so little upon them, and they have been so continual, that when reverses or afflictions come, you are grieved, and think God is unjust. You do not call to mind how little gratitude you have manifested for all the blessings of God. You have not deserved them; but because they have flowed in upon you day by day, year by year, you have looked upon them as a matter of course, thinking it was your right to receive every advantage, and give nothing in return. . . . The blessings of God are more than the hairs of our head, more than the sands of the seashore. Meditate upon His love and care for us, and may it inspire you with love that trials cannot interrupt nor afflictions quench.

### AUTHENTIC THANKSGIVING

Let us give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good, and His mercy endureth forever. What kind of a Thanksgiving shall we keep—one to ourselves, bestowing all our benefits upon ourselves and receiving the attentions of others, but bringing no thanksgiving offering to God? This is idolatry of the most offensive character in the sight of a jealous God. Everything should be avoided that would have a tendency to draw our hearts' worship from God. Let not any more Thanksgiving days be observed to please and gratify the appetite, and glorify self.

We have reason for coming into the courts of the Lord with offerings of gratitude that He has preserved our lives another year.

Parents, do not neglect to impart to your children the very education they should have. Upon their birthdays, instead of calling their attention to themselves by giving them presents, teach them to come with an offering to God. . . . In many cases, birthday gifts have proved a detriment rather than a blessing. The children should be educated to look to God as the giver of life, their protector and their preserver, and to come to Him with an offering for all His favors. Every opportunity should be employed to implant in their hearts right views of God and His love for us. Nothing should be done to foster in them vanity, self-esteem, or pride. Teach them to review the past year of their life, to consider whether they would be glad to meet its record just as it stands in the books of heaven. . . . Teach them the knowledge of the Lord, His ways, His precepts. "Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." We want the children to learn to look away from self to heavenly things, there to bestow their thanksgiving.

### **GOD'S KIND OF FEAST**

God has spared our lives till this day; now how shall we keep it, with feasting and gluttony? Is this a true thanksgiving to God? No; we are to render thanks and thank offerings for the mercies bestowed upon us every day during the past year. How should we keep Thanksgiving? "When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbors; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind; and thou shalt be blessed, for they cannot recompense thee; for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." This is the kind of a feast God instructs us to give. How many will follow these specific directions of God's Word by calling the poor to their homes with words of sympathy and the spirit of beneficence, and thus make such a feast as will be pleasing to God? Satan has sought to destroy the true purpose and design of Thanksgiving, to turn away from God the honor due Him, and to center it upon ourselves.

**Satan has sought to destroy the true purpose and design of Thanksgiving, to turn away from God the honor due Him, and to center it upon ourselves.**

### **REASONABLE RESPONSE**

Now is the time when God should be praised for His goodness and bountiful gifts to the children of men. You may say, "What has the Lord done for us?" Much in every way. You have the products of the earth, filling your barns, your granaries, your storehouses. In this you have abundance for which to give thanks. Here are your children. They are clothed, and you have fuel, food, and shelter. You should not only praise God, but you should come into His courts with a thank offering. How many of us have trained ourselves to bring an offering to Him? I remember a brother's once taking us to his granary, saying, "You see my barns and granaries are so full I shall have to build an addition; for I do not know where to bestow the products of my ground." And a little after, speaking of a poor widow, he said, "I do not see how she will take care of herself this cold winter. I fear she will have a hard time of it, indeed." I said, "Who gave you these things you have just shown me! Was it not the God of heaven? You say it was; then it is your duty to give of your plenty to that poor widow. Thus you can answer this question yourself." He had not seen it in that light. He had thought helping the poor from his bounty was another consideration. God help you to open your hearts to suffering humanity; for they are the purchase of high heaven. Christ identifies His interests with those of His needy, suffering children; and neglect done to them is registered in the books of heaven as done to Christ in the person of His saints. ✎

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 portion of a Thanksgiving sermon delivered at the Dime Tabernacle, Thursday, November 27, 1884, was printed in the *Review and Herald*, December 23, 1884.

# YOU ARE NOT A BIRD



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*But we can be lights  
wherever we are.*

*This article is condensed from a sermon preached at the Walla Walla University church on June 12, 2021, during graduation weekend. It retains the oral style of the original presentation.—Editors.*


I'll start with a hard truth, but don't be discouraged. There will be some encouragement from Jesus and some good news at the end.

We live in a society that actively fosters optimistic expectations. It's socially acceptable (and even considered wise) to regularly inform people of their limitless potential. I'm especially reminded of this societal emphasis on affirmation every year at graduation time. If you browse the Internet for sample graduation speeches or products, you'll find many examples of this unbridled optimism. Here are just two:

Example One: "I hope that all of us here today can take this personal accomplishment as an example of how anything is truly possible when we put our minds to it"<sup>1</sup>

Example Two: "It is after your graduation that you spread your wings wide and fly out to explore the world around, in pursuit of your goals."<sup>2</sup>

These are happy quotations, to be sure. But there is a problem. First, the bold claim that "anything is truly possible when we put our minds to it" is clearly and demonstrably false. And the second quotation? If you imagine that you will "spread your wings wide and fly," brace yourself for some sad news. You may be fit, smart, hardworking, and persistent, but you will not fly, because you are not a bird.



## In so doing, she stands in a long line of Bible characters with limited options, but who also did what they could.

we've made in the past, society will close some doors of opportunity in front of us. It's not fair, but that's what happens in a broken world.

We even face spiritual and moral limitations. Scripture tells us that the followers of Jesus receive unique spiritual gifts, but these are distributed as the Holy Spirit determines. This means that some people will be able to serve God in ways that we can't.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, our moral convictions may not allow us to pursue certain lucrative careers.

Finally, the sad reality of life is that even our limited abilities will almost certainly diminish over time. Our aged selves can't run as fast, work as long, or learn as easily as our younger selves could. In our later years society may view us as increasingly insignificant and obsolete. Disease and chronic pain may limit our activities and diminish our own sense of worth. So time will tend to lengthen the list of things we can't do.

This harsh reality hurts. Our pain is heightened when we compare ourselves with others who don't seem to be facing the same limitations and constraints. Our anguish often turns to anger and resentment, then discouragement and despair. We may accuse God of being unfair. We may even give up. When we're kept from doing something, we sometimes settle for doing nothing.

No, we are not birds, and we can't do everything. So how should we respond? How should we live in a world like this? Jesus has an answer. It comes to us in a single sentence, tucked away in a rather famous Gospel story in Mark 14.

### DOING WHAT WE CAN DO

Bethany was a small town less than two miles from Jerusalem. Just days before His crucifixion, Jesus enjoyed a banquet there at the home of Simon the Leper. During the meal a woman<sup>4</sup> approached him with an alabaster jar. It contained pure nard, an exquisite perfume extracted from

### REALITY CHECK

In a culture that says, "You can do anything," there is a hard truth that must be acknowledged. Humans are amazing, but there are some things we can't do.

Our limitations are evident in several areas. First, we all have physical limitations. As a man in his 50s with bowlegs, I will never be able to give birth to a child or become an Olympic sprinter. Through diet, exercise, and training I may be able to improve my physical capabilities, but there are some thresholds I cannot cross. The same is true for all of us. We are differently abled physically, and we can't do everything.

We also face mental limitations. Some of us quickly grasp math formulas but struggle to understand poetry. Some of us can learn languages easily but can't play the piano by ear. Some of us read books, while others of us are better at reading people. Once again, we can study, learn, and improve, but we are differently abled mentally and emotionally.

We are further limited by our society. We may have the necessary abilities, but because of our age, gender, race, religion, appearance, or mistakes

a plant that grew in the distant Himalayan region. She broke the jar and anointed Jesus with the perfume. It isn't surprising that onlookers protested at the wastefulness. The perfume was worth tens of thousands of dollars! Shouldn't the money have been used for the poor?

Then Jesus spoke. "'Leave her alone,' said Jesus. 'Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you. . . . But you will not always have me. She did what she could'" (Mark 14:6-8).<sup>5</sup>

*"She did what she could."* This affirmation from Jesus gives us a way forward in a world where not everything is possible for us.

We face limitations, but so did this woman. In her day Jewish restrictions on women were increasing. Access to education was limited. Married Jewish women could not divorce their husbands; they were segregated in worship settings and expected to spend their time at home. If they were in public, they were to be veiled and to avoid speaking to men. According to the Jewish midrash of the second century, there were certain classes of people who were not accepted as full witnesses in court. These included Gentiles, deaf-mutes, gamblers, pigeon racers, slaves, children, the insane, . . . and women.<sup>6</sup>

Yes, this woman had a long list of things she could *not* do. But it seems not to have led to passiveness and hopelessness. Somehow she got some perfume. And Jesus said in her defense, "She did what she could." In so doing, she stands in a long line of Bible characters with limited options, but who also did what they could.

Rahab was a foreigner and could not show birth records proving her lineage as a descendant of Abraham. She couldn't boast of an admirable occupation. She lived in a city where property values were about to come crashing down. But she hung a scarlet cord in her window. She did what she could.

He was only a boy named David. He couldn't be a soldier because he was too young. He couldn't wear Saul's armor because it didn't fit. He couldn't command the armies of Israel to fight because he had no authority. But he could pray, and he could sing, and he knew how to use a sling. He did what he could.

The Bible inspires us with stories of people with limitations who did what they could. Our hearts

continue to be inspired by contemporary stories of people who did what they could.

## OVERCOMING LIMITATIONS

Author and speaker Barbara Glanz introduces us to one such person. Glanz had given a sales presentation at a convention for a large grocery store chain. She urged her listeners to create memorable experiences for customers so they'd want to return. Several weeks later Glanz was contacted by a young man named Johnny. He had heard her presentation and had an idea. He introduced himself by saying, "I'm just a bagger in the store and I have Down syndrome, but I wanted to think of a way I could make a difference."

Johnny continued: "I like sayings, so each day I'm going to pick out one that I like, and my dad and I will print it out on the computer. I'll cut out the quote in strips and sign my name on the back of each one." When customers came through his line, Johnny's plan was simple. "I'll just drop a strip right in their bags and say, 'I hope you enjoy my quote of the day.'" Glanz encouraged Johnny to try it, and thought that was the end of that.

A few weeks later Glanz received another call, this time from Johnny's store manager. There was a problem. The manager explained that as he walked through the store, he noticed one checkout line that was three times longer than the others. He told Glanz, "I went to the back of the line and suggested that customers move to another checkout, and they wouldn't budge."<sup>8</sup> Nobody moved. They were in Johnny's line, and they wanted to see his quote of the day. Johnny couldn't do everything, but he did what he could.

The beautiful moments in our lives are also stories of people doing what they could. Maybe it was someone who wasn't a supermodel, but who gave us a smile. A child not named Michelangelo who drew us a picture. A teacher who will never make the news but who inspired us not to give up. A quiet friend who listened to us, cried with us, and gave us a hug. A parent who worked hard and lived simply so that we could get a Christian education. If we take a moment to reflect, we can all think of someone who couldn't do everything, but who did what they could on our behalf.

Each one of us faces a life with limitations. We can spend our time comparing ourselves with others. We can be consumed with anger, resent-



Though you die, you will one day rise. You will rise from your grave, rise up into the sky. Yes, you *will* fly . . . even though you are not a bird.



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ment, and despair over what we can't do or what society prevents us from doing. We can succumb to hopelessness and passivity. In this very moment there is probably an area of life where the future seems bleak and where all our efforts seem to be in vain. We may have even said, "Well, I guess I can't do anything."

But there is a better way. Do what you can.

Remember the woman in Bethany. Remember Rahab the prostitute and David the shepherd boy. And we also ought to remember one more.

If ever there was someone who faced limited options, it was the thief on the cross. He couldn't change his past, and his life was ending in physical agony and shame. Death drew near. But in that helpless moment, when it seemed there were no options left, he did what he could. He cried out, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:42).

Your future may not be easy. Life may present you with an unending series of challenges and disappointments. But if you ever find yourself in a place where all the doors are closed and it seems there is nothing you can do, this option will always be avail-

able to you: you will always be able to call on Jesus.

And if you do, death won't be the end of your story. Though you die, you will one day rise. You will rise from your grave, rise up into the sky. Yes, you *will* fly . . . even though you are not a bird. 🦅

<sup>1</sup> "Graduation Speech Examples" at <https://www.sampletemplates.com/business-templates/graduation-speech-examples.html>, accessed June 2021.

<sup>2</sup> "Cool Graduation Gifts" at <https://graduationgiftsideas.blogspot.com/>, accessed June 2021.

<sup>3</sup> See 1 Cor. 12:4-31.

<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere identified as Mary, she remains unnamed in Mark.

<sup>5</sup> All Scripture quotations have been taken from the New International Version.

<sup>6</sup> Moshe Meiselman, *Jewish Woman in Jewish Law* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1978), p. 80, correctly points out that the reasons the various groups were excluded as full witnesses differed, but "all agree that women cannot be witnesses." For a helpful historical overview of the increasing restrictions on women during the first and second centuries, see Deena Kopyto's "Women's Testimony and Talmudic Reasoning," in *Kedma: Penn's Journal on Jewish Thought, Jewish Culture, and Israel* 2, no. 2 (2018): 61-73, online at <https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1033&context=kedma>.

<sup>7</sup> "Johnny the Bagger—A True Story," contributed by Ken Blanchard and Barbara Glanz, available at <https://www.gotthings.com/motivation/johnny-the-bagger.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

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# WHAT'S YOUR SOURCE OF HAPPINESS?

*Thoughts on the joys of a Cessna 172*

**ANGELA COPPOCK**

The small Cessna 172 may not have looked like much, but to me it was a beauty. For my eighteenth birthday I had purchased a Discovery Flight: a one-hour introductory flight lesson that included 20 minutes of flight instruction and 40 minutes of additional flying time with the pilot.

## **I FLY**

On the runway for takeoff I was shaking with excitement. I had waited almost two years for this moment, and now I was about to fulfill my dream of flying a plane. We sped down the runway so fast that I was afraid we would run out of runway. But then the pilot lifted the nose, taking us up into the sky. The higher we rose, the more I could see—one great stretch of horizon, the most beautiful view I had ever seen. Just when I

thought it could not get better, the pilot gave me the wheel, and I took control. I felt free—as though I could go anywhere I wanted and explore the far reaches of the earth. The feeling did not last forever: we eventually returned to the airport. But I smiled for days thereafter, telling everyone about my experience. Even thinking about it now makes me happy. But why? Some people hate to fly; others feel sick; still others are scared. Why does it make me happy?

## **I WONDER**

In the documentary *Happy*, directed by Academy Award nominee Roko Belic, happiness is discussed through academic studies and authoritative interviews from all over the world. The subject has rapidly expanded



in interest and data worldwide over the past 30 years. This niche of psychology tries to interpret every possible way that people, cultures, governments, and religions understand and value happiness. Based on these studies, psychologists have hypothesized that 50 percent of happiness comes from one's genes, or personality makeup: an introvert may be happiest reading a book, putting together a puzzle, or otherwise operating in quiet; an extrovert may be happiest at a boisterous party among many friends. Our personalities dictate what we are comfortable with in mental and social situations. So our happiness is filtered through the genes that make us who we are.

My happiness in flying is because the major component of my personality is the love of exploration. I have always wanted to explore new places and experience new things, and the airplane is the ultimate exploration vehicle, with no limitations on where it can go.

In the *Happy* documentary, psychologists hypothesize that the 10 percent of happiness

derived from life circumstances—such as income, social status, age, and hardship—seems to make a difference in happiness only when all basic needs are met. After that is handled, horrible things can happen to a person, and they still are happy. To illustrate, we are told Melissa Moody's story.

From a young age Melissa Moody was a happy person who loved doing such things as supporting her family and sharing new experiences. She says, "I was very, very busy raising three children and loving that, and raising horses on my ranch and doing volunteer work. I had a very full life." Then in 1992 she was run over by a truck, dragged behind it on a gravel road, and finally thrown underneath the truck. She lost her face, her husband, her confidence, her ability to do the things she loved, and, almost, her will to live. Still, she continues to live, healthy and happy with her children, discovering new things she can do to be happy. Her story teaches that even if the worst things happen to you, you can still be happy. It isn't easy, but it is possible.

#### **I HURT MYSELF**

I had a similar experience to Melissa Moody almost two years before my Discovery Flight. On January 15, 2020, I fell on the back of my head from six feet up during a gymnastics performance, resulting in nerve damage affecting my cervical spine, thoracic spine, and cranial nerves. Everything became difficult—reading, walking, and much more; the ability to do the things I loved; things that made me happy. But I never gave up hope that I would find new things to make me happy, as well as recover to my preaccident condition. Hope kept me happy; got me well enough to fulfill my dream: I flew a plane!

When psychologists report on people who stay happy through hard times, they state that these people adapt more quickly to hardship than others. What allows them to is the 40 percent of happiness that comes from intentional activity.

Researchers have interviewed hundreds of thousands of people all over the world. And according to an essay by Harvard social scientist Arthur C. Brooks, "The Three Equations for a Happy Life, Even During a Pandemic," faith is one of the best intentional activities or actions we can do to impact our happiness. Whatever your faith, "the key is to find a structure through which you

can ponder life's deeper questions and transcend a focus [from] your narrow interests."

After my accident I could understand Brooks better: through the darkest times I had to pass, through days when there was no happiness in sight; when the pain, darkness, and misery seemed to close in around me; in those moments my faith in God and His promises were the only things keeping me going. As a practicing Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I believe that life's experiences are for a reason, and that no matter what, Jesus will be with me, carrying me, protecting me through whatever the world throws at me. Faith let me see the light, warmth, and happiness around me. Faith said that I was alive, not alone, and recovering.

### I LEARN—FROM SOLOMON

According to King Solomon, wise ruler of Israel from 970 to 931 B.C., another intentional activity for impacting your happiness is the loving support of those close to you: "Two are better than one, because . . . if either of them falls down, one can help the other up (Eccl. 4:9, 10, NIV). I never fully understood how much I relied on friends and family for happiness or support until my accident. Before the accident, fun activities with friends and family provided much laughter and happy memories. After it, friends and family banded together to pray for me; write me get-well cards; check on me periodically through calls, emails, texts, and gifts that showed they cared. They loved and supported me even when I thought I was unlovable or a burden to them. Through their mental, physical, and spiritual support I was able to see happiness and hope around me that pushed me forward in my journey of recovery.

A final intentional activity or action that can impact one's happiness is finding purpose or satisfaction in your work. Brooks's formula for finding satisfaction is taking what you have and dividing it by what you want, meaning that improving your perspective on what you have instead of focusing on what you want will stress and disappoint you less about things you already have. I understood the impact of satisfaction on my happiness much better after my accident. When I was first injured, all I could think about were the things I wanted to do but could not—playing sports, going to school. It made me depressed. I lost progress on recovery. Not until I saw what I could do (walking, reading)

through my rehabilitation exercises was I able to feel happy again. Once I focused on what I could accomplish through these exercises, I was able to see the satisfaction in my actions and truly feel happy.

### I LEARN—TO SEE

Before I studied *Happy*, Ecclesiastes, and "The Three Equations for a Happy Life, Even During a Pandemic," I thought happiness was an emotion people activated through experiences and thoughts that randomly made them happy. Now I see that happiness is an emotional formula specific to every person's personality, life experiences, and habits, which can be enhanced through personal hardship and trials. The Cessna 172 plane ride was my life's happiest moment both because the activity was designed for my personality and because that plane ride was one of a few experiences that made me feel normal and free.

**I now see a purpose for the injury, a story to tell about the wonders of God.**

Before my accident, I thought pain and trials shatter happiness. Now, through a perspective of faith, I see pain and trials enhancing and adding value to happiness. Considering that God makes all things work together for good—as my faith dictates—I now see a purpose for the injury, a story to tell about the wonders of God; about appreciating that all the happy experiences and memories after my accident were gifts from God. Not only do I see that Cessna 172 plane ride as the happiest moment of my life, but I also see the events leading up to that flight. I see my accident, my suffering, recovery, and growth all culminating in the moment I achieved my dream of flying a plane. My accident not only enhanced my experience and happiness during that flight, but also enhanced my understanding of my future career of becoming a missionary pilot. This moment of pure happiness and clarity has been forever burned into my brain, permeating my whole being with purpose and drive to share God, and the happiness He brings, with everyone I meet. ▀

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**Angela Coppock** is a student attending Andrews University, where she is majoring in aviation and premedicine. She hopes one day to be a missionary doctor and missionary pilot.

# Want to Have a Seating Problem at Sabbath School?

Could you imagine the biggest complaint at your church being, "I can't get a seat at our Bible study?" What would it be like if you had to take seat reservations at your Sabbath School so that your large group of visitors could even get in? Roy Ice has discovered how to do just that and more, and he and his team would love to share how God can do the same thing with your community by starting a Bible Lab.

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A photograph of an elderly man with white hair and glasses, wearing a blue and white plaid shirt and khaki pants. He is sitting in a light-colored quilted chair, reading an open book. A small brown and black dog is sitting on his lap. The background shows a large window with a view of green trees and a white fence.

Harry Hartmann

# SCRAPS OF FAITH

PHOTO BY CHRISTA MCCONNELL

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*God works miracles using just about anything.*

**BRIAN R. CARLSON**

**G**od can work in miraculous ways, but even the mightiest of faith warriors might be a bit skeptical of how God could use a scrap of paper in the backyard of an Indiana home.

Harry Hartmann has dedicated his life to serving the Seventh-day Adventist Church in both publishing and pastoral ministries. He's also committed to keeping his yard clean.

"I usually make it a practice to pick up little pieces of paper and trash in my yard when I get home," Hartmann says.

On a recent afternoon he noticed a ripped piece of paper lying in his backyard and picked it up. It was wet from a rainstorm the day before, but upon closer inspection he noticed that it was half of a \$50 bill.

“I went inside and showed it to my wife,” Hartmann says. “Both of us felt like we should do something more with this if possible. Something more than just getting Taco Bell.”

Hartmann had been reading “Asking to Give,” a chapter from Ellen G. White’s *Christ’s Object Lessons*, and a particular statement came to mind: “Our prayers are not to be a selfish asking, merely for our own benefit. We are to ask that we may give. The principle of Christ’s life must be the principle of our lives.”<sup>1</sup>

With these lines in mind, he prayed that God would help him to find the other half of the \$50 bill, and if He did, Harry would donate that money to National Camps for Blind Children, a program of Christian Record Services.<sup>2</sup>

Hartmann has been a dedicated supporter of Christian Record Services ever since he spent a day at a blind camp and was impressed with the counselors and how they helped the campers have fun each summer.

### KEEPING A PROMISE

During the next week Hartmann talked to each of his neighbors to ask if they had lost any money. Nobody had. Then it happened. He found the other half of the \$50 bill in his yard—on the *opposite* side of the house from the original find.

True to his word, Harry took the two halves of the bill to the bank, deposited them, and wrote a check to Christian Record Services. He thought that was probably the end of the story, but it wasn’t. God had bigger plans.

Hartmann has been part of a regular prison ministry at Elkhart County Criminal Justice Complex for many years. One day he talked with a group of prisoners and told them about finding the \$50 bill. Curtis, an inmate, seemed to be paying close attention to the story and wanted to know more about Christian Record Services.

A short time later Harry received an email from the county jail saying that Curtis wanted to donate \$200 to blind camps. The next time he visited, Curtis verified that he wanted to help kids who are blind to have fun.

**“I like helping people and wanted to do something kind. I love to work for God and am just trying to do my part.”**

“It was a good story of how God works in mysterious ways,” Curtis said. “I love Harry, and I figured it would be a good way of using the money—for something good.”

### DOING OUR BEST TO SERVE

Curtis did have some money in savings, but inmates need special permission to send those funds outside of the prison system. Thanks to a few prayers, he finally got the permission he needed and sent the \$200 to Christian Record Services.

“I was reading this book that tells us that we should do our best to serve people,” Curtis said. “I like helping people and wanted to do something kind. I love to work for God . . . and am just trying to do my part.”

It started with half of a soggy \$50 bill in an Indiana backyard. Thanks to two men who listened when God gave them messages through their reading, it became a significant gift to help individuals who are blind at summer camps across the country. ♣

*For more information, visit [www.christianrecord.org](http://www.christianrecord.org), call 402-488-0981, or email [info@christianrecord.org](mailto:info@christianrecord.org). You can also request a card to share with someone who is legally blind at <http://bit.ly/CRSBshare>.*

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1900, 1941), p. 142.

<sup>2</sup> <https://christianrecord.org>

**Brian R. Carlson** is the digital media manager for Christian Record Services in Lincoln, Nebraska.



# GOD BROUGHT US OUT

**ANN E. SLAUGHTER**





**M**oving is stressful, even under the best of circumstances. Try doing what we did—moving out of New York City during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **GETTING THERE**

In late March 2020 my husband became extremely ill and spent 10 days in the hospital with COVID-19. Once he was home and had recovered most of his strength and much of the 30 pounds he had lost, we finally, in June, drove out of the Bronx on our quest to find a house in or near Warren, Ohio. We had been searching online at various real estate sites for more than five years, and the time had come. We were preapproved for a certain amount and knew what we needed in a house. The real estate agent had listings to show us, and I had added a few that looked promising, according to photographs and descriptions.

Driving through Pennsylvania, we encountered something we had never anticipated. It was but one more pandemic-inspired crisis: severely limited access to restrooms, because of COVID-19 restrictions. We felt more desperate than ever as we were rejected, rather callously, one more time. Then our good God intervened, as we saw a hospital nearby, and approached with hope that the people there would be more considerate.

Porta potties! Have you ever praised the Lord for a porta potty? We sure did, as the guard in the lobby pointed us to the porta potties not far from the front entrance. It gave us a new perspective on celebrating God's goodness to His children.

Driving from the Bronx to our friends' home in Ohio proved to be an all-day trip, a tiring proposition that takes from us much more than many realize: the muscle exertion involved in sitting through long hours doesn't get counted as work, but for our bodies, it is. A recent article in *Science ABC* ("Travel Fatigue: Why Does Traveling Tire You Out?") states that our brain sends a stream of messages to our muscles about keeping us in

proper posture while traveling. The small movements our muscles must constantly be making to help us sit right are a taxing effort that tires them out over a trip as long as ours.' Falling into bed after a whole day's exhaustion brought great relief to muscles that had overworked themselves just trying to keep us sitting right! We could taste a Solomonic truth that night in our friends' basement bedroom suite: "The sleep of a laboring man is sweet" (Eccl. 5:12). Tomorrow, Monday, would be another day, the day our search would begin.

### SEEKING AND FINDING

Has house hunting ever made you wonder about heaven? Will we just live in quarters provided? Will everyone have to build their own house, or will it be up to heaven-certified contractors? We didn't think we were in heaven, of course, since the first seven houses our real estate agent showed us were still totally underwhelming: dingy or water-damaged basements, with a smell of mold; steep, narrow stairways with no rails to hold on to going up and down; ugly kitchens of weird configurations. I could not imagine living in any of them. Maybe I'd have to blame our modest price range!

And then we saw it! A darling little gray house—one-story, finished basement, nicely painted inside—that we both instantly recognized was "the one." And our price range was not at fault after all, thank God. We saw one more house just because it was scheduled, but our God had already performed His miracle for us. Now it was time for the avalanche of paperwork, and getting all things ready for a mid-July closing date.

Our two-week vacation ended, we returned to our Bronx apartment to discover how much stuff we actually had to pack and move, the complications of moving, and the steadily climbing amount it all would cost: a broker charges a fee, then passes the client on to a moving line that affixes their own fee. A smaller van shuttles belongings from a home in a small street to a location outside the city; then the items are reloaded onto a large van that will take everything to its ultimate destination.

### MOVING: A MATTER OF MONEY

Movers must be paid. The moving broker's charges kept climbing with each call until it was

\$3,000 above the original quote. Added to that were the inspection fees, the electrical work that had to be done before we moved in, and other unforeseen expenses. Our savings were flying out the window at great velocity. We tried to keep costs down by inviting men from the church to help pack our hundreds of books. When the stores ran out of the right-size boxes, we had to buy larger ones to pack the books. It made for boxes of greater weight that were decidedly more unwieldy. The movers would later moan at the very sight of them when they arrived to start their work.

I requested funds from my 401k to pay our closing costs, and happily awaited the check. The representative indicated there would be no problem getting it to me. However, a couple days later he called again to advise that my particular 401k did not allow any deductions until after retirement. He was highly apologetic, but that was all. I, meanwhile, needed those funds for the closing. I was already aware that the finances for getting us moved were going to be screamingly tight. And I had tried to prepare for it, as well as for our approaching stage of life: I had been paying off debt as fast as possible so that we could have a better cash flow in retirement; during the past half year or so, I had concentrated on building up our savings. But I did not have enough there to pay closing costs, movers, and everything and everyone else involved.

The news about unavailable money, my own money, was my last straw: I broke down in tears on the phone. Did my tears move the agent? Did his ear hear whispers through my tears? Perhaps they came from one of those ministering angels the book of Hebrews mentions, that God sends out to work for us (Heb. 1:14). One of them may tell me himself when I get to glory. What I do know is that the poor man, having had to bear with my weeping, promised to call my firm and see what could be done, if anything. I knew we would need income from my work for a while longer. Had that not been the case, I would probably have retired on the spot.

But though I could not retire, I could still count on my God. He has promised to supply all our need according to His inexhaustible riches, through our Lord Jesus Christ (Phil. 4:19). And once again He found a way forward for us.

Our first miracle was His provision of a house.

This new miracle would be financial. My 401k representative called again. The news was that the administrator of my plan had agreed to change the no-withdrawal clause so that I could access the necessary funds. And though that introduced a new challenge, timing, I had no need to worry. God was clearly in charge. He had moved people to grant an exception that made the funds we needed available to me. He would surely get the check to me on time. And so it was, thanks to UPS overnight delivery, that I had my check in hand the day before we drove back to Ohio for the closing. Tight timing? Another miracle, I say, from my gracious Father in heaven.

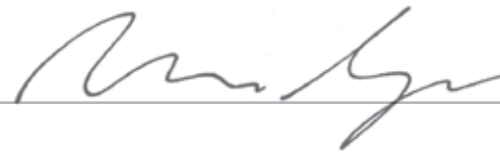
### ADVANCING AND REFLECTING

The movers arrived the Monday after I retired. Their leader added to his moaning about the heavy book boxes lining the front hallway, some groaning about the costs being greater still, given everything that still needed to be packed. I wondered if the broker had even informed him of the information we had already provided, since he went over everything that day as if for the first time.

Finally, at midnight on an exhausting Wednesday, with everything boxed, taped, and labeled, we drove away from our apartment. The movers had already left, their leader's final act being to have me sign the paperwork and pay the first of two installments. My hand shook as I signed—for an amount thousands of dollars higher than I had been told. But what else could I do at that point? This man had all our belongings in his possession. I signed, and continued to trust that God would figure something out so that I could hand over the second installment when the van arrived at our new home on Friday.

Several hours later, in a motel just over the New Jersey border into Pennsylvania, tired beyond sleep, I lay awake trying to figure out how to deal with that next installment. After all my God had already done—giving us a house that filled our fantasies; facilitating previous payments; showing up right on time. I am chagrined to admit that I lay there, after all His gracious doings, in full panic mode, tears falling onto my pillow. But then His voice came. His still, quiet voice, reminding me of kindnesses my brain had not properly registered, financial gifts that would fill in all the blanks and make everything possible, enabling us to cover all

# I signed and continued to trust that God would figure something out.

x 

our costs, fulfill all our financial obligations, and breathe a sigh of relief that was simultaneously a prayer of gratitude to my good God who did for my loved husband and me what He did for the psalmist thousands of years before: "He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps" (Ps. 40:2). Mine was not a pit of slime and/or mud, but without the extra \$3,000 from our church family, the generosity of the firm that (a) changed the 401k clause and (b) presented me with a retirement bonus; without all that and the gift from my two lovely bosses, our move would have been impossible to pull off. None of these was a given.

As a Christian believer, I consider all these acts as direct blessings from a gracious God who brought us to New York for His own purposes in 2007 and worked miracle after miracle to get us out again, during a pandemic, because He needed us elsewhere. His gracious provisions, despite the malicious scamming of some schemers, brought us, whole, to the "pleasant pastures" where we are now. No, it's not our forever home. But His provisions for us here encourage us all the more to trust His Word about a far more pleasant moving experience He has planned for us, and soon: "Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also . . ." ♣

\*<https://www.scienceabc.com/humans/travel-fatigue-why-does-traveling-tire-you-out.html>

**Ann E. Slaughter**, a recently retired paralegal from Warren, Ohio, enjoys writing and editing.



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# GRACE AND TRUTH

I know how many of you feel. Or at least I think I do.

As a Christian committed to God's Word, you're concerned to your core about the culture. As if the rapid shifts on sexuality weren't enough, now it's gender fluidity. Where does it stop? Your head's spinning . . . and for many years your heart's been hurting. Abortion rights: What about the rights of the most vulnerable of all?

I share these same convictions. Who can read the first two chapters of Genesis and not grieve over what humanity has done—is doing—to the image of God?

Jesus wasn't afraid to speak words of truth. To the wayward Samaritans He said, "You . . . worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22).<sup>\*</sup> To the secular Sadducees, Jesus shook His head: "You do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" (Matt. 22:29).

Jesus was filled with truth; Jesus was also filled with grace. Jesus was holy; Jesus was also kind.

For many months I've been praying a simple prayer: to keep a soft heart in an ever-hardening world. The language of humanity has gotten so harsh, so divisive, that I can't help wondering: Has our love grown cold? What troubles me most is the increasing coldness of Christians, especially on social media. Are we Christians still caring? still compassionate? Have we become so afraid to align with the wrong group politically that we're afraid to speak, or post, a kind word personally?

Recently I was reminded of a childhood memory: driving in the Subaru with my fun, young mom who was excitedly telling me about a new song on the radio called "Ebony and Ivory." As Mom explained about a Black man and a White man singing together, like keys on a piano, I felt myself sharing the joy and tenderness in her heart.

I've missed this joy and tenderness within my wider spiritual family.

There was another group of people Jesus wasn't afraid to confront: those closest to truth but furthest from grace. Jesus knew the sharp minds and the cold hearts of the Pharisees, and He called them on it—again and again. The story Jesus told about a gasping Jewish man rescued by a Samaritan made it clear: unbelievers can, in fact, be more caring than believers.

But it doesn't have to be this way. Over time Jesus' followers felt their hearts soften—including a young disciple once eager to call down fire on Samaritans, and a brilliant Pharisee who would one day write the love chapter.

We too can feel our hearts soften again. We Christians can stop mimicking the world and look to Christ, who loved the world.

"We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).<sup>†</sup>

\* All Bible texts are from the New International Version.

**Andy Nash** (andynash5@gmail.com) is a pastor and author who leads study tours to the Holy Land.

THE LIFE  
OF FAITH  
ANDY  
NASH



**FOR MANY MONTHS  
I'VE BEEN PRAYING A  
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PETER N. LANDLESS

ZENO L. CHARLES-MARCEL

## The God Gene

*Fact or fancy?*

**Q:** Is there a “God gene”?

**A:** To answer appropriately, we’ll review the apparent origin of the concept by summarizing the major themes and hypotheses that geneticist Dean Hamer used in his 2004 book *The God Gene: How Faith Is Hardwired Into Our Genes*.\*

Hamer posits that high-level consciousness and spirituality are affected by brain chemicals (monoamines) that are linked to the gene called vesicular monoamine transporter 2 (VMAT2). The book’s content and the author’s own comments betray the title’s truthfulness. Hamer admits that this concept is “a gross oversimplification.” His hypothesis is that spirituality is an instinct, is influenced by our genes, and that VMAT2 is a minor one of many such influencers.

VMAT2, he postulates, contributes to the sensation associated with mystical experiences, such as “feeling you are in the presence of God.” His definition of spirituality is akin to the charismatic description of “being in the spirit,” and he uses the self-transcendence construct as its basis. The varying levels of monoamine neurotransmitters influenced by VMAT2 make it more or less likely that one would “feel” spiritual. His book was based on his study of 1,000 individuals but was neither peer-reviewed (scrutinized by other scientists for validity) nor replicated.

Research among twins suggests that genes may play a role in human “self-transcendence” or “self-forgetful experience, identification with nature, and spiritual acceptance.” Self-transcendence has between 24 and 85 percent hereditary overlap, while the effects of upbringing and environment were weaker. Specific religious belief, such as believing in the Creator God of the Bible, displayed no hereditary basis. Religion

is therefore hypothesized to be sociocultural rather than genetic.

Because the enjoyment we get from any activity is modulated by brain neurochemicals, VMAT2 may influence a person’s enjoyment of religious activities. There’s no credible scientific evidence that manipulating this gene interferes with one’s capacity to believe in, know, love, or commit to God.

In summary, the “God gene” is an idea that human spirituality has an innate genetic component. Characterizing VMAT2 as the God gene is

unfounded. VMAT2 does not make people believe in God. Hamer’s hypothesis is that humans inherit a predisposition to be spiritual—to reach out and look for a higher being.

The Bible teaches that all humans have a spiritual nature and that God’s Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are His (see Rom. 8:16). So our “spirituality” is as much who we are as is our “physicality.” Given that our complex physiology and biochemistry cannot be reduced to the effect of one gene, the notion of imposing this ‘God gene’ idea on our spiritual nature is unthinkable!

VMAT2 may not be “the” God gene or even “a” God gene. Nonetheless, God is the Creator of genetics and monoamines and VMAT2. The wonder of genetics itself reveals the handiwork of a wise, powerful, and gracious Creator in whom we live and move and have our very being (see Acts 17:28). We’re not to be fearful or deceived. God invites us to know Him personally, and Jesus, whom He sent to give us abundant and eternal life. ♣

\*Dean H. Hamer, *The God Gene: How Faith Is Hardwired Into Our Genes* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Pub. Group, 2004).

**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.

“Spirituality”  
is as much who  
we are as is our  
“physicality.”

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# THE “UNIMPORTANT” MISSION

**D**ear God, what would You have me do? I prayed.

Having left my career behind as I tried to get a newly diagnosed illness under control, I wanted to be sure I was serving God in my downtime.

*Give people rides.*

*God, I argued, I have talents. Isn't there a writing project I can do?*

*Give people rides.*

That was what my husband and I were doing. Every week I took my sister shopping. Every day I picked up several kids from school, bringing at least one of them home with me until his parents got off work. And sometimes I even took kids to school in the morning.

It was probably because of our family's full-sized van that we were called on for ride-giving, but I wasn't comfortable driving the van; so when my husband wasn't available, I was giving rides in our beat-up, retired Forest Service jeep.

Then when our church secretary sent a mass email looking for someone to take a community member to evangelistic meetings, I was hesitant to respond. *Certainly someone who lives closer or who has a nicer vehicle would be better for this job*, I thought. But still I replied, "If no one else is available, we can do it."

In accepting the task, we soon befriended Tammie, who was struggling to make ends meet on her disability income.

We took her to every meeting and were encouraged when she commented that she believed Adventists had the truth. After the meetings ended, our friendship continued for years. We often provided her with transportation to various places:

food banks, rummage sales, grocery stores. But only once did she ask for a ride to church, and several times, with various excuses, she declined our offer to join us for church.

After some time we lost contact. Feeling like a failure, I wondered if we'd overstepped.

Years passed, and my health improved. Finally I received what I thought was a more important call, as I was invited to be the editor of *Guide* magazine.

With a frenzy our family packed up and got our house ready to sell. There wasn't time to attend that year's evangelistic meetings, but we made a Friday night appearance.

A friend tapped me on the shoulder. "Lori, there's someone here who wants to say hi."

I turned to see Tammie reaching out for an embrace.

"I'm so glad to see you!" I kept repeating, and she confirmed the joy of the moment was mutual.

But nothing could compare to the joy the next week would bring when the pastor called the baptismal candidates forward. There stood Tammie, ready to commit to membership. And as I choked back tears, I realized the most important commission I'd ever been given was the one I'd argued with God about.

*Give people rides.*

The task had been simple and the fruits hadn't been immediate, but I'd done what God had requested—and that had been enough. ♣

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Lori Futcher is editor of *Guide* magazine.

WITNESSING  
FOR  
INTROVERTS  
LORI FUTCHER



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## HANDLE WITH CARE

From paupers to pundits to preachers, reflecting on the fragility of human life has historically been a hackneyed enterprise. Add to that a teaspoon of nuclear weapons, a pinch of economic disarray, and a sprinkle of lingering pandemic, and it may easily turn into a platitude. Being human is, the truism goes, being fragile.

Our whole existence could potentially be upended with no warning or time to prepare. In the words of writer A. Manette Ansay: “At any moment the sky can open and drown us, the earth can open and swallow us . . . Our bodies can betray us, the

accidents and atrocities, the missteps and the misunderstandings.”<sup>1</sup> Even in the best-case scenario, Moses prays, our “boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (Ps. 90:10).

If we ever had second thoughts about Moses’ existential gloom, the past 20 months may have significantly contributed to changing our minds. Too many relatives and friends lost; a whiff of death seems to hound us to a point too close for comfort.

### A PURPOSE FOR FRAGILITY

There seems to be a redeeming quality, however, in being aware of our fragility. Perhaps it is why God commanded Israel to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:33-43). Once the Israelites settled in Canaan, spending seven days in a fragile booth was certainly a hassle. But it was in such a state of precariousness—or one brought by sorrow, disease, or bankruptcy—when humans seem to separate the fleeting from the essential.

With God, a state of fragility engenders untapped sturdiness and a renewed

acknowledgment of the divine. “Unless the Lord had helped me, I would soon have settled in the silence of the grave,” the psalmist wrote (Ps. 94:17, NLT).<sup>2</sup> “When doubts filled my mind, your comfort gave me renewed hope and cheer” (verse 19, NLT).

### FINDING JOY IN FRAGILITY

Finding strength in God does not overlook our plight this side of Paradise. We serve a God who “knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust” (Ps. 103:14, NLT). But even in our chronic state of unremitting brittleness, He calls us to thrive in His power.

When instructing the Israel of old about the feasts, God commanded, “You shall rejoice before the Lord your God” (Deut. 16:11). Rejoicing is generally a natural consequence of an inner state of happiness. It is not usually the product of a command; it cannot be enforced. Yet God called Israel to rejoice.

Finding joy in fragility does not deny our actual state but, by faith, manages to see beyond. It is based on God’s faithfulness to His creation, not on our human devising. It is “why we never give up” (2 Cor. 4:16, NLT). Because “though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day . . . We fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever” (verses 16-18, NLT).


No bankruptcy or pandemic can ever obscure such a cemented hope. ♣

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *Sister* (New York: Avon Books, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Bible texts credited to NLT are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

**Marcos Paseggi** is senior news correspondent of *Adventist Review*.

**FINDING JOY IN FRAGILITY DOES NOT DENY OUR ACTUAL STATE BUT, BY FAITH, MANAGES TO SEE BEYOND.**

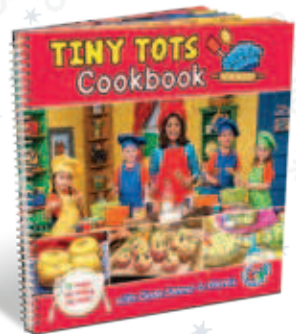


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