

# ADVENTIST REVIEW

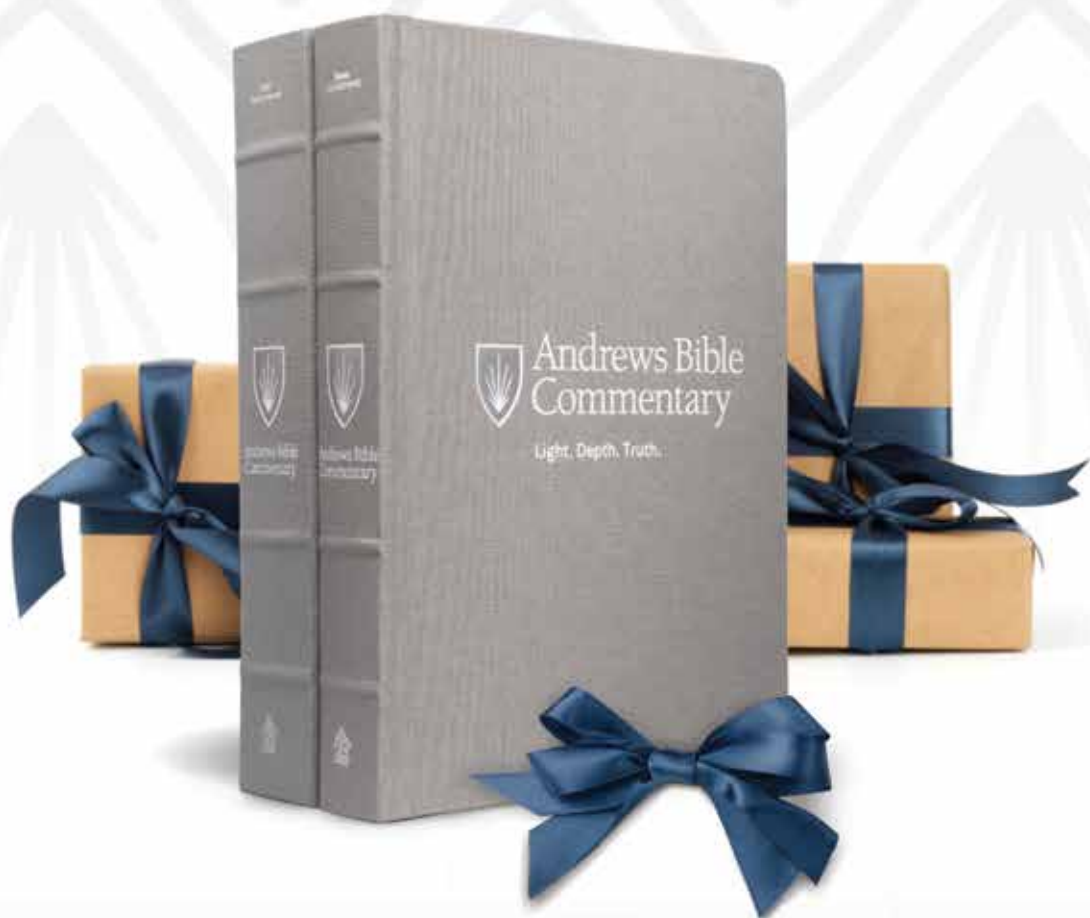
**MARCH 2023: ATTACHED TO GOD + ONE  
CONSPIRACY THEORY ADVENTISTS CAN  
SUPPORT + THE CHANCE TO LIVE + TWELVE HOURS  
IN THE VALLEY OF DEATH**

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THE MOST SHARED  
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ADVENTISTREVIEW.ORG  
LAST MONTH:

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**A Heartfelt Plea to My Fellow Adventists**  
by Janel Tasker

# 2



**Crystallizing Angels**  
by Justin Kim

# 3



**Rooted in Our Collective Heart**  
by Wilona Karimabadi

# 4



**America in Prophecy?**  
**More Than Ever, Thank You**  
by Clifford Goldstein

# 5



**Flying Witnesses**  
by Roger Coon with Patti Guthrie

# MEET JESUS **HERE**

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

Collegedale, TN





*The conundrum of the modern church is not in fighting against the power of secular culture, but in the adoption of dominant scripts into the church.*

## WYSIWYG

**P**ronounced “wizywig,” it was a novel concept in the 1980s. With computers becoming mainstream, developers employed a user-friendlier model in which what one saw on a clunky square monitor was what one got; hence the titular acronym for “What You See Is What You Get.” Living now in an era of custom-sized thin touchscreens, tablets, and other technical devices, we may think this idea to be simple and obvious. But in the primitive era of inputting into black MS-DOS prompts it was, and proved to be, revolutionary.

The spiritual life also follows similar rules of WYSIWYG. Just as simple and obvious, what you see is what you get. Beyond the mere visual, however, it is what we allow into our mind, heart, thinking, and inner self that determines who we are.

Theologian Walter Brueggemann explains more in his 19 theses about the Bible in the church.\* Everyone lives by a script they may not be cognizant of. This script was written by different combinations of metanarratives, stories, and/or value systems. Whether Marxism, capitalism, political ideologies, culture, media, favorite author, or your family’s dinner table, they range from giving yourself a sense of purpose,

security, and meaning to how to understand the world. They are therapeutic, in offering a solution to our pains and troubles; technological, in assuming that anything can be fixed by human ingenuity; and consumerist, in assuming acquiring more of this as better. The world is militant to maintain this system and its hope to deliver humanity.

As alluded to by the second angel of Revelation 14, these scripts have failed us. History is ripe with evidence of their malfunction. What is needed is to detach and disengage from them. An alternative is offered in the counterscript of Scripture. We enter this counterscript by baptism, where we renounce the former script and look to Christ to embody the ultimate source of therapy, to eclipse human ingenuity, and to put our consumerism to shame. What results is the richest and most complete sense of purpose and identity.

The conundrum of the modern church is not in fighting against the power of secular culture, but in the adoption of dominant scripts into the church. Every age has its fashionable script and presents its customized temptations to the church. Rather than baptism being an exit and entry point,

we baptize these scripts *as* the counterscript because each age is offended by some attribute of Scripture. Our minds refuse to let go of our sense of human incompetence, assume that human ingenuity still has some merit, and are addicted to these habits of consumption.

As a result, there isn’t a difference. We compromise the therapy of the counterscript. This results in the same failure of issues in understanding self, our relationships, and our purpose in this world. Cloaked as Christ’s religion, but consisting of the world’s scripts, these offer no revolution nor transformation. Some even become indifferent to this inconsistency: *Laodicea*.

The true counterscript has been manifested by the character, the charm, and the person of Jesus. He came to manifest genuine WYSIWYG. Though simple and obvious, undeniably what you see is what you get. The more we see and input Jesus Christ, His Word, His life, His love, His teachings, and His Spirit, the more we will see His values, His solution, His purpose, and His output in our daily lives. Simply said, the more of Jesus we see on the inside, the more of Jesus we see on the outside. 🍂

\* <https://www.religion-online.org/article/counterscript>

As a lifelong Adventist, I know how easy it is to get sidetracked, to get sucked into majoring in minors.

—BRUCE MCCLAY



## ROOTED

Many thanks to Wilona Karimabadi for her article. She rephrased our beliefs in less scholarly language that reaches into the heart. To know that the privilege of prayer connects us with our three-in-one God is an awesome thought that was only touched on briefly. Perhaps that deserves more emphasis, especially for new believers.

**Ruth Wright Hoffer**

Thank you for the article on the 28 Fundamental Beliefs. As a lifelong Adventist, I know how easy it is to get sidetracked, to get sucked into majoring in minors. It's good to be reminded of what counts and to be rooted again in the fundamentals.

**Bruce McClay**

*Battle Ground, Washington*

Having been in youth ministry most of my career, I especially appreciate Wilona Karimabadi's wonderful "In Conversation" add-ons to the theological altiloquence of the 28 Fundamental Beliefs (February 2023). I'm currently reading her add-ons to my almost-teen grandson. Truth be told, though, it's not just Gen Z that is drawn to conversational, relatable, linguistically approachable writing. It's the style Jesus took with His hearers, and if we want to share His message, we would do well to emulate His approach.

**Cindy Tutsch**

*Yakima, Washington*

## MORE THAN FRIENDS

I was blessed reading Marvene Thorpe-Baptiste's article in the *Review*, "More Than Friends." When in crisis you find out who are your real friends. Not everyone has friends as you described. I was gravely ill once, and I called my "best friend" to support me on this journey. She told me she couldn't do it and to never call her again. This year my husband had kidney cancer surgery. We recently changed our membership to another church an hour away. This is why the elders drove an hour away to come to the hospital to anoint him. It was such a blessing. I wish all churches and people lived the Christian life. Wouldn't that be something and Jesus would come sooner to take us home. Thanks again for your message.

**Anne Fergusson**

## A HOLY SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH

I read Janel Tasker's article on her friends' search for a home



I am so looking forward to Jesus coming so we can see Rose and many others again.

—GLENDA JUDD

church in Canada with shock. It almost strains one's credibility to read that her friends could not find a normal, Holy Spirit-filled church. Certainly, when we have a visitor in church, we need to respond appropriately, trying to meet the needs of the visitor, and not talk "shop" or politics, or spout some particular point of view. Thankfully, in all my visits to other Adventist churches in the past 30 years, I have never encountered any of these types of incidents. Nor have I ever heard a request to stop and pray ignored.

**Douglas Abbott**

*Union City, California*

## 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.

## FROM FACEBOOK AND ADVENTISTREVIEW.COM

### **PATIENT'S PROCEDURE CLOSES A HOLE IN HER TRANSPLANTED HEART**

Congratulations on the success of the procedure. Brilliant doctors, rock star patient.

**Elle Rempos**

### **ADVENTIST WOMEN'S LUNCHEON CHALLENGES NEARLY 70 ATTENDEES**

Dear Lord, bless Adventist women's ministry in the world.

**Godson Peter**

### **EXHIBITION FEATURING ARTIFACTS FROM ANCIENT ISRAEL OPENS SOON**

I would very much like to see it!

**Victoria Arakawa**

### **FORMER ADVENTIST LEADER ROSE OTIS DIES AT 82**

Sorry to hear of this loss. She inspired me to take missionary trips. God comfort her family.

**Cathy Seals**

Hugs and prayers for the family. She has touched so many lives. We all miss Rose. I still have at least two of the devotional books that she was in charge of putting together. Even to this day I still love reading the women's devotional book. Some of the

women who wrote the devotionals have become friends. I am so looking forward to Jesus coming so we can see Rose and many others again.

**Glenda Judd**

### **PUERTO RICO UNIVERSITY LEADS WITH RESPIRATORY-CARE PROGRAM**

This is awesome. May God continue to bless all of those involved. All glory to God!

**Sonia Pearman**

### **HOW A MINISTRY PARTNERS WITH THE CHURCH FOR MISSION**

This is so good. There is a great need for this, especially in South Sudan.

**William Evangelist**

I see you, Elmer Barbosa! Love to all the great people at Maranatha!

**Chris Webb**

### **"IT'S ALWAYS ABOUT GOD," ADVENTIST TANZANIAN DIPLOMAT SAYS**

Very inspiring. Thank you for sharing with us your firsthand experience with God. Indeed, it is always about God.

**Emanuel Henry**



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**“The timely, compassionate, relative, and consistent outreach of the Tottenham Lighthouse church is a wonderful example to the watching world.”**

**—Sharon Platt-McDonald, p. 15**

# NEWS



G. Alexander Bryant, North American Division president, gives the first keynote at the opening general session of the “Replenish” Adventist Ministries Convention on January 8. PHOTO: PIETER DAMSTEEGT

## LEADERS REPLENISH AT 2023 ADVENTIST MINISTRIES CONVENTION

**NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION EVENT FOCUSES ON REST AND RENEWAL.**

**KIMBERLY LUSTE MARAN, NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION, AND ADVENTIST REVIEW**

**T**onight I want to spend a few minutes talking about God’s oasis for His people. It is not a place. It’s a person, and His name is Jesus,” G. Alexander Bryant, president of the North American Division (NAD) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, said on January 8 at the opening session of the 2023 Adventist Ministries Convention held in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Bryant continued, “In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus says, ‘Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me;

for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light’ [KJV].

“This is an invitation to God, through Jesus, for His people. And that invitation is for calm. . . . He asks us first to ‘come.’ . . . [Jesus] is the first place that we can retreat that brings peace in difficult and troubled situations.”

The three-day convention, starting with a reception and evening general session on January 8 and running through the morning of January 11, featured the “Replenish”

juice bar, exhibit booths, a variety of seminar tracks, and morning hikes. The notion of rest and replenishment also spilled into the six general sessions of the ministries convention.

“When we’re tired, something about us changes,” Lola Moore Johnston, senior pastor of the Restoration Praise Center in Maryland, said as she described in her keynote Elijah’s situation on the mount, and in the wilderness when he was in hiding. “This depletion takes us to a place of finally giving ourselves the truth about who we are and what

## “If You don’t move the mountain, I trust that there’s a way through.”

—Erica Jones

we believe. This type of fatigue that we do not know how to remedy on our own can be used by God.

“Elijah had to learn to rely on God, to trust in His power—and this is a lesson for leaders today,” Moore Johnston continued. “I think that God allows [us to be] in this state so that our off-camera selves might be exposed and healed.”

Each general session featured two keynote addresses; two song service blocks with the praise team from the Crosswalk Seventh-day Adventist Church in Redlands, California; a short historical session with Michael W. Campbell, director of NAD Archives, Statistics, and Research, and Matthew J. Lucio, pastor of the Peoria Seventh-day Adventist Church in Illinois and host of the Advent History podcast; the presentation of ministry awards; and prayer time.

### LESSONS FROM EARLY LEADERS

The sessions kicked off with Lucio and Campbell hosting a short segment titled “Historical Replenish,” during which the two shared interesting tidbits from Adventist history described in modern terms. In one of the segments, while talking about the difficulties James White was encountering in early 1878 as plans developed for the “Dime Tabernacle” in Battle Creek, Michigan, Campbell said that the Whites decided they needed some rest and relaxation, to which Lucio rejoined, “So they got a nice little Airbnb house in Colorado.”

“It was incredible for James White—it was only when he stopped

working and had some peace, some quiet with beautiful, natural views, that he had the space to kind of recharge spiritually, because he was burnt out,” Lucio added.

“It was called the ‘grove experience,’ with James and Ellen going out into nature and hiking to a grove of trees. They just took all their frustrations and laid their souls before God, and had this kind of reversion experience,” Campbell said.

“Basically, the ‘check engine light’ is coming on, saying, ‘Something’s wrong; we need to attend to your soul.’ . . . They went and got that spiritual tune-up,” Lucio said.

### KEYNOTE HIGHLIGHTS

During the convention other speakers addressed various topics, including the discouragement, burnout, and crises that affect ministry leaders and how leaders need to take time to replenish spiritually, physically, and emotionally. For some it’s solitude that is needed—time to study the Word of God, pray, and reflect and renew their faith and commitment. For some it is time with family and friends. For others it is enjoying music or engaging in humor and laughter.

“Some of our church members may believe that because we are working for the Lord, we don’t have to deal with the challenges they face,” Elden Ramirez, executive secretary of the Lake Union Conference, said. “That is not the case. As you know, we have challenges that we face in our roles, we have

challenges that we face with our families and in our work. . . . We have those moments when we are facing challenges that are causing our flame to start going down.”

After sharing about the many challenges she faced in 2022, Erica Jones, NAD Women’s Ministries assistant director, explained, “It’s a choice to say to God, ‘I don’t get this. And [life] doesn’t always seem fair. But I trust You because You can see what I can’t. And if You don’t move the mountain, I trust that there’s a way through.’”

### TIME TO REPLENISH

Wendy Eberhardt, vice president of ministries for the NAD and convention organizer, said that as she was working in preparing for the event, she remembered the moment in the Gospels that Christ sent the disciples out. “They were so excited and exuberant with spreading the gospel. Jesus said to them, ‘Come away; come be with Me, we need to be together.’ It’s like they just needed to regroup, needed to breathe. And Jesus knew that,” Eberhardt said.

She continued, “We have had to stretch ourselves tremendously during this pandemic, to continue to do ministry. Our leaders had to learn how to get beyond the masks and separation and isolation, and I felt the Lord telling me that we needed to ‘come away’—to replenish through meeting and talking to other ministry leaders, have some time for silence and solitude, and just replenish.”



North Peru Union Mission leaders answer requests for clarification from Maranatha leaders as they discuss the particulars of an initiative to build dozens of churches.

PHOTO: MARCOS PASEGGI

## HOW A MINISTRY PARTNERS WITH THE CHURCH FOR MISSION

**MARANATHA AND ADVENTIST LEADERS' SYNERGY MAKES A DIFFERENCE FOR THE KINGDOM.**

MARCOS PASEGGI, ADVENTIST REVIEW

**F**riday, December 9, 2022, was more than just a regular day in Lima, Peru. For one, it was a holiday. But it was also a day that the political protests of previous days seemed to be turning for the worse across the country, including in the nation's capital.

And then the FIFA World Cup in Qatar was reaching crunch time, and across the streets of Lima, thousands were looking forward to the Brazil match that was about to start.

In the church offices of the South Peru Union Mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, however, there was a different kind of activity. Adventist leaders from the two church unions in Peru were meeting with the visiting leaders of Maranatha Volunteers International, a supporting ministry of the Adventist Church.

The plan was to discuss the infrastructure needs of the Adventist Church in Peru and find ways that

Maranatha can support erecting new church and school buildings across the country.

Since its beginnings in 1969, Maranatha has supported initiatives in Peru on many occasions. On December 9, Maranatha leaders were in Lima on their way to Ica, a few hours south, to attend a school inauguration on December 11. But before that, Maranatha leaders wanted to discuss a new plan to build at least 100 church buildings and assist in some school-building projects across the country.

"We are very thankful for all that Maranatha has done through the years," South Peru Union president Enzo Chávez said. "But the needs are still many, and we haven't stopped dreaming."

As in dozens of other countries of the so-called Global South, the Adventist Church has grown substantially in members. Most members are not well off, however, and the physical facilities often lag

behind the need. It is in cases like these that Maranatha steps up with a plan to construct buildings that, in turn, help the church to keep growing. "Maranatha builds churches but also helps fill those churches," a leader explained.

### HOW MARANATHA WORKS

Since the requests Maranatha receives are usually well above the volume that the ministry can respond to, its board considers each project request carefully for need, the overall impact on the community, and resources for long-term maintenance and support.

Throughout the process Maranatha works in tune with the elected leaders of the Adventist Church organization. The typical process goes like this:

Maranatha receives requests for assistance from regional Adventist church leaders. Requests can range from a few dozen to hundreds of structures within a country. The

## The [Maranatha] model allows local members to feel the project also belongs to them.

ministry then assesses potential construction sites selected by regional leaders and also the project logistics (costs, safety, accessibility, and so on) for the country.

Once a country has been accepted for Maranatha projects, Maranatha begins fundraising for the requested structures, preparing sites for construction, and organizing mission trips for volunteers. Where appropriate, volunteers visit to help build structures and interact with the local community. Maranatha field staff builds structures in areas where accessibility or safety could be an issue.

After volunteers leave, Maranatha field staff conduct the finishing work on the structures. This can range from finishing blockwork to painting. Then the property is handed over to the local church leadership for use.

### PROJECT FUNDING

Maranatha's operations are divided into construction project costs and operation-related costs. Donations from private supporters fund Maranatha's construction projects. Donors can choose to give to a general fund that goes where it's needed most or give to a country effort. There are also specific programs that make it easy for people to give.

Independent business investments and private donors fund most of Maranatha's operational expenses, such as marketing, salaries, and other overhead.

While Maranatha supports the

mission of the Adventist Church, the ministry does not receive money from the corporate church organization, but only from private donors. It is not uncommon for people who are not Adventist Church members to find out about the ministry of Maranatha and decide to support various initiatives.

### LOCAL BUY-IN

For Maranatha, the buy-in of local church members and congregations is essential. It is usually more feasible for the ministry to support building projects that local members are committed to finishing, remodeling, or enlarging the basic structures funded by Maranatha. It's not uncommon for Maranatha to fund the foundation, pillars, and roof of a church building while the local congregation commits to erecting the walls and purchasing the furniture. Often local missions or conferences help cover the costs that Maranatha doesn't.

The model to be applied in Peru in 2023 has been used before, in Peru and elsewhere. Currently Maranatha is working in a dozen countries, including the Dominican Republic, India, Kenya, and Zambia, building churches and schools and drilling water wells.

"The model allows local members to feel the project also belongs to them," Maranatha leaders explained. "It also helps them to look forward and consider long-term maintenance and improvement of the building long after Maranatha has left."

### WORKING IN SYNERGY

On December 9 at the Lima meeting, the excitement was palpable. The ideas were many, and the prospects were promising, if challenging. After a couple of hours someone arrived and reported that Brazil had just been beaten out of the World Cup. After a few gasps the meeting went on. There seemed to be much more important business to attend to than a soccer match. Church buildings and schools were at stake, with the potential to reach many thousands for the kingdom.

Maranatha has decades of experience working in close connection with the elected leaders of the Adventist Church organization. If well executed, projects end up blurring—at least in the mind of those who benefit from them—the line between church organization and a supporting ministry such as Maranatha.

"It often happens that regular folk don't understand all the intricacies between regional church structure and a supporting ministry, which is, to some extent, outside the organization," a leader explained. "Church members or not, people don't know or don't consider important whether the official church or a particular ministry has built them a church or drilled a water well in the community. They say, 'Seventh-day Adventists came all the way to our community and helped us.' That's what counts. It's the name of the church that they retain. We take it as a compliment." 🍀



Church leaders participate in the inauguration ceremony of the new church offices of the Malaysia Union Mission.

PHOTO: SOUTHERN ASIA-PACIFIC DIVISION NEWS

## ADVENTIST CHURCH IN MALAYSIA INAUGURATES NEW OFFICES

CELEBRATION HIGHLIGHTS THE PROGRESS OF MISSION IN THE REGION.

**EDWARD RODRIGUEZ, SOUTHERN ASIA-PACIFIC DIVISION, AND ADVENTIST REVIEW**

**O**n December 5, 2022, a day of celebration began in the territory of the Malaysia Union Mission as its leaders, constituents, and members came to witness the opening of its new office building in Seremban 2, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia.

The Southeast Asia Union Mission was dissolved on December 13, and replaced by three new church territories: the Singapore Conference, the Southeastern Asia Union Mission, and the Malaysia Union Mission.

The inauguration was a reunion of former employees and friends. Leaders and past coworkers from nearby institutions attended the occasion to witness how the ministry is developing in Malaysia.

Malaysia Union Mission president Abel Bana shared some of what he called the “joyous beginnings” and “birth pains” of creating a union to further the mission in the country of Malaysia. “I still recall when we attempted to organize the union office in Malaysia,” Bana said. “God has helped us through the shift by giving us strength and endurance. We were able to refocus our mission thanks to the dissolution. This project has

taught us a lot. The road may be challenging, but God will always get us through.”

General Conference associate secretary Claude Richli, who supported the church as it started its mission in Malaysia, represented Seventh-day Adventist world leaders during the opening. To have a focused evangelistic plan to reach the Greater Southeast Asian region, Richli recalls having the vision to dissolve the Southeast Asia Union Mission. The Southeastern Asia Union Mission, which serves the deeply Buddhist nations of Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam, was established because of this desire, he said. The Singapore Conference is concerned mostly with cultures that are more secular, while the Malaysia Union Mission encompasses Malaysia and Brunei, both of which have a significant Muslim population.

The rationale behind the move is to be able to reach more people in this region, Richli reminded those attending the ceremony. “Our thought is not only about the breadth of the territory but the peculiarity in terms of its richness in culture,” Richli said. “God made all of these things happen in His

time. After seven years of preparation, all the prayers and hard work have finally culminated to where we are right now.”

The mission task is extensive and difficult in the area of the new offices. Muslims make up about 61 percent of Malaysia’s population, and the country’s laws strictly prohibit any attempt to engage them. Evangelistic endeavors have become more challenging because of increased religious intolerance in this area during the past 10 years. Finding a legitimate place of worship is another difficulty. Only 9 percent of people identify as Christians, and just 30 percent of people are receptive to conventional evangelism, church leaders said. “It is a true answer to prayer to have this facility house the new Malaysia Union Mission office, which will further the evangelistic effort in this area,” they said.

Roger Caderma and the other executives and directors of the Southern Asia-Pacific Division of the Adventist Church expressed their appreciation for the outstanding achievement made in this area. “Spiritual success depends not on how brilliant a leader’s vision is or how spiritually powerful a leader is, but entirely on the relationship of a leader to his people,” Caderma said.

Malaysia is also home to the Penang Adventist Hospital, a prestigious health institution in Malaysia that is known for bringing whole-person health to patients. ■



Robbie Berghan (right) with attendees at one of the Faith FM community dinners. PHOTO: ADVENTIST RECORD

## FAITH FM SHOWS STEADY GROWTH ACROSS AUSTRALIA

ADVENTIST MINISTRY BECAME A NETWORK OF 230 RADIO STATIONS.

MARITZA BRUNT, ADVENTIST RECORD, AND ADVENTIST REVIEW

When Faith FM station manager Michael Engelbrecht climbed onto the roof of his rusty shed in July 2008 to install a radio antenna, he had no idea the impact that a single radio channel would have.

Together with Paul Holton, who now works in infrastructure support for Faith FM, and several other members from the Moe and Traralgon Adventist churches in rural Victoria, Australia, they strung up guy-wire and mounted the radio mast. The church members prayed over the radio station, believing God could multiply their efforts to reach Australia with the gospel message.

And multiply He did.

Faith FM will celebrate 15 years of radio in Australia this year, with more than 230 radio stations across the country. While the ministry has grown steadily over 15 years, the past 12 months have seen exponential growth, starting with a network increase to cover an additional 1.5 million listeners across Australia.

Adventist Church conferences around Australia have invested in Faith FM, both in the areas of content creation and network expansion. The result has been an explosion in listener engagement,

specifically in requests for evangelistic resources such as literature and DVDs.

“The year 2022 was an incredible year of growth for us,” Faith FM content and promotions manager Robbie Berghan said. “During the past 18 months we made some very intentional changes to the local content we are creating for Faith FM, and this has really resonated with Australia.”

Of course, with such growth also came challenges. The small Faith FM team, already stretched to capacity, found themselves struggling to manage the surge of listener engagement. But thankfully, support from Australian donors has also been increasing. This allowed the Faith FM team to step out in faith, welcoming additional team members in part-time roles focusing specifically on supporting listeners and helping to create connections with Faith FM ambassadors.

At the same time, Faith FM has made deliberate efforts to connect with listeners.

“I was speaking to a woman after church who had been a long-time listener of Faith FM, and she was telling me which shows she loved,” Berghan said. “And then she started mentioning her favorite presenters, too, and she said,

‘Oh, I’d just love to meet them one day.’”

Her comment sparked an idea—the Faith FM community dinners. Commencing in the first half of 2022, listeners enjoyed good food and conversation with Faith FM presenters, with fantastic turnouts in several Australian cities.

“During the dinner a Faith FM presenter will give a quick 20-minute presentation expanding on their show’s theme,” Berghan said. “These presentations often give listeners bonus insights and material beyond their on-air show, leaving an appetite for more.”

While a large number of listeners attending the Faith FM dinners are from a secular background, Adventist Church members also attend and enjoy the community aspect. And with more listeners connecting, the team found there were, and continue to be, more opportunities for local church members to support Faith FM. This led to the Faith FM ambassador program.

“Radio is a powerful tool that educates and encourages people to make positive changes in their lives, but lasting changes, particularly in the spiritual area of life, most often occur in the context of personal relationships with real people,” Berghan said. “Faith FM ambassadors have the unique opportunity to form friendships that can connect listeners with people in their own community who can help to nurture a growing disciple in their walk with Jesus.”





A local church initiative in London seeks to assist those in the community struggling to pay bills and put food on the table.

PHOTO: BRITISH UNION CONFERENCE

## NATIONAL TV FEATURES UK LOCAL CHURCH'S COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE

CONGREGATION IS HELPING NEIGHBORS COUNTER THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS.

BRITISH UNION CONFERENCE NEWS AND ADVENTIST REVIEW

An ITV News broadcast on Sunday, January 8, featured the exceptional community outreach of the Tottenham Lighthouse Seventh-day Adventist Church in its response to the current cost-of-living crisis in the United Kingdom. Interviewed also was the local church pastor, Jude Jeanville, who shared the ethos for reaching out with tangible resources to those in need through the church's Food Hub.

### THE OUTREACH

Realizing the significant needs of individuals struggling to cope with soaring inflation, increased energy bills, and rising fuel costs, Jeanville shared a vision with his church members. He encouraged them to respond in practical ways to meet the daily needs of individuals unable to supply themselves and their families with essential items.

Each week more than 250 community residents visit the Tottenham Lighthouse church to receive essential resources for their sustenance. Recipients can receive fresh, dried, and tinned foods, a range of household items, and cash to assist them in purchasing additional necessities on two occasions.

The British Union Conference (BUC) Adventist Community Services donated 200 Advent booklets in gift bags, distributed to visitors

at the Food Hub on January 7. A cash donation (from the church) was enclosed in each booklet, making a total of £10,000 (about US\$12,300) given to the community. This gesture was a focal point of the ITV News coverage.

### THE IMPACT

BUC communication and media director Sam Davies reflected on the scope of the initiative. "During the past two years the consistent humanitarian outreach program by the Tottenham Lighthouse church has significantly impacted the community and the church, resulting in ITV News featuring their latest outreach endeavor in the news on Sunday," he said. "The good deeds have undoubtedly given the church a positive presence in its community, with increasing numbers continuing to turn to the church for their supply of groceries and other essential foodstuffs.

"Like many congregations within the BUC, Tottenham Lighthouse church has been encouraged to be community-focused," Davies said. "Churches and individuals who have pursued this call have seen engagements from their community members and leaders. . . . Enoch Kanagaraj, who started a similar program with the Stanborough Park church in Watford a few years ago,

attended the Tottenham Lighthouse event to lend a hand. His efforts at the Stanborough Park church have also been a testament to attracting the attention of community leaders who favor humanitarian endeavors."

Sharon Platt-McDonald, BUC Adventist Community Services director, agreed. "We saw, in that positive ITV News coverage, the British media broadcasting what they felt was a newsworthy report of interest and impact, important enough to share with the nation," she said. "The timely, compassionate, relative, and consistent outreach of the Tottenham Lighthouse church is a wonderful example to the watching world, a credit to our Seventh-day Adventist membership, and a witness of the power of the gospel changing lives for the better in 2023."

### PASTORAL REFLECTION

Jeanville commented on the recent ITV coverage of the Food Hub in action. "We now have the attention of the media. Let's keep it going, but more important, let's build community," he said. "God wants to do something big through His church for His glory. He wants to give us more extensive opportunities than we can imagine, but it starts with us extending ourselves in compassion and faith."

In an appeal to Adventist members, Jeanville reminded them that "God and men will note extraordinary acts of kindness; therein lies our sanctification." ❖



Rose Otis died in her sleep on January 7. She was 82.

PHOTO: GENERAL CONFERENCE WOMEN'S MINISTRIES

## FORMER ADVENTIST LEADER ROSE OTIS DIES AT 82

SHE WAS THE FIRST WOMEN'S MINISTRIES DIRECTOR OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE.

### ADVENTIST REVIEW STAFF

sophomore while attending Cedar Lake Academy in Michigan. They got married three years later, and they had two children—Todd Otis (Kim Klabe) and Heidi Bresee—and several grandchildren.

In 1991 Rose was elected as the first coordinator of the Office of Women's Ministries of the Adventist Church at the General Conference. In 1995 the office became the Department of Women's Ministries, with Rose as its first director.

"Rose balanced the unique skills of power, grace, and humility," her family said. "Her ability to find the good in everyone was second nature to her."

In 2002 Rose stepped away from

her work because of health challenges. During the next 20 years she did not once complain about her disease. Instead, she put a smile on her face and was grateful for each day she was granted.

"She was fierce and strong, yet tender and compassionate," her family said. "She was so good at always saying the right thing, even in her last breath."

"Rose was the right woman in the right place at the right time. God's time," current General Conference Women's Ministries director Heather Dawn-Small said in a recent tribute. "She was a woman of incredible creativity, insight, sincerity, intelligence, and diplomacy." ❖

**R**ose Marie Otis, Seventh-day Adventist leader, author, and public speaker, died in her sleep early on Saturday, January 7, in Frederick, Maryland, leaving behind her husband of 64 years.

She was born to Harlan and Grace Niesen on April 22, 1940, in Manistee, Michigan, and met her husband, Harold "Bud" Otis, Jr., as a



Daniel Honoré died unexpectedly on January 13.

PHOTO: MINNESOTA CONFERENCE

## ADVENTISTS MOURN DEATH OF MINNESOTA CONFERENCE PRESIDENT

DANIEL HONORÉ WAS A LEADER FOCUSED ON EDUCATION AND EVANGELISM, LEADERS SAID.

### SAVANNAH CARLSON, MINNESOTA CONFERENCE, AND ADVENTIST REVIEW

service he shared his love and passion for evangelism, education, and multigenerational ministry.

Honoré's pastoral ministry began in 1995, when he was called to be pastor of two Adventist congregations in Massachusetts. During his pastorate he baptized 150 people and founded the Brockton Area Seventh-day Adventist Academy, which today has more than 130 students.

In addition, Honoré conducted evangelistic meetings in New York, Peru, Brazil, Jamaica, Haiti, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic. He served on several boards and committees.

Honoré was born in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, to a Haitian father and a Dominican mother.

Growing up in a pastoral family involved relocations and exposure to various cultures. As a result he became fluent in English, French, Haitian Creole, and Spanish.

"Daniel Honoré was an amazing leader who gave his whole life to helping others," MAUC president Gary Thurber said. "His compassion for others on his journey made him much respected and beloved by all."

Regional Adventist leaders shared that Honoré's unexpected death affected them greatly. "We grieve with all those who knew him. Our thoughts, prayers, and love are with his wife, Fritze; his children Gamaliel, Gabriel, Nathanael; and Danielle; his brother Joel; and his extended family," they said. ❖

**W**ith profound sadness Seventh-day Adventist leaders of the Minnesota Conference and the Mid-America Union Conference (MAUC) in the United States announced that conference president Daniel Honoré went to sleep in Jesus on January 13.

Honoré began his ministry as president in September 2022 with a consecration service dedicating the conference to the work of bringing people to Jesus. During this



### IN CZECH REPUBLIC, ADVENTISTS PUBLISH NEW TESTAMENT IN ROMANI.

Christian leaders introduced the first translation of the New Testament in the Abov Romani dialect on November 15, 2022. The translation was published by the Adventist church in Trebechovice pod Orebem. Three native speakers worked on the translation “O Névo Zákonos” for 12 years. Romani is the language of the Roma. It is spoken throughout Europe and beyond in various country-specific dialects.



### SCHOOL STUDENTS SERVE COMMUNITY ON MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY.

Students at HMS Richards Adventist School, located in Loveland, Colorado, celebrated MLK Day on Monday, January 16, by taking half the school day to serve others. First- and second-grade students delivered about 50 handwritten border sheets with verses of encouragement in the neighborhood. Grades 3-4 sang praise songs to downtown businesses and passed out Bible border sheets. Students in grades 5-6 held up signs of encouragement on street corners and prayed with people. Students in grades 7-8 gave away free hot cocoa and handmade ornaments at a local supermarket.



**AIIAS DEDICATES HIGH SCHOOL BUILDING ON ITS CAMPUS.** The Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIIAS) dedicated its brand-new school building on January 20. The new facilities are located near the elementary school in Silang, Cavite, Philippines. The event drew more than 400 students, parents, faculty, and guests. The new building includes classrooms for grades 7-12, previously located in former Sabbath School rooms connected to the gymnasium.



**NEW CAMPGROUND EXPECTED TO STRENGTHEN MINISTRIES IN EL SALVADOR.** Adventist leaders in El Salvador inaugurated a new campground center in the city of Santa Ana, in the western part of the country, during a special ceremony on January 21. The newly purchased 12-acre campground is the fourth such property purchased by the church. The campground will be used to train department and ministry leaders and hold family retreats, camporees, summits, and congresses.



### HUNDREDS MARCH FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN GUATEMALA CITY.

More than 1,000 Seventh-day Adventists marched through the main streets of Guatemala City, Guatemala, on January 21, to highlight their constitutional right to religious freedom. The crowd of church members carried signs and banners to the city's Municipal Hall in the heart of Constitution Plaza to commemorate what the church observes every January as International Religious Liberty Day.



### LEADERS ARE BACK ON THEIR BIKES FOR FAITH-SHARING ADVENTURE.

After the “I Will Go Ride” in the United States in 2022, a group of Adventist leaders and cyclists set off on a new adventure. Seventeen cyclists, including seven of the eight cyclists from the U.S. trip, embarked on an Australian version of the I Will Go Ride. The cyclists left in two groups, one setting off from Melbourne, and the other from Brisbane. Both rides ended up in Cooranbong, where most of the cyclists were involved in the Australian Union Conference Empower meetings, which started on February 7 at Avondale University.



### ADVENTIST REVIEW MINISTRIES NEWSLETTER

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# Attached to God





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**TORBEN BERGLAND**

*Your God-image and self-image shape your relationship with Him.*

**W**e don't see things as they are. We see them as we are."<sup>1</sup> Is this true about how we see God? Is this true about how we see others? And, ultimately, is this true about how we see ourselves?

As we go about our everyday lives, most of us operate on the notion that how we experience things is how they are. We may not have the capacity, interest, or ability to deeply reflect on the true nature of everything we constantly experience.

Yet we all know that my experience of reality may differ radically from someone else's—even from those we love and live with. How can it be that reality is experienced so differently?

This also applies to our images of ourselves, others, and God. My image of myself will often be different from my parents', my spouse's, my children's, my friends', and my colleagues'. When I see someone, my image of that person will often be based on rather limited knowledge and understanding of who that person really is. Therefore, I may be lacking significant aspects of truth and reality regarding that person. When it comes to images and experiences of God, there are thousands of religions claiming to know what truth and reality is, yet what they claim differs and is often in conflict. Within the faith tradition of Adventist Christians, there is diversity in our beliefs about God and images of Him. How are our images of ourselves, of others, and of God formed and shaped?

**IMAGE OF SELF**

How we see ourselves is very much formed and shaped by how we are seen by others. People tend to become what they are told they are. If while growing up I was told by significant others, such as family and friends, that I was bad, stupid, or worthless, then it's possible I would come to believe such negative "truths" about myself, develop a negative self-image, and maybe even become precisely that. Or I might create an inflated narcissistic self-image as a self-protective defense, believing I am the opposite of all that, and instead project those negative traits onto others. On the other hand, if I experienced that I was loved, that I was worth something, and that others believed in me, then it's likely that I would develop a positive self-image and become a loving person who does worthwhile things.

Psychiatrist and psychotherapist Irvin Yalom acknowledged

the preeminence of relationships in our lives:

“We are intrinsically social creatures. Throughout life, our surrounding interpersonal environment—peers, friends, teachers, as well as family—has enormous influence over the kind of individual we become. Our self-image is formulated to a large degree upon the reflected appraisals we perceive in the eyes of the important figures in our life.”<sup>2</sup>

### **IMAGE OF OTHERS**

How we see others is predominantly formed and shaped by our previous relational experiences. Do I have positive or negative expectations when interacting with others? Do I approach them with trust or fear? Such relational patterns are often based on assumptions we make based on our past. That’s why psychology often seeks to understand the past in order to change the present and the future.

Our brains become wired by experiences, and rewiring, when necessary, is a biological process that requires development and growth of new neural pathways. Repeated positive experiences may gradually change a negative image of others to a more positive one. Likewise, what initially was a positive image of others may be changed toward a more negative one through painful and traumatic experiences.

### **IMAGE OF GOD**

How is our image of God and attachment to Him formed and shaped? Psychological research reveals that our image of God is formed in similar ways as our image of others. What we experience with others, especially parental figures early in life, often has significant impact on how we come to see God. We may not be consciously aware of how our relationships with significant others influence our God-image and attachment.

Most people may not see a resemblance between their God-image and parental figures, yet research consistently reports a relationship. In early life there will often be a correspondence between our image of our parental figures and our image of God, yet as we grow, develop, and gain new experiences, our image of God may become more detached from our parental images. When we haven’t been sufficiently loved and cared for in our earlier relationships, God may become our friend and refuge, the one who compensates for what we needed but never received. Our

God-image may then morph from a negative image associated with unfulfilling interpersonal relationships to a positive image based on our understanding and experience of God.

### **GOD-CONCEPT VERSUS GOD-IMAGE**

It is worth noting that our intellectual and emotional understanding of God may not align. I’ve seen patients and others whose beliefs and theology about God—their concept of God—may be positive, but whose relationship and emotional experience with Him renders their image of Him rather negative. In a battle between beliefs and experience, experience often emerges stronger. For a relationship with God to be secure and healthy, a theoretical knowledge of God must be supported by experiential knowledge of Him. Thus, “the right” theology and preaching alone is not sufficient to bring people close to God. The relationship must be a lived experience. While our God-concept may be primarily informed by reading, teaching, and preaching, our God-image is informed primarily by relational experiences with God and others.

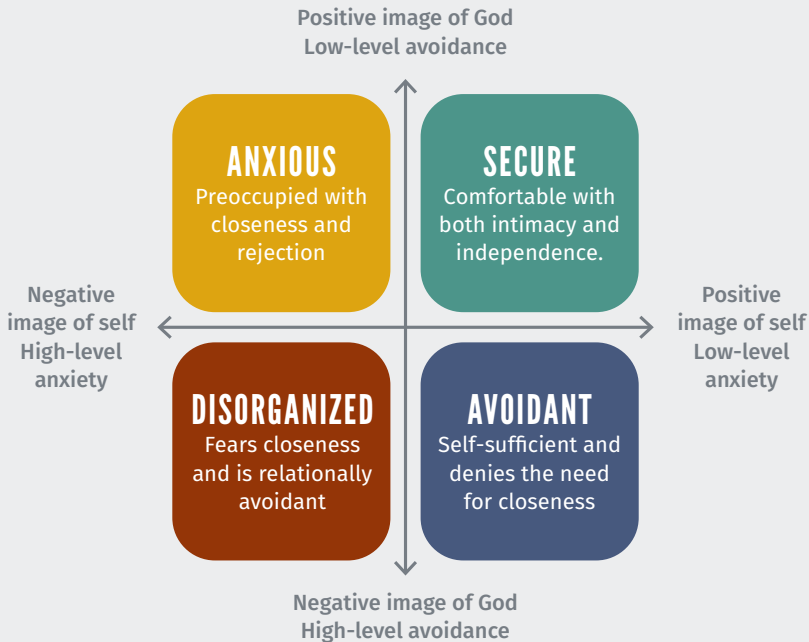
### **ATTACHMENT THEORY**

British psychologist, psychiatrist, and psychoanalyst John Bowlby contributed one of the most significant models in psychology for understanding the dynamics of close relationships and the human quest for “security, meaning, and self-regulation,” known today as attachment theory.<sup>3</sup>

In his 1988 book, *A Secure Base: Parent-Child Attachment and Healthy Human Development*, Bowlby states: “Attachment theory regards the propensity to make intimate emotional bonds to particular individuals as a basic component of human nature, already present in germinal form in the neonate and continuing through adult life into old age. During infancy and childhood bonds are with parents (or parent substitutes) who are looked to for protection, comfort, and support. During healthy adolescence and adult life these bonds persist, but are complemented by new bonds.”<sup>4</sup>

Attachment theory provides a profound understanding of the human need for bonding in close relationships and our dependence on others, including God. Bowlby specifically argued against the idea that dependence on others is immature or pathological at any age, or that grieving a loss

# ATTACHMENT IN ADULTS



is pathological or undesirable. He understood that even fully mature and relatively autonomous adults—especially when threatened, in pain, lonely, or demoralized—benefit from seeking and receiving other people’s care. When attachment relationships function well, a person learns that distance and autonomy are completely compatible with closeness and reliance on others.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond that, attachment theory also explains the dynamics of struggles and insecurity in those relationships. Whenever an attachment figure—whether a parent, partner, friend, or someone else who is a go-to for protection, comfort, and support—is not available, sensitive, and responsive, then that may cause significant distress and anxiety. Consciously, or subconsciously, an alarm may go off: “Am I safe? Can others be trusted? Will anyone be there for me when I need them? Can I manage this on my own?”

## SECURE ATTACHMENT

People who predominantly have experience with attachment figures who are available, sensi-

tive, and responsive will typically lead a more robust and resilient life when faced with challenging situations. They are what we call “securely attached.” Their primary strategy when distressed is to seek closeness to an attachment figure, whether a person, God, or something else that gives a sense of safety. Or they return to their depository of comforting and soothing experiences in their past, draw on them, and are thus comforted in the present. They are typically trusting of others and feel assured that they are not alone in this world. Thus, they are well equipped to manage closeness and distance in day-to-day life.

Mikulincer and Shaver summarize the characteristics of securely attached people:

“Secure people openly disclose their personal thoughts and feelings to relationship partners (even if they lead to disagreements), expose their vulnerability and need for support even if it leaves them open to disapproval, open their cognitive schemas to new information even though it entails uncertainty and reorganization, explore challenging and changing life circumstances and new expe-

# THE GOD-CONCEPT AND THE GOD-IMAGE

L. Hoffman, *God Image Handbook for Spiritual Counseling and Psychotherapy: Research, Theory, and Practice*, ed. G. L. Moriarty (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 1, 2.

## GOD-CONCEPT

- The God-concept is an abstract, intellectual, mental definition of the word “God.”
- It represents what people think about God rather than what they feel about God.
- Most individuals profess a God-concept characterized by love, strength, and wisdom.

## GOD-IMAGE

- The God-image is the complex, subjective emotional experience of God.
- It is shaped by a person’s family history and causes their experience of God to resemble their relationship with their parents.
- People who struggle with mental health issues often have a God-image that is distant, critical, and judgemental.

riences, and commit themselves to the personal choices they make in their career and close relationships. They make leaps of trust and faith.”<sup>6</sup>

Secure attachment is based on a positive image of others, and a positive image of self.

### INSECURE ATTACHMENT

People with insecure attachment styles often struggle with their image of themselves and/or of others, including God. They are less resilient when faced with emotional distress. Since they lack assurance of finding comfort in others, they have typically developed one of three strategies for maximizing closeness and minimizing distress: fight, flight, or freeze.

The fight response is a hyperactivation of the attachment system. Since they do not trust that others will provide the closeness they need, they will fight for it. They have what we call an anxious attachment style. They are typically in a state of chronic activation of the attachment system, constantly seeking closeness with attachment figures and hypersensitive to signs of rejection, whether real or perceived.

The other strategy—the flight response—is a deactivation of the attachment system. Instead of fighting for closeness, those who have an avoidant

attachment style walk away from it. Their assumption is they won’t get the comfort they need from others, so there is no point in even trying. Typically, they shut down their sense of need for comfort and their need for others. The deactivated attachment system leaves them with no option other than to manage on their own, being independent and self-sufficient.

A third type of insecure attachment is the disorganized attachment style. We typically see it in people who have gone through traumatic and severely confusing attachment experiences. The disorganized aspect of their attachment pattern is that neither fight nor flight has consistently worked for them. Thus, they are left without any preferred strategy for dealing with insecurity and distress. They may be caught in the trap of longing for comfort, meanwhile fearing the ones who potentially could provide it. They may long for closeness, but at the same time fear it. Thus, they may be lost at sea with no engine or rudder to direct them into the safe harbor of comfort and security. It is a painful place to be.

### TOWARD BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

In this imperfect world of imperfect people in imperfect relationships, how can we gain more



security and confidence as we relate to others and God? What makes attachment more secure is positive experiences with attachment figures who are available, sensitive, and responsive. Whether we are secure or insecure, we need positive experiences repeatedly and consistently. We need to be surrounded by attachment figures who want to give comfort and safety. And it does not have to be given perfectly. What is needed is care given often and consistently enough to make the relationship a safe place to be.

As we grow beyond the small world of our parental figures and families of origin, we enter into a world of many new potential attachment figures, including spouses, siblings, family members, friends, colleagues, and others. Beyond that, God can become an important attachment figure as people go through a life of challenges. If one believes and trusts in God as someone who is loving and caring, who is available, sensitive, and responsive, then He may be a secure attachment figure for that person.

If God truly is the way He is presented in the Bible, then He will always be with us whatever we go through. He will never abandon or leave us. He will be someone we always can come to, whatever our situation or life circumstance. Being in a relationship with Him will provide comfort and safety on the journey through life. He will be our Father, and we will be His sons and daughters, His children. He will compensate for the shortcomings and failures of people. In the book of the prophet Isaiah, God says: "Do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will give you strength, and for sure I will help you. Yes, I will hold you up with My right hand that is right and good" (Isa. 41:10, NLV).<sup>7</sup>

When our distorted image of God is transformed into an image of God as the loving Creator and Father, then we are transformed into His likeness. When the image of God is reproduced in us, then our self-image may rightfully be a positive one. Ellen White so aptly said: "Through belief in Satan's misrepresentation of God, man's character and destiny were changed, but if men will believe in the Word of God, they will be transformed in mind and character, and fitted for eternal life. To believe that 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life'

(John 3:16, KJV) will change the heart, and reproduce in man the image of God."<sup>8</sup>

Whether our attachment figures are our parents, others, or God, we never outgrow the need for having others who are lovingly available, sensitive, and responsive in our lives. When we have that, we can move toward a greater sense of security in our relationships. The preeminence of relationships and love in the life of humans is recognized in science, philosophy, art, and religion alike. And for the believer, God is also included in the universe of relationships and love. When asked by one of the intellectuals of His time, Jesus summarized the essence of life, what the fundamental message of the Bible is, and what the conviction of any Christian should be: "One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, 'Of all the commandments, which is the most important?'

"'The most important one,' answered Jesus, 'is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'"

"'The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

"'There is no commandment greater than these'" (Mark 12:28-31, NIV).

There is no better prescription for life than to be loved by someone who is available, sensitive, and responsive. The essence of Christianity is that God loves us like that, and that the greatest commandment is that we are to love others like that.

"The greatest thing you'll ever learn is . . . just to love and be loved in return."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Origin unknown.

<sup>2</sup> Irvin Yalom, *The Gift of Therapy: An Open Letter to a New Generation of Therapists and Their Patients* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Mario Mikulincer and Phillip R. Shaver, *Attachment in Adulthood: Structure, Dynamics, and Change*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Guilford Press, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> John Bowlby, *A Secure Base: Parent-Child Attachment and Healthy Human Development* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> Mikulincer and Shaver.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

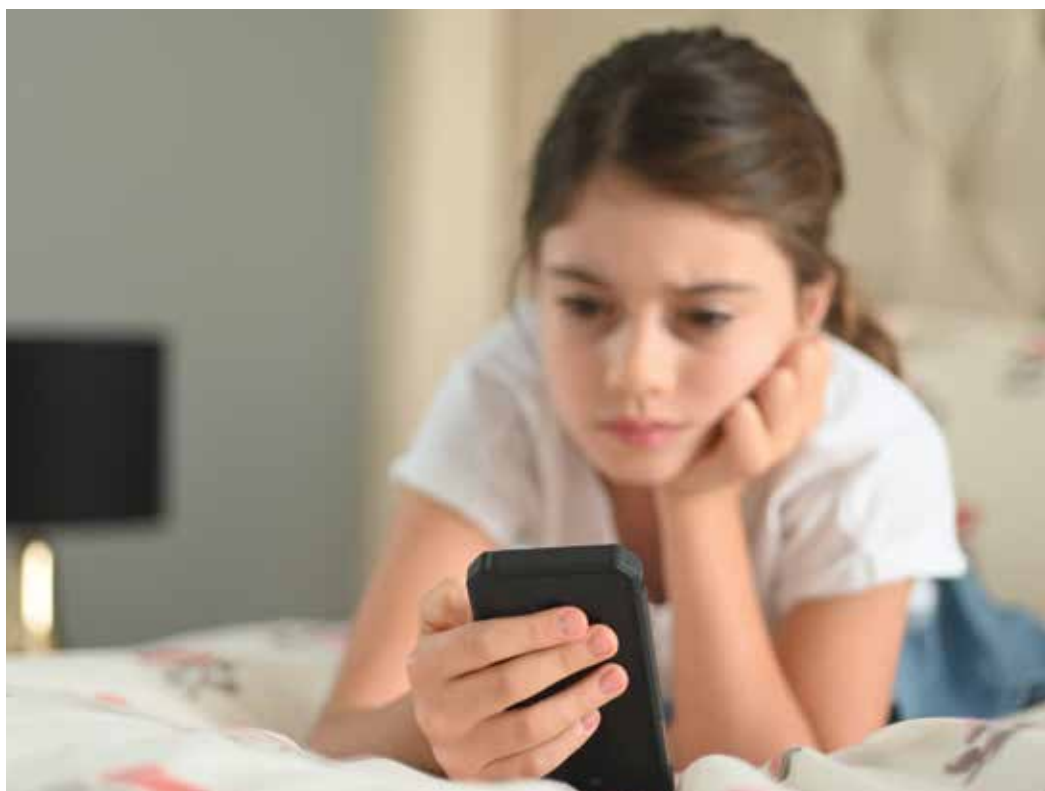
<sup>7</sup> Texts credited to NLV are from the New Life Version. Copyright © 1969, 2003 by Barbour Publishing, Inc.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958, 1980), book 1, p. 346.

<sup>9</sup> Eden Ahbez, "Nature Boy" (1947).

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CHAMELONSEYE / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS

## SOCIAL MEDIA: A CULPRIT BEHIND POOR BODY IMAGE

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*Here's what you can do to flip the narrative.*

**E**xposure to impossibly tall, chiseled models is nothing new. Thanks to social media platforms, though, how we see these images has changed a bit. Not only are there more of them, but the pictures and videos are also routinely filtered to present unrealistic body images we may envy.

“Seeing only doctored, aspirational content on social media can chip away at our self-image,” says Adventist Healthcare System medical director of psychiatry Marissa Leslie, M.D. “The more pictures and videos

we see of unattainable body types, the unhappier we may become with our own bodies, increasing our risk of developing an eating disorder or other harmful behaviors.”

Platforms like Facebook and Instagram offer a steady stream of easily alterable pictures, making people appear flawless. And TikTok uses a special algorithm to detect the type of videos we watch to show us more of them. We don't have to search anymore—in a matter of seconds TikTok collects a video library for us. That means our news feed

fills with content promoting hard-to-achieve physical goals, as well as unhealthy eating and exercise habits.

### HOW SOCIAL MEDIA AFFECTS BODY IMAGE

Some people use social media to chat and share information, but according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), many, particularly younger people, use these platforms to guide what they want to see in the mirror. It's all about presenting an appealing appearance. Ultimately, online content influences how people think they measure up to others.

"According to the NIH, pursuing the body ideals we see online is troublesome because existing research shows regular social media use is linked to body dissatisfaction and a drive to be thinner," explains Leslie. "Although the problem mostly affects younger people, we can experience these feelings at any age. Social media content celebrates the pursuit of having a perfect body and may use shame to motivate us to work on our own."

The more we scroll, the more likely we are to compare ourselves to unrealistic body images. According to a study from King University, approximately 87 percent of women and 65 percent of men evaluate themselves against the pictures they see online. And frequent comparisons can double or quadruple the risk of body dissatisfaction or push everyone to believe they should lose weight.

"Viewing appearance-based content can lead us to severely restrict how much and what kinds of foods we eat or to exercise too much. And the more we engage in those behaviors, the more vulnerable we can become to an eating disorder, such as anorexia nervosa, binge eating, or bulimia," says Leslie.

### SIX WAYS TO LIMIT SOCIAL MEDIA IMPACT

Fortunately, we can control how social media affects our body image. How is that possible?

**1 Know You Use It:** Do you scroll through Facebook or Instagram when bored or procrastinating? Or is social media your preferred way to stay in touch with friends and family?

**2 Follow Accounts Promoting Healthy Approaches to Nutrition and Exercise:** Look for accounts highlighting nutritious approaches to eating that include a wide variety of foods and avoid those that focus on restriction. Look for pages that

**Social media can be a great tool for entertainment and communication, but it's important to remember that what you see in pictures and videos doesn't always represent reality.**

promote different, enjoyable exercises. The accounts we follow shouldn't make working out feel unattainable or a punishment for what we've eaten.

**3 Unfollow Accounts That Prompt Us to Compare Ourselves to Others:** Get away from pages that trigger a negative hyperfocus on food and exercise. If we feel worse about ourselves after seeing their content, we should remove the account from our feed.

**4 Find Body-Positive Accounts to Follow:** Search for accounts that post content focusing on overall good health and wellness rather than body type and appearance.

**5 Celebrate Body Differences:** Keep in mind the measurements for ideal body mass, bone density, and hydration are not limited to one ideal body type. Thin doesn't always mean healthy, just as overweight doesn't always mean unhealthy. Follow accounts that celebrate healthy bodies that come in different shapes and sizes.

**6 Keep Everything in Perspective:** Remember that many people posting photos and videos on social media may be in different age groups, with different genetics, or have athletic abilities different from your own. Even then, digital images can be easily altered, with only the most flattering ones making the post.

Social media can be a great tool for entertainment and communication, but it's important to remember that what you see in pictures and videos doesn't always represent reality. Be good to yourself and take steps to keep your news feeds positive while protecting and nurturing a healthy self-image. ✨

Whitney Palmer writes for Adventist HealthCare Shady Grove Medical Center's Behavioral Health Services.

# NEUROTHEOLOGY AND THE GOD WE KNOW

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*Do our brains really change  
from spiritual experiences?*



Is it possible to experience God by donning a helmet, like one would wear to play football or ride a bike? Are the experiences normally associated with activities such as prayer, fasting, or meditation artificially triggered by electrode-studded headgear authentically divine or just in our brains? Welcome to the brave new world of applied neurotheology.

When a few scientists decided to study religious phenomena, there was excitement in anticipation of what would be found, especially among people who live in both religious and science camps. “Will science finally demonstrate what adherents to religion have believed all along? Or would this be the death knell for religion and God?” These questions have been prevalent in the minds of both secular and religious thinkers alike.

In 1993 Drs. Eugene d’Aquili and Andrew Newberg from the University of Pennsylvania published a paper describing the then-modern interface between neuroscience and theology. Several names for this new discipline of neuroscience were tried: “spiritual neuroscience,” “biological theology,” and “neurotheology”—among others. The term “neurotheology,” first used in 1962 in the novel *Island*, stuck. What author Aldous Huxley meant by that term is debatable, but its current use conjures up a variety of fanciful notions that have led to speculations based on the “sound science” of neuroimaging and multidisciplinary neuroscience.

Anthropologists have observed that nearly all human societies have developed some form of religious or spiritual belief system, which may include the worship of gods or goddesses, the belief in an afterlife, or the practice of rituals. This universality has been documented in cultures as diverse as the ancient Egyptians and the contemporary Kung San people of the Kalahari Desert. Additionally, the idea of a supernatural being or higher power as well as the concept of an afterlife have been found in all known societies. Thus the interest in this widespread phenomenon of religion is born of true scientific curiosity.

### **RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IS RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE**

Neurotheological studies have shown specific neural correlates of religious or spiritual experiences, such as the activation of our default mode network (DMN) and the prefrontal cortex, and the

participation of the brain chemicals serotonin and dopamine. Studies done with Buddhist monks meditating, Franciscan nuns praying, and Sikhs singing their prayers report all participants describing a feeling of oneness with the universe. Some neurotheologists conclude that “there is no Christian, no Jew, no Buddhist, no Muslim—it’s just all one.” And when it comes to the brain, religious experience is religious experience. They even echo the word of a certain Christian apostle who penned “There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . ; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28) in corroboration between Scripture and neuroscience. Nonbiblical forms of meditation and prayer are accompanied by changes in brain activity and connectivity in regions associated with self-referential processing, emotion, regulation, and attention, as well as reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety. Interestingly, the parietal lobes of the brain responsible for processing sensory information decrease activity during deep meditation, accompanied by a blurring of the boundaries between self and nonself and a sense of oneness with the universe.

Other observations should give us pause and ask further questions. It has been shown that taking a break from work, a short nap, going for a stroll, daydreaming, self-reflecting, or even mind-wandering can also activate the DMN. This network may appear to be very “spiritual” since it is involved in processing thoughts, emotions, and experiences, creating and imagining future scenarios and events, retrieving memories, understanding others’ perspectives and mental states, and processing moral and ethical decisions. So are all the activators of the DMN God-equivalents?

The author Carlos Castaneda, and the mystic occultist Aleister Crowley, long ago proposed the use of psychedelic drugs to induce mystical, transcendent states of consciousness before dopamine and serotonin were known. Alcohol and opioids do the same. So is God in the drugs? Researchers observe positive systemic changes in the brain and immune systems such as greater antibody response to virus exposure in just two months of meditation training. While this is considered a validation of meditation as a spiritual practice, there is evidence that listening to known and liked music—a nonspiritual practice—stimulates certain areas of the brain, and enhances the immune system. Is music, then, God?

## The idea that our brains create the concept of God falls under the broader umbrella of neurotheology and is rejected as being radically unbiblical.

### A DIFFERENT BRAIN

That scientists find the brains of people who spend significant amounts of time in prayer or meditation “different” from those who don’t should neither inspire awe nor welcome surprise since spending large amounts of *anything* (e.g., knitting, painting, reading) invariably leads to changes in the brain. The awe comes from the now-accepted *fact* that the brain can be rewired and retooled in the first place (i.e., it exhibits neuroplasticity). The brain can be sculpted much as muscles can from weight training. Mindful meditation is really deep focus. And when we focus on something—whether algebra, cricket, or food analysis—that thing becomes etched into the neural connections in our brains. By beholding we become changed, so we should be careful about what we focus on—sound advice found in Psalm 1 and Philippians 4:8.

The idea that our brains create the concept of God falls under the broader umbrella of neurotheology and is rejected as being radically unbiblical. Some neurotheologists argue that the human brain has evolved to seek out patterns and meaning in the world and that this tendency leads to the creation of religious beliefs and experiences to fill in the gaps in our understanding—the so-called God of the gaps. Some suggest that specific regions of the brain, such as the prefrontal cortex and the temporal lobes, may be responsible for religious experiences and the perception of a higher power. They go so far as to say that if God does not exist, our brains are wired to create Him. Still, others propose that religious experiences are the result of a complex interplay between biology, culture, and personal experience and that the concept of God is a product of human imagination rather than an objective reality.

### ALL THAT GLITTERS

Neurotheology cannot be accepted lock, stock, and barrel. Some Christians may be enamored with the promising idea of proving the truth about God. But that is a promise that neurotheology cannot fulfill. First, it reduces religious experiences to mere brain activity. The scientific *evidence* is merely *data* that could lead to multiple interpretations. Phre-

nology was considered scientific when it was first introduced, and had a solid inferential, hypothetical framework. The measurement of cranial bumps was very precise in its day, much like images now produced by functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), positron emission tomography (PET), and single-photon emission computed tomography (SPECT) scans. The interpretation of the data was the problem, and ludicrous data-derived inferences led to ridiculous conclusions.

Further caution should be levied because of the possibility of manipulating religious experiences through brain stimulation and the characterization of people according to their ability to have mystical experiences. Is the idea of a “God helmet” ethical? Is the explanation for someone who wears such a helmet and doesn’t have the “experience” as being somehow genetically disadvantaged (and, by inference, spiritually disadvantaged) any less offensive than when the same arguments were used to disenfranchise people who didn’t have “certain patterns of bumps” on their skulls?

Neurotheology tends to overgeneralize its findings and often presupposes that the same neural mechanisms underlie all perceived religious or spiritual experiences. For Adventists, many of its described spiritual practices and experiences have little foundation in the canonical Scriptures. The emptying of one’s mind and the feelings of oneness with the universe were not described by Jesus or any of the prophets of the Bible as part of their religious lives. Much of neurotheology flies in the face of the teachings of Scripture, which starts with the words “In the beginning God . . .” The Bible never entertains the idea of “God maybe,” as some neuroscientists propose, but always “God is!” If the premises of neurotheology are true, then Jesus is a liar, and we create God, He didn’t create us. Some think that the future for bridging the gap between nonbiblical religions and atheistic science is bright because of neurotheology, but it is always wise to remember that in many things, all that glitters is not gold. ♣

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CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD





TORBEN BERGLAND

**A**s human beings, we are obsessed with images. Since the invention of the camera in the mid-nineteenth century, this piece of technology has been something we most often have pointed outward toward the world. When the front-facing cameras on our mobile phones became available, we turned the lens from looking at the world to looking at ourselves. We now live in the age of the selfie.

There is a paradox with selfies, though. One study showed that 82 percent of us prefer to view normal pictures rather than selfies on social media. Selfies are often associated with self-centered narcissism and a lack of authenticity, and we don't like those things when we see them in others. Based on these and other observations, some researchers have said that "selfies should have never become as popular as they actually are."<sup>1</sup>

Our fascination or even obsession with images of ourselves is nothing new. In *Metamorphoses, Book 3*, by the Roman poet Ovid, we encounter the story of Narcissus from Greek mythology. It's a rich tale in terms of exploring human nature and how we relate to ourselves and one another. Here is an excerpt of the story:

Narcissus, tired from hunting and the noon heat, finds a beautiful, peaceful, clean mirror-like spring. There he lies down. While he stoops to quench his thirst, another thirst increases. As he is drinking, he sees himself reflected in the mirrored pool and falls in love. He loves an imagined body that contains no substance, for he believes the mirrored shade is worthy of his love. And now he can't move because he is so infatuated with himself.

## THE PROBLEM

The myth about Narcissus reveals the problem of narcissism: the person who is not able to love someone else but seeks and loves the image of himself. But such love is wasted love. The image he sees of himself cannot love him back. And when he realizes that it all is in vain, he loses his life. An ancient story, yet as relevant as ever to humankind.

We live not only in the age of the selfie but also in the age of narcissism, for the story of humankind is a story of narcissism. The story of sin is a story of narcissism.

In the journal *Psychodynamic Practice*, group analytic psychotherapist Pat MacDonald wrote: "Ever increasing levels of greed, self-obsession, superficial relationships, arrogance and vanity are everywhere apparent and not making us any happier. . . . Narcissistic traits, involving vanity, arrogance, feeling special, lacking empathy, and having little regard for others, are becoming increasingly common."<sup>2</sup>

This was written in a secular, academic journal. But the words remind me of Paul's message to Timothy: "There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3:1-4, NIV).

MacDonald continues: "There may be serious disturbances in self-esteem which can ensnare the individual, just like Narcissus in a shallow world of self-obsession and grandiosity with no warm or loving relationships. Grandiosity is a defense against deep feelings of inferiority and is neither constant nor consistent, leaving the individual torn between thinking himself wonderful or worthless."

"The narcissist focuses excessively on his own image and how he is perceived by others, replicating the obsession of Narcissus with his reflection in the water. Individuals can create an identity which presents an unrealistic, glamorous portrait of the self, artificially boosting self-esteem."

## ORDINARY IS GOOD

A few years ago my family was gathered for Christmas. My brother and I were in the kitchen talking with my niece Dina, my sister's then 6-year-old daughter. We were asking her silly questions, such as "What do you want to become when you grow up?" Upon being asked that, she got quite annoyed. Then she gave an answer that is one of the most mature, profound, and psychologically healthy things I have ever heard: "I just want to be an ordinary person!"

An ordinary person: common, average, normal. If only we all could be content with that. By worldly standards, Dina may never become anything beyond ordinary. But in my eyes, she is quite exceptional. She is one of the most relational, caring, and considerate people I know.

If only Lucifer (Satan) in heaven would have said, "I just want to be an ordinary angel!" If only Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden would have said, "We just want to be ordinary people!" If only the narcissist within each one of us would surrender and reconcile the beauty that is found in being an ordinary person. If only we could cease to create grandiose, inflated images of ourselves.

Lucifer is the prototype narcissist. In Isaiah 14:13, 14 we read: "You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High'" (ESV).

This is the language and thinking of a narcissist. "I," "my," "myself." The decline and fall of the devil was his focus on the "I." The decline and fall of every human being since the fall has been the "I." The decline and fall of every community, church, institution, society, nation, and empire has been the "I."

Ever since the fall of Satan, then the fall of humanity, the great misunderstanding has been what the essence of being in the likeness of God is. Humankind has bought into the devil's delusion of what it means to be in the likeness of God. Satan,

then human beings, envied and desired God's greatness, His highness, and His superiority. We crave to be exalted like God. But that is not what being in the likeness, in the image, of God is about.

### IS IT I OR WE?

The true likeness of God is being relational; being in a partnership, in fellowship, and in community. It highlights the "We," not the "I." For the devil and humanity, the fundamental temptation, and the fundamental sin, has ever been and will always be exalting the "I" over the "We." When we focus on the "I," then we desire to rise above others. When we focus on the "We," then we desire relationships with others. Being one of, but not above. Being ordinary.

In the Creation story of Genesis 1, up until the creation of humanity, all acts of creation are initiated with the words "Let there be." In these words God doesn't reveal Himself. But when we come to the creation of humans, the words of God change. As God is about to create human beings in His image, His words reveal the essence of who He is. God reveals Himself by saying "Let Us," "in Our image," and "Our likeness." God is not about the "I" God, His image, and His likeness are about the "Us," the "Our." God is about the "We."

The story of humanity's creation is not the story of humanity being exalted above the rest of creation. That is the story of the Fall, of humans seeking to be exalted above the rest of creation, even to the level of being exalted like God. Our problem is that disconnected from God, we cannot tolerate the smallness of what we are. Therefore, we are driven to compensate by creating images of ourselves that are bigger than what we are.

Narcissism is the antithesis of the image of the triune God. The image of God is the "We." It is the reflection of the love, benevolence, and harmony of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in a relationship, in partnership, in fellowship, and in community. The image of God is expressed in the creation of "Them": the male and female; the couple; and beyond that, the community of humanity, and the rest of creation.

A self-centered life will never satisfy. Fame, fortune, power, or any other kind of greatness according to human standards may never truly satisfy. God is others-centered. We are created in His image, and thus only an others-centered life

**Narcissism is  
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The image of God  
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can truly satisfy. Being created in God's image, we are to reflect God to the rest of creation: His character, His love, His goodness, His benevolence, His care, and His joy in relating. This is what life is about. That's the kind of life we should live.

And in those who live like this, the image of God is evident still today. "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:26, 27, NIV).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> S. Diefenbach and L. Christoforakos, "The Selfie Paradox: Nobody Seems to Like Them, Yet Everyone Has Reasons to Take Them. An Exploration of Psychological Functions of Selfies in Self-presentation," *Frontiers in Psychology* 8 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00007>.

<sup>2</sup> P. MacDonald, "Narcissism in the Modern World," *Psychodynamic Practice* 20, no. 2 (2014): 144-153, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14753634.2014.894225>.

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# New Year's Resolutions Falling Flat?



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# SABBATH EXCUSES

How (I admit) pathetic! It took Seventh-day Adventists to teach a guy named “Goldstein” to keep the Sabbath. Though knowing about the Sabbath, of course, even having lived for a year in Israel, which shut down *Shabbat*, I never kept the day “holy,” nor had any idea how to or that I was supposed to. That is until I met Adventists, who also taught me not to eat unclean foods.

When early on I had asked other Christians about the seventh-day Sabbath, they either downplayed or denied it because, they said, as a believer in Jesus, I was “not under law but under grace” (Rom. 6:14). I still remember one fellow, a charismatic named Danny, who said, “We don’t need to keep the Ten Commandments anymore.” As someone who a week before wasn’t sure that God existed, I couldn’t adequately respond, at least then, to such nonsense.

Not much later I met another Christian who flat out told me, “Jesus changed the Sabbath to Sunday,” an angle that at the time I couldn’t refute either but, quickly, could.

During the ensuing decades, I haven’t often heard arguments like these anymore (the Ten Commandments have been abolished, Jesus changed the Sabbath, etc.), as if Sunday apologists have moved beyond them. Instead, their new approaches have become more sophisticated, such as the seventh-day Sabbath has been superseded by Sunday, “the new covenant soteriological-eschatology sign of grace,” and the like. Or that our Sabbath rest is found in Jesus, to which I now reply: “Fine. Yet anyone can say that they are resting in Jesus, but the seventh-day Sabbath is a tangible expression of that rest.”

Not long ago, however, I read something in *Christianity Today*. It was in the context of an Amazon truck driver fired for refusing to work on Sunday. Talking about the rise of Sundaykeeping in antiquity, the article said: “After the Resurrection, Christians began adopting the first day of the week as the Lord’s Day, but it took hundreds of years to develop the kinds of formal church services we come to associate with weekly worship, historian Craig Harline wrote in his book *Sunday*. And it wasn’t until the fourth century that Christians began calling it Sunday rather than the Lord’s Day. Before that, too many worried about the pagan connotations around the sun.”

What a frank admission. And none of the usual Sunday apologetic fare, either. How fascinating (if true) their worry about “the pagan connotations around the sun.” (They didn’t worry enough, obviously.) Also, notice that—in his line about the Christians, after the resurrection, adopting Sunday as the “Lord’s day”—there’s nothing biblical to back up that claim because, of course, there’s *nothing* biblical to back up that claim.

Unfortunately, the mammoth weight of tradition, 1,800 years’ worth, has so embedded Sunday into the psyche of Christianity that not even Scripture itself is going to dislodge it. And so, whenever the mark of the beast does arise (see Rev. 13), these Sunday excuses, unless abandoned, will for way too many souls carry tragic, long-term, even eternal, consequences (see Rev. 12:9-11). ♣

\*[www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/february/amazon-sunday-delivery-christian-sabbatarian-driver-lawsuit.html?utm\\_medium=widgetemail](http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/february/amazon-sunday-delivery-christian-sabbatarian-driver-lawsuit.html?utm_medium=widgetemail)

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

CLIFF'S  
EDGE  
CLIFFORD  
GOLDSTEIN



IT TOOK SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS TO TEACH A GUY NAMED “GOLDSTEIN” TO KEEP THE SABBATH.



BRUNO NASCIMENTO

great light to shine upon their pathway. Shall those who are “looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works,” be behind the religionists of the day who have no faith in the soon appearing of our Saviour? The peculiar people whom He is purifying unto Himself to be translated to heaven without seeing death should not be behind others in good works. In their efforts to cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God, they should be as far ahead of any other class of people on the earth as their profession is more exalted than that of others. . . .

# HEALTH AND FAITH

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*The bonds of health and faith are inextricably linked.*

It was shown that there is a much greater work before us than we as yet have any idea of, if we would ensure health by placing ourselves in the right relation to life. Dr. A has been doing a great and good work in the treatment of disease and in enlightening those who have all their lives been in ignorance in regard to the relation that eating, drinking, and working sustain to health. God in His mercy has given His people light through His humble instrument that in order to overcome disease they must deny a depraved appetite and practice temperance in all things. He has caused

## THE NECESSITY OF HEALTH REFORM

While men and women professing godliness are diseased from the crown of their head to the soles of their feet, while their physical, mental, and moral energies are enfeebled through gratification of depraved appetite and excessive labor, how can they weigh the evidences of truth and comprehend the requirements of God? If their moral and intellectual faculties are beclouded, they cannot appreciate the value of the atonement or the exalted character of the work of God, nor delight in the study of His Word. How can a nervous dyspeptic be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh him a reason of the hope

that is in him, with meekness and fear? How soon would such a one become confused and agitated, and by his diseased imagination be led to view matters in altogether a wrong light, and by a lack of that meekness and calmness which characterized the life of Christ be caused to dishonor his profession while contending with unreasonable men? Viewing matters from a high religious standpoint, we must be thorough reformers in order to be Christlike.

I saw that our heavenly Father has bestowed upon us the great blessing of light upon the health reform that we may obey the claims which He has upon us and glorify Him in our bodies and spirits which are His and finally stand without fault before the throne of God. Our faith requires us to elevate the standard and take advance steps. While many question the course pursued by other health reformers, they as reasonable men should do something themselves. Our race is in a deplorable condition, suffering from disease of every description. Many have inherited disease and are great sufferers because of the wrong habits of their parents, and yet they pursue the same wrong course in regard to themselves and their children which was pursued toward them. They are ignorant in regard to themselves. They are sick and do not know that their own wrong habits are causing them immense suffering.

## FAITH AND HEALTH

There are but few as yet who are aroused sufficiently to understand how much their habits of diet have to do with their health, their characters, their usefulness in this world, and their eternal destiny. . . .

I was shown that we should provide a home for the afflicted and those who wish to learn how to take care of their bodies that they may prevent sickness. We should not remain indifferent and compel those who are sick and desirous of living out the truth to go to popular water cure institutions for the recovery of health, where there is no sympathy for our faith. If they recover health it may be at the expense of their religious faith. Those who have suffered greatly from bodily infirmities are weak both mentally and morally. As they realize the benefit derived from the correct application of water, the right use of air, and a proper diet, they are led to believe that the physicians who under-

stood how to treat them so successfully cannot be greatly at fault in their religious faith; that as they are engaged in the great and good work of benefiting suffering humanity, they must be nearly or quite right. And thus our people are in danger of being ensnared through their efforts to recover health at these establishments.

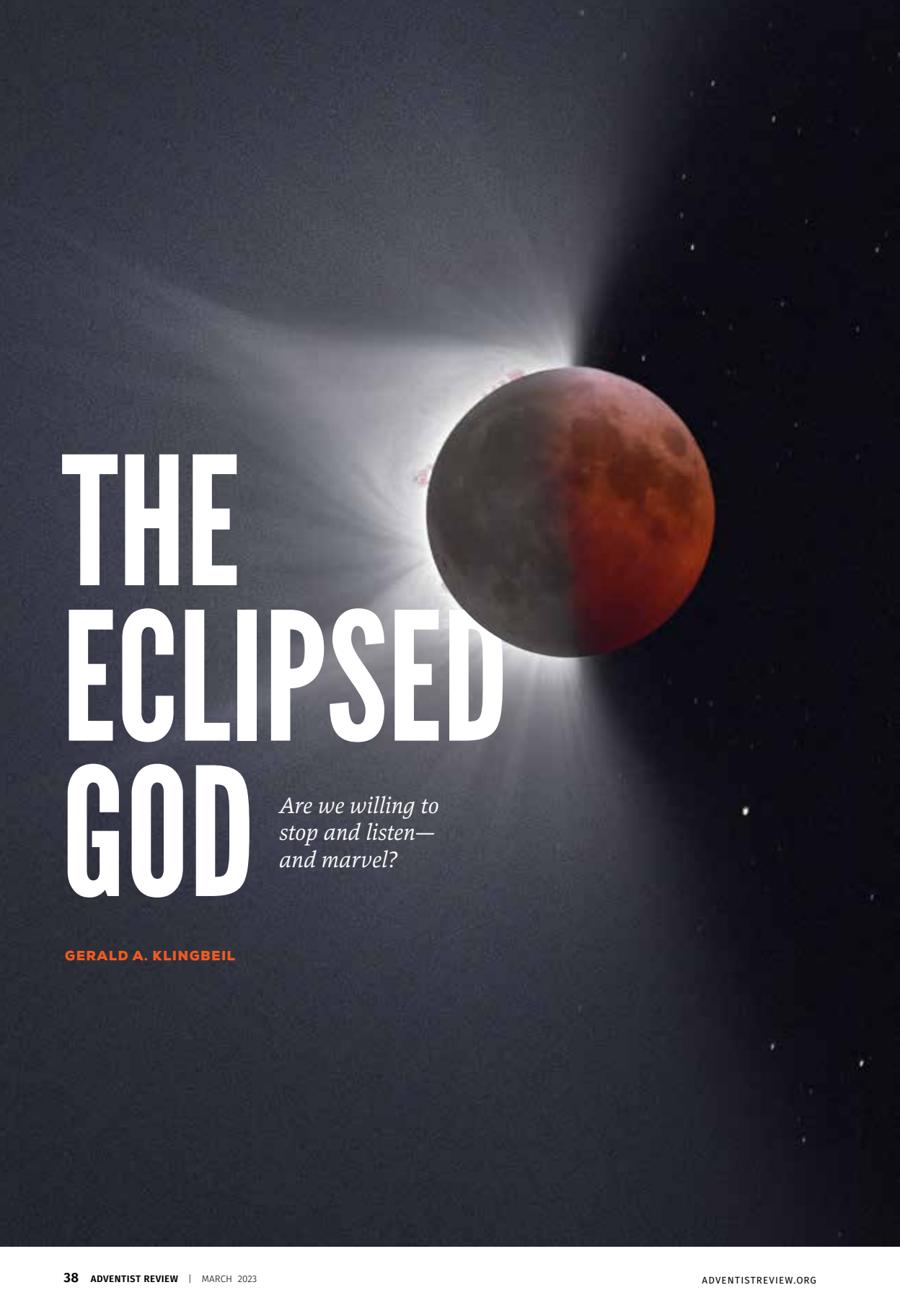
Again I was shown that those who are strongly fortified with religious principles and are firm to obey all God's requirements cannot receive that benefit from the popular health institutions of the day that others of a different faith can. Sabbathkeepers are singular in their faith. To keep all God's commandments as He requires them to do in order to be owned and approved of Him is exceedingly difficult in a popular water cure. They have to carry along with them at all times the gospel sieve and sift everything they hear, that they may choose the good and refuse the bad. . . .

Conscientious Sabbathkeepers who visit these institutions for the purpose of regaining health cannot receive the benefit they would if they were not obliged to keep themselves constantly guarded lest they compromise their faith, dishonor the cause of their Redeemer, and bring their own souls into bondage.

I was shown that Sabbathkeepers should open a way for those of like precious faith to be benefited without their being under the necessity of expending their means at institutions where their faith and religious principles are endangered, and where they can find no sympathy or union in religious matters. God in His providence directed the course of Dr. B to — that he might there obtain an experience he would not otherwise have gained, for He had a work for him to do in the health reform. As a practicing physician he had for years been obtaining a knowledge of the human system, and God would now have him by precept and practice learn how to apply the blessings placed within the reach of man. He would have him become prepared to benefit the sick and instruct those who do not understand how to preserve the strength and health they already have, and how to prevent disease by a wise use of heaven's remedies—pure water, air, and diet. ♣

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Seventh-day Adventists believe that **Ellen G. White** (1827-1915) exercised the biblical gift of prophecy during more than 70 years of public ministry. This excerpt was taken from *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 1, pages 487-491.



# THE ECLIPSED GOD

*Are we willing to  
stop and listen—  
and marvel?*

**GERALD A. KLINGBEIL**



**S**ometimes God seems distant, if not entirely absent. Sometimes silence seems all we hear when we yearn for a word from the Lord.

Israel must have felt this way when Moses didn't return from Mount Sinai for more than a month. *Where was their leader? Would he ever come back? Had he perished on the mountain? Had God even destroyed him because approaching the divine can be dangerous? Would God speak again to them, and would they be able to hear Him?*

It's easy to read the golden calf narrative in Exodus 32 describing Israel's obvious idolatrous turning away from God and forget that sometimes God seems distant, hidden, or even absent to us as well.

### **WE WONDER**

You may have wondered about God's absence in your own life. I have. Here are some of these moments as I remember them in my life.

I wondered where God was when my parents told me as a 17-year-old teenager that they wanted a separation and, ultimately, a divorce.

I wondered about God's seeming silence to my wife's and my passionate prayers when we had to wait what felt like an eternity to receive an invitation to mission service, ultimately taking us to Peru. It may have been only eight months, but it felt so much longer.

I wondered about God's hiddenness when our phone rang early one morning while we served in Argentina, and we heard the news that my father had unexpectedly died—alone and two weeks prior to the phone call.

I wondered why God apparently didn't hear our prayers when my wife suffered a miscarriage in Peru—and it didn't get easier when we experienced a second miscarriage two years later.

We wonder and wait—for better answers, a clearer picture, a safe place.

What about people living in the Ukraine following the February 24, 2022, Russian invasion, wondering about the hidden God as rockets or mortars hit their homes, their trains, their power lines, and also their dreams? What about people living in Ethiopia or Tigray who have faced seemingly endless civil war and large-scale destruction and hunger? We could add to that list for quite a while.

We often wonder about God's hiddenness as we consider a world that seems to get closer every week to spinning out of control.

### **REBELLION AND DISTANCE**

Israel's response to their waiting and wondering didn't lead to real answers. They exchanged the silent (or hidden) God

for a mute calf made of gold. Their rebellion resulted in punishment (see Ex. 32:28) and more silence. In fact, God's response to Israel's unfaithfulness was often marked by distance and divine sorrow, as also noted later by Israel's prophets (Isa. 8:17; 54:8; Jer. 33:5; Eze. 39:23, 24; Micah 3:4). Listen to Deuteronomy 32:20, a part of the Song of Moses that reviews Israel's history with God: "He [God] said: I will hide my face from them [Israel], I will see what their end will be; for they are a perverse generation, children in whom there is no faithfulness" (NRSV).

That's a strong and loud statement by the God who offers grace again and again and who showed us His love and compassion by coming into this sin-filled world and carrying our guilt and our sins unto a rough wooden cross.

### **FINDING THE HIDDEN GOD**

The Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, best known for his existential philosophy of the I-Thou encounter or dialogue, suggests that we can only truly exist as we encounter and engage with the world around us. Our perilous existence requires us to search for the sometimes silent or hidden God who is eager to be truly found. Who of us knows if we will survive a trip to the supermarket tomorrow? Can we guarantee the safe return of our children going to school? Are we sure we will be able to enjoy the long-anticipated dream vacation in another part of the world?

In 1952 Buber wrote a book titled *The Eclipse of God*, where he likens God's temporary hiddenness to an eclipse of the sun.<sup>1</sup> In a solar eclipse the moon passes between the earth and

## Mercy, compassion, grace, steadfast love, abundance, and faithfulness are key ingredients of God's character.

the sun, and the world is covered temporarily in darkness. During an eclipse of God, as during the Holocaust, for instance, people behave in ways that make it hard, if not impossible, for God to be seen. But God is present. God is not dead, but eclipsed—alive, yet invisible to human eyes.<sup>2</sup>

But is God really absent, invisible, and cannot be known? When we fast-forward two chapters from the golden calf episode found in Exodus 32, we come across one of the most powerful self-disclosures of God that can be found in Scripture—only to be bested by the incarnation of the living Word more than a millennium later. This divine self-disclosure is referenced again and again by later Old Testament writers and offers us a magnifying glass perspective of God's character.

God instructs Moses to cut two new tablets of stone on which He would write the Ten Commandments by His own hand, replacing the ones that had been smashed by Moses in a covenant-rupture ritual as he descended the mountain (Ex. 34:1). The covenant, endangered by Israel's action, is still valid, and God is willing and able to offer a way forward. But it all begins with reminding Moses and Israel of the character of the Lawgiver and Covenant Maker. God meets Moses by passing before Him. Listen to what Moses heard at that moment, for he couldn't look directly at God's goodness and live: "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation" (verses 6, 7, NRSV).

Mercy, compassion, grace, steadfast love, abundance, and faithfulness are key ingredients of God's character. His forgiveness reaches a thou-

sand generations into the future while His justice is limited to the third and fourth generation directly affected by the transgressions and sins of those who have chosen to stop looking for the hidden and, at times, eclipsed God, and have distrusted God's motives and His actions.<sup>3</sup>

### THE WONDER OF GOD'S LOVE

In a 2019 Pew Research report, "10 Facts About Atheists," I was struck by one finding in particular—the other nine were fairly expected, including the fact that atheism is growing significantly in the United States, that the typical atheist is male, identifies as a politically liberal Democrat, and looks to science for life guidance.<sup>4</sup> But there was one fact that surprised me and that may be useful when we think about the, at times, eclipsed God of Scripture whose hiddenness also affects our lives: Atheists were more likely than American Christians to say they experienced "a deep sense of wonder about the universe" at least once a week.

Are we ready and willing to look for the wonder of God's presence and handwriting perceivable in the universe—or in the lives of those surrounding us? Can we, once again, stop for a moment today and, while recognizing that God is at times hidden or even eclipsed, see that He is never absent and always on the move to bless His creation because He is gracious, compassionate, merciful, steadfast, faithful, and abounding in goodness?

Perhaps there can be a purpose to God's silence. Perhaps moments when He seems hidden can draw us, can motivate us, to move closer, look more carefully, and engage more deeply with the invisible God who longs to draw us to Himself. ▀

<sup>1</sup> Martin Buber, *The Eclipse of God* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952).

<sup>2</sup> I was first introduced to Buber's thinking on this in Rabbi Dennis S. Ross, *A Year With Martin Buber: Wisdom on the Weekly Torah Portion* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2021), pp. 89-92.

<sup>3</sup> I have argued elsewhere that the reference to the third and fourth generation is really code language for household, as households and clans in Israel were multigenerational. As people living together under one roof impact each other directly, the divine punishment strategy becomes more understandable. See Gerald A. Klingbeil, "Between 'I' and 'We': The Anthropology of the Hebrew Bible and Its Importance for a Twenty-first Century Ecclesiology," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19, no. 3 (2009): 319-339.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Lipka, "10 Facts About Atheists," *Pew Research Center*, Dec. 6, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/12/06/10-facts-about-atheists/>.

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

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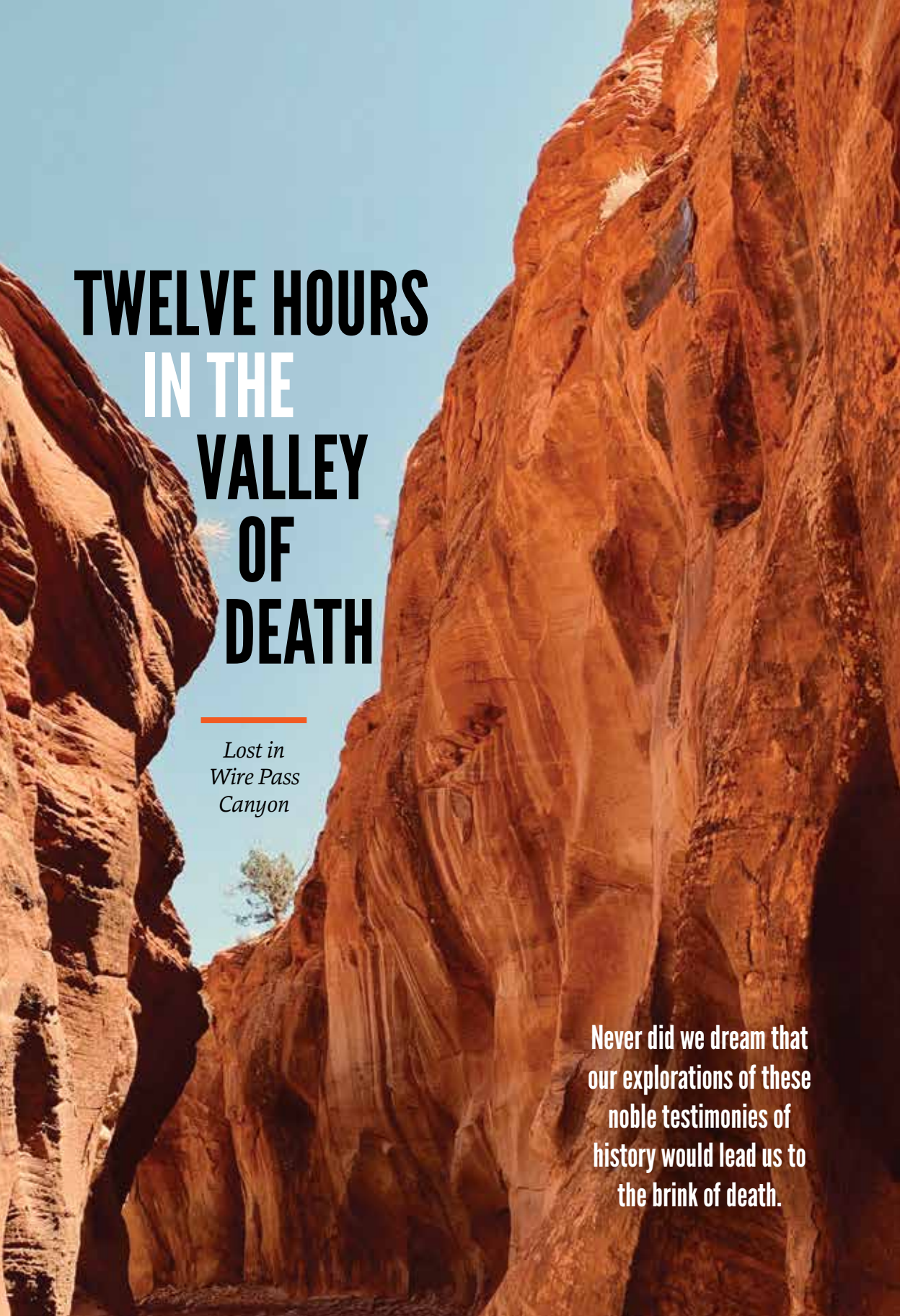
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# TWELVE HOURS IN THE VALLEY OF DEATH

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*Lost in  
Wire Pass  
Canyon*

Never did we dream that our explorations of these noble testimonies of history would lead us to the brink of death.

## EDWARD CHUN

**D**uring the 50 years that we've lived in the United States, my wife, Holly, and I have enjoyed exploring national parks. We especially love visiting the ones in Utah and Arizona, where the topography stands as a witness of ancient history.

Last year, when a two-week opportunity came up, we decided to take a trip to the canyons. Never did we dream that our explorations would lead us to the brink of death.

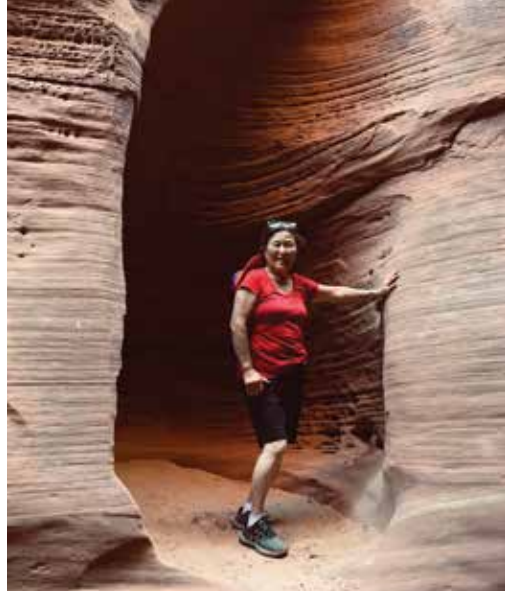
We decided to visit Antelope Canyon in Page, Arizona. Unfortunately, when we arrived, we learned that because of COVID-19 regulations Antelope Canyon was closed. A ranger suggested we go to Wire Pass Slot Canyon in Utah instead. So we packed up the next day and drove to Kanab, Utah.

After pulling into the parking lot at Wire Pass, we met a family comprising a mother, son, and daughter. We joined them for the hike into the canyon. The son, Maya, was a first-class tour guide who'd majored in archaeology and geology, and he shared interesting information about the Wire Pass Slot Canyon.

After hiking along hills and valleys for about an hour, we arrived at the entrance to the canyon. In this slotted canyon, rock mountains had split, leaving a gap of several hundred feet between opened rocks. Various stone colors reflected the sun's light through the cracks of the giant rock. The cool air inside the canyon was in sharp contrast to the 110-degree temperature outside.

We walked through the cave for about 30 minutes until we reached a cliff that went down about 12 feet. Fortunately, a previous hiker had left behind a rope ladder that we were able to use to venture down the cliff. In less than an hour we walked out of the cave and saw another magnificent view. The strangely enormous giant stone mountains split in all directions as if they had been cut with a knife. We could see traces of historic Native American life on the colossal, cracked stone walls.

Regrettably, at this point we had to part ways with our new friends. Maya and his family were heading to another canyon, so Holly and I would have to find our way back on our own. We wouldn't be able to return using the same route, because we couldn't climb the 12-foot cliff in the cave without help. So we decided we would return to the parking lot by taking the trail along the right side of the mountain.



Holly Chun in Wire Pass Slot Canyon

After about a half hour, however, the trail ended. *We must have gone too far in the wrong direction*, we thought. We decided to try to make our way out of the canyon and then look for the trail to the parking lot. After about two hours we left the canyon behind. The hills appeared, and we reached a dry creek called Coyote Creek. I turned on the GPS, which showed that we were still about five miles from our parked car.

We were very thirsty and tired. We'd already drunk the two bottles of water we'd brought with us, and we didn't have the energy to continue walking. It was 5:00 p.m., and no other hikers were in sight. A fear came over us, but we had to find a way out. Then Holly declared that she couldn't take another step.

"Honey, if we cross this hill on the left, we should find the trail to the parking lot," I told her. "Just wait for me here until I return with help from the rangers. You might have to wait three or four hours."

Leaving Holly behind, I climbed for about an hour toward the hill on the left. But instead of the field and the trail I was expecting to find, another hill appeared. And then another hill and still another.

It was so discouraging!

My body felt like it was withering away. I hadn't had anything to eat or drink for five hours. Like Holly, I'd reached my limit; I couldn't take another step. It would soon be sunset, and then darkness would prevail in the desert. I knelt and cried out, "God, what should I do? Show me the way to go." When I opened my eyes, I felt a renewed sense of energy. I was able to stand up and walk.

Suddenly I had the thought that I should go

Instead of the field where I was expecting to find the trail, another hill appeared. And then another hill and still another.

back and stay with Holly, to live or die together. More than an hour later, when I finally arrived back where I'd left Holly, she wasn't there! "Holly! Holly! Holly!" I shouted her name hundreds of times, but only echoes resounded back through the deserted canyon. I thoroughly searched the area, but it was in vain. Fear and anxiety dominated my thoughts.

*What could have happened to her?* The thought of losing Holly was too much. As the shadow of the mountains began to cover the desert valley, I lay down on the bank. It would have been so easy to fall asleep.

#### THE CROSSROADS OF LIFE AND DEATH

Just as I began to fall asleep, I was startled awake. Tiny, almost invisible ants were biting my half-dead body. I took it as a warning sign to stay awake. I thanked God for mobilizing an ant army to get me up!

With a renewed sense of strength, I decided to go back the way we'd come, even though it was a long distance. It was slow going. I could walk only 200 or 300 yards at a time before I had to stop to rest. As 9:00 p.m. drew near, darkness began to engulf the entire area.

I'd gone almost 10 hours without water. My tongue was stuck to the roof of my mouth; there was no saliva left to swallow. Just then I found some muddy, yellow water that had accumulated beneath a rock wall. It tasted like mud, but this water of life was more precious than honey.

I continued walking to save Holly. Suddenly a coyote appeared in front of me. Startled and afraid, I shouted at the coyote, and it ran off. I wondered whether coyotes had attacked Holly. The ominous scenario of these creatures having a feast tonight was stuck in my head. I had to get help, and I asked God for strength.

Finally I entered the square behind Wire Pass. I appeared to be alone in this vast, deep rock stadium. I felt no fear, only the determination to get through this cave and save Holly. It was dark inside. I took out a small LED lighter on a key chain, the only lifesaving tool I had to guide me on my path.

I finally reached the 12-foot cliff. Fortunately, the rope ladder we'd used was hanging from the corner. It wasn't secured to the cliff wall, but it appeared to be attached at the top. I slowly climbed the ladder until I was almost to the top. I found a gap in the rock wall and tried to pull myself up with both hands. Suddenly my body collapsed, and I fell back down onto a pile of rocks. My left knee was bleeding. Mercifully, I hadn't broken any bones.

I had to climb the ladder again. I grabbed the spots carved for hands. "God, give me strength," I prayed. I felt a surge of energy in my fingertips and wrists, and this time I managed to get to the top. I shed tears of gratitude.

I walked out of the dark cave and continued walking, frequently stopping to rest. It'd been a long time since I'd thought about my hunger and thirst. Only Holly was on my mind. "I won't die until I save Holly," I murmured.

Finally I found myself at the entrance of a canyon cave. *This is strange. I don't remember a canyon cave near the parking lot.*

I couldn't believe it! I pulled my hair and cried. Instead of the

Wire Pass cave, I'd somehow gotten confused with direction and had headed back toward the canyon.

I felt as though I was approaching, after more than 70 years, the end of my life. I lost all track of time, but I turned around and continued to walk.

Then the sound of "plum, p-p-p-p-p-p-p-r" came from over the mountain, startling me from my mind-numbing existence. A helicopter broke into view. I quickly pulled out the LED lighter and shone it toward the sky. *Oh, no! Was the helicopter flying over the northern ridge? Had they not seen my light?*

The helicopter came over the hill again. *Are you coming to save me?* I shook my light, flashing it countless times. The helicopter turned back, lowered altitude, and then came down low, blowing dust in the wind. A bright light shone on me. I yelled and swung my arms wildly.

The helicopter landed on a nearby level surface. A crew member jumped out and grabbed me, dragging me into the helicopter.

"I've lost my wife," I shouted over the noise. "Please help me!"

## Holly's Story: Alone in the Wilderness

**M**y husband, Ed, and I began our hike toward Wire Pass Slot Canyon early in the morning. It was supposed to be a three-hour trek, but we became lost on the way back. The two bottles of water we had with us were quickly depleted, and dehydration kicked in. I eventually became so exhausted that I couldn't take another step.

Ed told me to relax and wait under the shade of a tree near a dry creek bed while he went to get help. He would drive back with a ranger to get me. I had no choice but to do as he suggested.

At first I felt peaceful. I observed the beautiful rocks, the mysterious colors, the sky above. The passing breeze seemed like a whisper. Looking at the surrounding landscape, I realized once again that God is great, and I am small and insignificant.

I don't know how many hours passed, but I began to feel alone and defenseless, without water or food. The heat, thirst, and fatigue were draining me. I became nervous. What if I were attacked by wild animals? What if I never again saw my baby granddaughter, whom we've been caring for? Suddenly tears began to pour out. "Oh, heavenly

Father, please allow me to return home safely."

As time passed, I became more and more anxious and exhausted. Then, amazingly, I saw four young men hiking toward me!

After explaining my circumstances, I asked them, "Do you have any extra water?" Fortunately, they did. I was so thankful! After drinking some water, I felt as though I could now survive.

The young men insisted that I hike back with them and then look for my husband. They also explained that a car couldn't get through to where we were. Although the creek bed was dry, it was impassable for a car. They assured me that no matter how slowly I walked, they would wait for me.

The young men had parked their car in a different place than Ed and I had, and had hiked into Wire Pass using a different trail. They'd found me on their way back to their car. This is the subtle guidance of God's providence. God had heard my prayer even before I'd realized my need of help.

Once, while we were resting, we sat looking at the stars, and I told the men that the stars reminded me of why I believe in God, the Creator of the universe. I then learned that not only did they also believe in God, but that they were Seventh-day Adventist Christians, just as I was. We immediately felt a special bond between us.

When we finally arrived at their car, we saw a firefighter waiting nearby in a truck. A fire had broken out on the other side of the Grand Canyon, and he was evacuating everyone. He used his radio to notify the rangers of our urgent situation and asked for help with finding Ed.

The young men and I then slowly made the two-hour drive on an unpaved road to where my car was parked. Only one car was parked there, our Hyundai Santa Fe. Ed, however, wasn't there. *What has happened? Ed should have been here by now.*

I knew Ed was weak, having no water or food in this hot desert. He also suffered from heart disease and diabetes. What if he'd lost consciousness and was lying in a bush where no one could find him? Tears flowed as I prayed, "Oh, my loving heavenly Father, please have mercy on him."

My companions quietly comforted me. "Don't worry too much, Holly. We're also praying for Ed's safety."

A ranger finally arrived and asked me for the details of where and how Ed and I had gotten separated. He said that the county rescue team



Ed Chun and his rescuers



Ed and Holly Chun

was coming with a helicopter, but by the time I heard the helicopter, it was past midnight.

The ranger told us we should go to Page. He said that if they found Ed, they would take him there. We thanked the ranger and left. About 1:00 a.m. we arrived at the hotel in Page where the young men were staying. I was in the lobby checking in when one of the young men's phones rang. A smile was on his face as he got off the phone.

"They found Ed!" he exclaimed.

## Back to Ed: The Lord's Rod and Staff

**A**fter I was pulled inside the helicopter, I shouted against the noise of the whipping wings, "I've lost my wife. Please help me!"

Handing me a bottle of Gatorade, the crew member responded, "Your wife is safe. She met four hikers who rescued her. Don't worry. She's at a hotel in Page."

I grabbed her wrists and shook her. "Really? Oh, dear God, thank You!"

As the helicopter took off and climbed into the sky, I could see red flames spreading for dozens of miles on the left. A forest fire was spreading in the northern part of the Grand Canyon.

My body was exhausted by emotions that can't be expressed in words. It was like a spring day, full of new life. It reminded me of being spiritually born again.

When the helicopter landed at the parking lot, I headed to the car, saying I had to hurry to go to Page. The crew member told me I should first get checked out at the hospital, and the rangers offered to escort me there; but I refused, saying I could drive myself.

As I headed to the hotel I felt the thrill of gratitude. I smiled as the tears flowed down my cheeks. I was so thankful to God and amazed by His endless grace.

It was 3:00 a.m. when I reached the hotel in Page. Holly was waiting for me outside. I couldn't say anything. I just hugged her for what seemed like an eternity. We'd been separated for 10 hours.

After I got into bed, however, my whole body began to tremble. Both my legs were cramping. I felt cold all over, and I continued to shiver. In the morning the symptoms grew worse, and I was taken by ambulance to the hospital's emergency room. The doctors said my kidneys weren't working because of severe dehydration. I was admitted to the hospital and put on an IV. When I awoke the next morning, I felt better and was discharged.

After Holly and I drove home, we visited my mother's grave. I'd almost joined my mother in her long sleep. As I stood by her graveside, I longed for her warm embrace.

"Mother, do you know how close I came to death?" My mother's favorite flowers seemed to tilt their heads toward me, whispering, "Welcome back." ♣

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**Edward Chun** is a Korean American living in Folsom, California, with his wife, Holly.



# PERSONAL PLATFORM FOR SPIRITUAL POWER

**T**raditionally, during the first month of the year, people develop resolutions, an accountability list (goals they share with others for accountability), or a word of intention (one word they use to thematically characterize the year).

The above techniques are good and have their arena of effectiveness. But here's a simple challenge for you as you navigate 2023. Join a small group (SG) or create one! Join the SG to do ministry for your church—putting into practice the “I will go!” theme, to accomplish good for others in your community, or to accomplish personal growth goals.

Small groups have awesome power. Margaret Mead echoes the “change value” of SG: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.” Ellen White emphasized the “spiritual value” of SG: “The formation of small companies as a basis of Christian effort is a plan that has been presented to me by One who cannot err.”\* And Luke illustrated the “growth value” of SG in the expansion of the early church: “Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah” (Acts 5:42, NIV).

The SG tool has been around for a long time, but is often easy to overlook. Yet creating or becoming a part of the right one can accelerate your meaning and maturation.

Countless research has demonstrated that a SG helps to add depth to realizing the meaning of life as you relate to others and experience a sense of community; it allows the opportunity to appreciate and respect others as well as yourself. There are few things to match SGs in growing faith and ministering development.

Here are seven practical ways that

proper SGs and subsequent involvement can provide you with a platform for power. This CHAPTER approach will help you to combine personal action to your prayers for blessings, expansion, and a life of righteousness (see 1 Chron. 4:10).

**C**—Construct for improvement: small groups can put you amid people who can motivate, and inspire you to be a better believer, family member, community citizen, and authentic person.

**H**—Haven of belonging: small groups can provide you with a safe, loving context where you can better realize your purpose and aspire to be more earthly good and heavenly-focused.

**A**—Agency for spiritual growth: the right SG can help strengthen the building blocks of spiritual growth, namely, Bible study, prayer, proper use of talents, and service to others.

**P**—Partners of accountability: small group members can help to motivate you to follow after righteousness.

**T**—Team of “empowerers”: a positive small group with a good support system can affirm the good and beckon you to a higher standard.

**E**—Ensemble of seekers: a well-composed small group can nurture the desire for more and deeper truth.

**R**—Resilience for righteousness: when one is tempted to be fearful, grow weary, be discouraged, and overwhelmed, a spiritual small group can provide just the needed prayer and support.

*If you're in a good small group, great. If not, join or begin one as soon as possible. You'll be blessed. ♣*

\* Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 7, pp. 21, 22.

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**TRANSFORMATION TIPS**  
**DELBERT W. BAKER**



**THERE ARE FEW THINGS TO MATCH SMALL GROUPS IN GROWING FAITH AND MINISTERING DEVELOPMENT.**

Paul and Shobah Orser and their children, Stanley Scott and Sakshi



God's plan for him to use his education to minister to the physical needs of others?

After agonizing all week in prayer that God would somehow change the exam dates, he knew that he would have to make an appointment with his state's education vice chancellor and appeal the timing. After traveling 250 miles (400 kilometers) by bus for the appointment, Paul made his plea—and his hopes were shattered. The curt reply was "Go home, boy. I have no time to deal with such nonsense!"

Devastated, Paul returned to his home and his family. That night as he lay in bed, Paul thought about God's promise in Philippians 4:19: "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

## PAUL'S TESTIMONY

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*A story of faith and courage*

**I**n almost disbelief I stared at the notice pinned to the college administration's bulletin board. My heart sank. Would all my education be in vain?

I checked the notice a second time: "Examination Schedule for All Medical Students." Looking carefully, I could see that my final 10 days of exams would begin on a Thursday, which meant that required exams would also be held on two Sabbaths.

For most people this would not be an issue; but for Paul Orser, who had never attended class on a single Sabbath, it would be a severe test of his faith. How easy it would be to compromise. After all, wasn't it

### GOD'S BLESSINGS IN THE PAST

Undeniably, throughout Paul's life, God had proved Himself to be faithful. Paul recalled how in 2002 a fire had raged through his small village near Kadapa in Andhra Pradesh, India. It had destroyed 52 homes, including his own, along with all his meager possessions. After his father died, village elders finally succeeded in securing a land grant (for only two cents) and gave him one year to build a home. He vividly remembered, however, that sad day when, after 14 months and no sign of construction, a government official came and demanded that the land documents be returned.

Challenging years followed, as Paul was torn between providing care for his mother and grandmother and completing his education. In 2011 he grad-

uated from Jeeva Jyothi Ministry, a medical missionary school in Tamil Nadu, 230 miles (370 kilometers) from his home. The following year he became part of the teaching staff.

During a home health-care visit, while traveling by bus to administer medical treatments, Paul came upon an accident. The driver was dead, and another person was in severe pain, bleeding from his head and leg. Paul did his best to comfort him, called an ambulance, and accompanied him to the hospital. Paul recognized the injured man. He was the same official who, a year earlier, had demanded that his land documents be returned.

Two weeks later Paul returned home and found his mother waiting nervously. A stranger had been waiting for Paul most of the day. It was the injured man from the accident, whom Paul had helped. Paul listened as Prabhaka Reddy expressed his thanks for Paul's kindness. Then, in disbelief, Paul watched as Mr. Reddy opened his briefcase and returned Paul's land documents. In time, because of the kindness shown by Paul, Mr. Reddy became a Christian and joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Then Paul recalled another time that God had shown His faithfulness: Prabhaka Reddy was moved to a different region, and a new official, Mr. Rami Reddy, came to check on Paul's construction progress. Only a small portion of the house foundation had been laid, so the land documents were again reclaimed. On Rami Reddy's way home, he stopped to visit his uncle, Ayyavar Reddy. When he laid Paul's land documents on his uncle's table, Ayyavar Reddy noticed Paul's parent's surname, Subbaiah, on the form.

"What are you doing?" Ayyavar Reddy demanded of his nephew. "That man's son is a doctor and has been treating me! I'm walking again because of him! You must return these documents." Also, Paul's mother worked in the rice paddy fields owned by Ayyavar. Honoring his uncle's request, Rami returned the land papers to Paul.

Remembering God's blessings in his past, Paul had confidence that God would work things out for him to graduate.

### **MOVING FORWARD IN FAITH**

The day after receiving the abrupt rejection of his request to take his exams on days other than the Sabbath, Paul felt impressed to seek advice from Dr. Vengam Raju, a close and trusted professor

## **My heart sank. Would all my education be in vain?**

and counselor at the medical college. Taking Dr. Raju's advice, Paul made an appointment to speak with the top education chancellor of India. Funds providentially were provided for his six-hour flight to Delhi. Many people were praying for Paul on the morning of his appointment.

Paul nervously made his way along the cold, stark marble halls to meet the chancellor, yet he felt confident that God would provide a way through his difficult dilemma. After expressing his appreciation to the chancellor for allowing him to appeal the decision regarding Sabbath exams, he then explained his commitment to follow his conscience in keeping all God's commandments. In amazement, Paul listened as the official spoke by phone to the very same person who had refused to hear his earlier plea. "Yes, he must be the same student," the chancellor said to the woman on the phone. "Yes, he's really here in my office. I'm sure that he would appreciate another chance to see you."

Traveling back to Vijayawada, Paul now was given time to appeal and to present a written plea for an exception. The administrator showed much kindness, and Paul was allowed to make up the exams given on the two Sabbath days and rescheduled for two successive Sundays.

### **LIVING A LIFE OF SERVICE**

Paul has now finished his training and is specializing in diabetes recovery at Sri Venkateswara Institute of Medical Sciences in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh. Paul achieved nearly perfect scores and ranked near the top of his class.

After graduating in June, Paul took an additional six-month class and became a certified cardiac monitor technician. While doing his "practicals" in the hospital's intensive-care unit, he was amazed at how those under his care responded to his physical loving touch and prayers for them—rare indeed in India.



Paul Orser at the Sri Venkateswara Institute of Medical Sciences in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, where he did his “practicals.”

Paul’s wife, Shobah, will be graduating with a master’s degree in 2025 and anticipates uniting her career with Paul’s as they continue to seek God’s guidance in serving their community. They’re currently overseeing the construction of a health center near their home, where they will be advancing Christ’s method in ministering to both physical and spiritual needs in nearby villages. Paul has also purchased property near the health center where organic, nutritious vegetables will be provided for those incorporating a plant-based diet and living a healthy lifestyle.

Again and again God has proved His faithfulness. God opened the door to allow Paul to graduate, which was just another of the many ways God has proved that He has a plan for Paul’s life.

Paul also was successful in constructing a home for his family on the property God providentially protected, a visible tribute to God’s promises.

“To God be the glory!”

---

**Del and Bonnie Orser** are regional directors for Gospel Outreach (<https://goaim.org>) and live in Athol, Idaho.

Paul and Shobah Orser oversaw the construction of this health center, newly named the New Life Health Center, in Andhra Pradesh.



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# THE SOUL'S CONTEMPLATION AND THE "UNREAD" BOOKS

You may have heard people somewhat humorously say that Ellen White's books, sometimes colloquially referred to as the "Red Books," could be called the "Unread Books," since, sadly, few Seventh-day Adventists seem to read them today.

I get this. Both empirical and anecdotal evidence seems to point to the idea that, while many Adventists still like to refer to and quote Ellen White (at least in my experience), there doesn't seem to be a high percentage of members who give her writings a very thoughtful and thorough reading.

There are probably varied reasons for this that could be debated and analyzed. But I'd submit that there is, in particular, a certain genre of books by Ellen White that we need to refamiliarize ourselves with.

I think that if every Adventist submersed themselves in her writings on the life and teachings of Christ, we'd experience the powerful revival and reformation we've been looking for.

Indeed, what if we—following her counsel—spent a "thoughtful hour" each day contemplating the life of Christ?<sup>1</sup> This can be pursued, in addition to reading Scripture, by reading her wonderful classic works on the life of Jesus—such as *The Desire of Ages*, *Christ's Object Lessons*, *Steps to Christ*, and *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*.

In one of those books White puts it this way: "Christ in His self-denial, Christ in His humiliation, Christ in His purity and holiness, Christ in His matchless love—this is the subject for the soul's contemplation."<sup>2</sup>

This isn't to say her writings on other matters aren't important, because we have plenty to learn from her very practical counsel. But I'm wholly convinced that if Adventists spent more time contemplating the life

of Christ through her writings, and a little less time tracing out various end-time scenarios or poring over behavioral concerns, we could turn the world upside down.

After all, it seems to me that what God is chiefly focused on in these last days is developing our characters to reflect His love, which can be done only by contemplating, understanding, and embracing Christ's tender character of love.

Of course, some might feel that focusing primarily on Jesus might not be "Adventist" enough. We have a specific message and mission in these last days that goes beyond what other denominations have. We should therefore leave Jesus with them while we pursue our prophetic calling, preparing people for His soon return.

But again, I believe the true preparation we need for the last days comes not through a perfect understanding of how everything will unfold prophetically, but by having a deeper understanding of Christ and His love. And to that end, I'd humbly propose that the Adventist understanding of Christ, which Ellen White beautifully articulates, goes beyond what other faith communities have been able to recognize.

So yes, let's reacquaint ourselves with the "Unread Books." But let's spend the bulk of our time learning about *Christ* through them. ♣

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898, 1940), p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), p. 70. (Italics supplied.)

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



**I THINK THAT IF EVERY ADVENTIST SUBMERSED THEMSELVES IN HER WRITINGS ON THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF CHRIST, WE'D EXPERIENCE THE POWERFUL REVIVAL AND REFORMATION WE'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR.**

**T**he Thessalonian church had a problem. False teachers, claiming Paul had taught that the second coming of Jesus had already occurred, had infiltrated the community. The Thessalonians had plenty of evidence that these claims were false, but some believed them, and Paul had to coax the church back to reality. As he closed his attempt to set the record straight, Paul described what would happen before Jesus returns.

“The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. *They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved*” (2 Thess. 2:9, 10, NIV).

Paul didn’t assert that the miracles, signs, and wonders would be such perfect counterfeits that no one would be able to recognize the deception. He wrote that many would be deceived and perish because they refused to love the truth. By extrapolation, this means that anyone who loves the truth won’t be deceived and won’t perish. It’s becoming apparent that Paul’s prediction is being fulfilled in our time.

#### ERODING TRUTH

Through the years the premise of absolute truth has become increasingly fragile. Less than 100 years ago, if an attendee at an Adventist evangelistic meeting could be convinced that their belief was erroneous and that the evangelist’s beliefs were Scripture-based and true, the listener took it for granted that they must accept the new truth.

It’s not so today. Popular perception is that truth is flexible. *The truth doesn’t exist, and therefore truth can legitimately differ from person to person.* Taken to its logical end, this means that lying doesn’t exist either, because nothing is absolutely true. Facts are no longer necessarily accepted, and the wildest conspiracy theories are considered viable alternatives.

More balanced media outlets are, understandably, reacting strongly against conspiracy theories. And their arguments against conspiracy theories are reasonable, but don’t seem to call forth a resonating response from those who choose to believe such theories. By their own admission, those who do believe state that no amount of evidence will convince them that their favorite conspiracy theory is false.

Although I applaud the media’s backlash against false conspiracy theories, I anticipate a future problem. Those who reject outlandish conspiracy theories are also scornfully laughing at those who believe them, because it’s astonishing that anyone would be deceived by such foolishness. This is where Seventh-day Adventists will soon face a challenge, because we do believe in a conspiracy, and have been preaching about it for more than 170 years.

Our conspiracy goes like this: An evil being from a place called heaven has been quietly working in the background for thousands of years to arrange a massive deception that will climax before a man who died 2,000 years ago floats down on a cloud from outer space. The agents of this evil angel have infiltrated the Christian church, and are actively eroding key biblical truths. Eventually the United States government, followed by all other earthly governments, and backed by the apostate Christian church, will begin to

How can we distinguish the genuine from the fake?



**ONE  
CONSPIRACY  
THEORY  
ADVENTISTS  
CAN SUPPORT**



## I am convinced that Satan is succeeding phenomenally in conditioning our world to reject the idea of his last great deception as just one more foolish conspiracy theory by ignorant Christians.

force everyone to accept their version of truth. And part of this deception will include fantastic supernatural signs and miracles that no human is able to perform. All this will convince the world that the counterfeit is actually genuine.

This conspiracy sounds similar to (and as ridiculous as) the others swirling around today to anyone who doesn't accept the Bible as the inspired Word of God, or to those who have different interpretations of key Bible prophecies. Can we blame reasonable people for responding to this conspiracy theory by rolling their eyes and thinking, *Here we go again?*

I'm convinced that Satan is succeeding phenomenally in conditioning our world to reject the idea of his last great deception as just one more foolish conspiracy theory by ignorant Christians. As usual, Satan has two extremes, and he is happy if we will invest in either. One extreme is to believe any number of fake conspiracy theories so that when the real one comes, it gets lost and confused with the others. The other extreme is to scorn all conspiracy theories, so that when the real one appears it is immediately rejected with the rest.

### HANDLING THE COMING PROBLEM

So how should Adventists handle this coming problem?

It may come as a surprise, but I recommend advising people to be prepared to believe the things they hear. Not to believe everything, of course, but to be prepared to believe anything that passes certain tests. Why? Because if we love the truth, we must test everything in order to determine what is true. Lovers of truth don't want to discard the truth if it arrives looking like everything else that they have rejected as false. After all, that is what counterfeits are: things that seem so close to genuine that it's difficult to recognize the fake. If we love the truth, we must accept the reality that when surrounded by counterfeits, we must do some work to identify what is genuine.

The plethora of false conspiracies currently making the rounds can be useful if we use them as practice for learning how to distinguish between the true and the false.

When I was a teenager, I bought a counterfeit Rolex watch in Singapore. I took it into a Rolex store in the United States just to see how good a counterfeit it was. The manager looked up as I walked through the door, and from across the room he locked eyes onto the watch in my hand. Without a moment's hesitation he called out dryly, "It's fake." He knew the real thing so well that he could spot a counterfeit from across the store. We must learn to do the same with situations, news, social media, advertising, etc. Unfortunately, with good counterfeits we cannot simply trust our instincts, because we are biased and we tend to believe what we want to believe. We must learn discernment by practice.

### HOW TO SPOT COUNTERFEITS

Here are a few ways to investigate and distinguish between truth and falsehood, even when we must push against our own biases. And we should apply these tests not only to Satan's final great deception but to whether we should believe that Elvis is still alive, or that Bill Gates developed COVID-19, or whether a statistic or story that appears on social media is accurate or a fake.

But first a warning: To do this investigation properly, we must commit to following the truth no matter where it leads, even if it means giving up our own favorite conspiracy theory, public figure, or anything else. With so many people believing lies, following the truth is becoming increasingly unpopular. The lover of truth must resolve in the heart to seek truth no matter where it leads. The situations we face today are dress rehearsals for how to handle Satan's final great deception, which is already in progress.

Here are five biblical steps to help differentiate between true and false.

### Step 1: Admit Your Limitations

Admit you don't know enough. Proverbs 3:5 counsels us not to lean on our own understanding, and verse 7 counsels us not to be wise in our own eyes. Those who believe they possess sufficient knowledge within themselves to distinguish all truth from all falsehood will certainly be deceived.

### Step 2: Ask for Wisdom

Ask God for wisdom. James 1:5 tells us that if we lack wisdom, we should ask God, who will give it generously. Knowing that Satan is a master counterfeiter, the person who loves the truth will ask daily for the God-given ability to discern between truth and falsehood.

### Step 3: Listen

Listen to the Holy Spirit. According to 1 Corinthians 4:2, the truth should commend itself to your conscience. One who loves the truth and has asked God for wisdom will listen carefully for the inner voice of the Spirit of God. If something seems slightly wrong, even if a person cannot identify exactly what it is—or even if that person wants to believe it is true—the individual who loves the truth will take time to identify and pay attention to God's voice.

### Step 4: Continuing Education

Never stop gaining an education. One of Satan's strategies is to keep people in ignorance and, incredibly, even to value ignorance as a virtue. But in Proverbs, God states outrightly that He values education and careful thinking, counseling us to obtain learning and knowledge at all costs (Prov. 4:7). This doesn't necessarily mean acquiring advanced degrees. It applies to ordinary situations. For instance, those who have never fixed the brakes on a car ought to find the manual and educate themselves before doing it. Similarly, test and confirm any and every rumor. Check it out, seek out what is true, and be prepared to accept or reject it based on trustworthy sources and evidence.

This step, however, comes with a caution. Not every source is trustworthy. That's why we research the people we hire to work on our cars, our houses, and our health. We are surrounded by counterfeits, so we know we must choose carefully whom to trust. Each time we investigate

someone to see if we can trust that person, we prove the Bible is right. Education is not the enemy. Ignorance is.

### Step 5: Read the Fruit

We must trust someone: how do we determine who is trustworthy? It is easiest to listen to those who say what we want to hear, but lovers of truth won't be content with stacking the deck. Jesus provided clear instruction for determining whom to trust. Each person wears a collection of signs that are either warning or recommendation signs.

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. *Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them*" (Matt. 7:15-20, NIV).

The fruits we bear are the signs we wear that reveal our characters. The Bible provides several lists of dependable signs that reveal character (e.g., Gal. 5:19-23; 1 Tim. 1:9, 10; Phil. 4:8). Everything necessary to determine who is safe to listen to, support, trust, and follow can be recognized by their fruits. Simply check their behavior (and the behavior of those they call friends) through these lists. If the fruit is rotten, then their other redeeming qualities—education, position, politics, beliefs, etc.—cannot be trusted either, because Jesus warned us that a bad tree cannot produce good fruit. "Read" the fruit. We can't safely give someone a pass when the fruit warns us to turn away.

### SUMMING IT UP

We are surrounded by counterfeits. According to Scripture, the only way to differentiate the genuine from the false is to love the truth and to accept it, even when we don't like it. If we love the truth, we won't be deceived, even when the greatest conspiracy of all time convinces most of the world.

---

Jeff Scoggins is planning director for Adventist Mission at the General Conference.

# ESTHER FOR GROWN-UPS



# Between providence and divine silence

JOHN K. MCVAY

**D**espots and dictators are concerned about their personal safety and guard it elaborately. Elite troops, with personal, sworn loyalty to the ruler, guard the throne. Royal taste testers sample meals. Meticulous procedures and regulations insulate, isolate, and protect.

The Persian law guaranteeing the king's safety is as stark as it is effective—anyone who approaches the king uninvited will die at the hands of those elite troops. No exceptions. Inescapable. Automatic. It will happen every time.

Only the king himself can halt the inevitable execution.

Queen Esther courageously affirms: “I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish” (Esther 4:16).<sup>1</sup> This time, though, she does not have 12 months to prepare (Esther 2:12). She and her court have just three days to get ready (Esther 4:16). But you can imagine that when she steps out of her palace and sweeps toward the king's throne room, she is at her alluring best.

\*\*\*

Someone has written, “For heightened action the story [of Esther] is perhaps unsurpassed within the pages of the Bible.”<sup>2</sup> For all its action-packed attractiveness, the story of Esther is troubling. There's a lot to wince and squirm at here. Some of the discomfort comes from what is absent: God is nowhere mentioned and, while there is a lot of “fasting and weeping and lamenting” and “sackcloth and ashes” (Esther 4:3), no one prays. Much of the discomfort, though, comes from what is present, especially the vindictive slaughtering by the Jews after they are saved (Esther 9).

Given our own squeamishness about the book, it's no surprise that Esther has been revised down through the ages. Well after the time frame of the Old Testament story of Esther, six additions were made to the book. Totalling 107 verses, these additions appear in the Greek Old Testament (LXX) and are accepted as inspired by many Christians.

It is not difficult to see why the additions were made. One addition describes Esther at prayer:

“Queen Esther, in the grip of mortal anxiety,

sought refuge in the Lord. . . . Then she prayed to the Lord God of Israel. . . . ‘Do not yield your scepter, Lord, to gods that have no real existence. . . . You know all things; you know that I hate the splendor of the heathen; I abhor the bed of the uncircumcised or of any Gentile . . . I, your servant, have not eaten at Haman's table, nor have I graced a banquet of the king nor touched the wine of his drink-offerings’” (Esther 14:1-17, REB).<sup>3</sup>

With that sample in view, it seems likely that the additions were included to reassure readers that, first, God is indeed alive, well, and active in the story; and, second, the heroes, Esther and Mordecai, are indeed praying, faithful, law-observant Jews of high moral and spiritual caliber.

## TWO VIEWS OF ESTHER THE BOOK

Do we need to rewrite Esther to make it acceptable? Two views of the book as it stands have developed: (1) it is what it is—a godless, pagan composition—and we have to try to make sense of it as such; (2) it is what it isn't—hiddenness and disguise are key to this complex, sophisticated composition.

Esther is indeed a sophisticated composition that is structured very carefully. One example? There are two halves to the story that carefully mirror each other. To hide the presence of God could be another example of careful rhetoric. On the surface, God is not mentioned or acknowledged. Beneath the surface, God is everywhere witnessed and celebrated as the true hero of the work.

What evidence is there that the author is purposefully concealing God's presence? The story reflects earlier Bible stories in a detailed way, especially the story of Joseph. To cite just a few parallels between the two stories:

Both Joseph and Esther are away from home involuntarily, sold into slavery (see Esther 7:4).

The physical attractiveness of the hero is important to each story.

Both stories feature a royal banquet in which guests do not know the true identity of the host.

The turning point of each story involves remem-

Perhaps it's just here that we find a most powerful gospel message in Esther: Esther's characters are not squeaky-clean ones operating in a morally antiseptic world. And neither are we.

bering a Hebrew during a difficult or sleepless night.

The Esther story “alludes and points back to Joseph’s story,” suggesting “that God is in fact very much involved in the events, even if he is not directly mentioned.”<sup>4</sup>

In addition, in spite of the fact that God is nowhere explicitly mentioned, the story reveals events that are obviously planned to occur just as they do. Mordecai just happens to overhear a conversation between two would-be assassins. Haman plans the death of Mordecai, scheduling his request to the king the next day. That very night, the king experiences sleeplessness, and requests that the royal chronicles be read. The scribe just happens to read the story of Mordecai’s loyalty in revealing the assassination plans. Haman just happens to arrive at court at the moment the king is pondering how to honor Mordecai.

The evidence mounts that the providence of God is at work. But why? Why would the author of Esther conceal the presence of God? Here is an intriguing answer: The author draws readers into the story, inviting them to experience what providence feels like (rather than instructing them that it is at work). The evidence of God’s providence is so detailed and cumulative that it drives the reader to the unspoken conclusion that God is active to save His people.

### THREE THOUGHTS ABOUT ESTHER THE BOOK

So what can we learn from the story as grown-up disciples of Jesus? What advice might we offer one another about reading and applying the lessons of Esther today?

#### 1. Esther and the Jews

First, we should attend carefully to when we are reading the story, nearly 80 years after a central, horrific, historical event—Hitler’s genocide of 6 million Jews. Esther tells the story of a genocide of Jews averted. Just a few decades ago, Haman’s failed attempts turned to the terror of actual, mass executions. We cannot forget that we now read Esther under the dark cloud of the Holocaust.<sup>5</sup>

Why not gather your family or a group of friends and visit one of the world’s Holocaust museums and a memorial to it? Why not visit a local Jewish synagogue and participate in the Purim celebration? As the story of Esther is read, take part in the hissing and noisemaking every time Haman’s name is spoken. If you do, you will never read the book of Esther quite the same again.

#### 2. Esther and Us

A second insight is about Esther and us. Esther disturbs our idealism, our dreams of a perfect people of God, untouched by the world around them and bearing clear, straightforward witness to the truth. It presents us, instead, with heroes who seem rather deeply embedded—marinated, even—in the pagan world around them. Their Persian names echo the pagan, polytheistic culture: “Esther” evokes the name of the Persian goddess “Ishtar” and “Mordecai” the name of the Persian god “Marduk.” They do not seem invested in forthright witness to their pagan neighbors. Instead, Mordecai “commands” Esther not to reveal her identity as a monotheist Jew, and she obeys (Esther 2:10). Why can’t Esther and Mordecai be more like Joseph and Daniel?

As we read the story, Mordecai and Esther seem more willing to go along with the whole scandalous, massive, recruit-a-new-queen-for-the-king sex-trafficking operation than we would like. Moreover, Mordecai serves as a member of the court of Xerxes I, a studiously loyal factotum of a perverted, immoral, pagan emperor. And Esther is that emperor’s queen!

We must recall, though, that this is a story of God’s people in the diaspora, the dispersion of Jews throughout the world following the exile, who are trying to figure out how to make their way in a world opposed to God and the ways of God. By our assessment, they are not doing so well at it.

Perhaps it’s just here that we find a most

powerful gospel message in Esther: Esther's characters are not squeaky-clean ones operating in a morally antiseptic world. And neither are we. If God used them, flaws and all, He can use us, flaws and all! As Rahel Wells puts it: "Ultimately, God is able to use fallen and faulty people to His glory. For readers today, this should be very comforting. God is able to use imperfect human agents."<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Esther and Jesus

A third and final insight is about Esther and Jesus. The identities of the protagonist and the villain in the story may seem random and unimportant. The protagonist is introduced as "Mordecai, the son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjamite" (Esther 2:5), which means he is related to King Saul, Israel's first king. The villain is identified as "Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha" (Esther 3:1), which means he is related to the Amalekite king Agag. Neither Mordecai or Haman is Persian. Both are immigrants.

Their stories entwine in an ancient hatred: King Saul, Mordecai's ancestor, disobeyed the counsel of prophet Samuel and spared the Amalekite king Agag (1 Sam. 15), though Samuel himself eventually slays Agag. The seemingly random introductions induct us into "an epic conclusion to the age-old contest between the descendants of Saul and Agag, between the nations of Israel and Amalek."<sup>7</sup> This is not an isolated, disconnected happenstance, but a powerful, evocative vignette in a long-running conflict. While Kishites and Agagites are hard to find these days, "the book of Esther portrays a battle between good and evil, which is a microcosm of the great controversy between Christ and Satan."<sup>8</sup>

So how might the story of Esther refract the story of Jesus?

\* \* \*

All alone, she is ravishingly beautiful, a wave of the most aromatic and seductive fragrances on the planet preceding her. This youthful queen, who "had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at" (Esther 2:7), approaches the outer ring of guards. She acknowledges them with a slight nod of her beautifully sculpted chin.

Though momentarily bewildered, the walkie-talkies crackle to life, and the assassination threat is announced. The whole detailed security apparatus around the Persian emperor snaps to attention.

The execution squad begins to close in on the threat.

She approaches the king, exuding her submission to her monarch, bowing, curtsying in her carefully choreographed advance. The determined death squad slow their pace, glancing at each other with raised eyebrows and lowered swords. The king, instantly . . . distracted . . . from all other business, quickly extends his golden, jewel-encrusted scepter to his gorgeous queen.

\* \* \*

When, centuries later, Paul describes the work of High Priest Jesus in Ephesians 2:18, he uses a term that takes us back to the court of the Medes and Persians. Anyone wishing for "access" (*prosagōgē*) to a Persian monarch had to request it through credentialed friends who could grant it. Paul writes: "For through him [Jesus] we both [Jewish and Gentile believers] have access (*prosagōgē*) in one Spirit to the Father."

Jesus enters the court of the King to intercede for His people. Through Him, in Him, by Him, we have access to the Emperor of the cosmos. When Esther sweeps her way toward Xerxes I, the courageous, beautiful Jewish-Persian queen offers an image, however dim and oblique it may be, of the grandest story of all, the intercession of Jesus before the Father:

"Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16);

"For through him [Jesus] we both [Jewish and Gentile believers] have access (*prosagōgē*) in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph. 2:18). ♣

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations are from the English Standard Version.

<sup>2</sup> "Esther, Book of," *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1998), pp. 246, 247.

<sup>3</sup> Texts credited to REB are from *The Revised English Bible*. Copyright © Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press, 1989. Reprinted by permission.

<sup>4</sup> See Adam Garfinkle, "Joseph and Esther: Some Parallels and a New Midrash," *Conservative Judaism* 65, no. 1-2 (2013-2014): 95-106.

<sup>5</sup> See Julie Gaines Walton, "And All Who Joined Them: A Faithful Christian Reading of Esther in a Post-Shoah World," *Review & Expositor* 118, no. 2 (May 1, 2021): 209-213.

<sup>6</sup> A. Rahel Wells, "Esther," in *Andrews Bible Commentary: Old Testament*, ed. Ángel Manuel Rodríguez et al. (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2020), p. 604.

<sup>7</sup> Katie Benjamin, "The Book of Esther and God Hidden and Revealed," *Lutheran Forum*, Fall 2014, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Wells; cf. Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1917), pp. 605, 606.

**John K. McVay**, Ph.D., is a New Testament professor and serves as president of Walla Walla University.

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# THE JOSHUA GENERATION OF THE ADVENTIST CHURCH

**W**hat was Israel's greatest generation? Was it the patriarchal era of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Or the golden era of David and Solomon? Or the reformation era of Ezra, Esther, and Nehemiah? All these generations indeed shone brightly, albeit with occasional flickers.

I favor the Joshua generation. There was something very special about a generation of babies born in the Sinai desert during Israel's 40-year sojourn. These desert babies grew into desert toddlers and then desert teenagers and finally desert young adults who found themselves standing at the Jordan River, ready to cross into the Land of Promise. Refined and ready, this generation was stronger than they realized. They were equipped to do what their parents were not: enter fully into the abundant life that had been promised.

Even more powerful is the image of these young adults led by their two older mentors, Joshua and Caleb. Of the 2 million Israelites who walked through the Red Sea, Joshua and Caleb proved to be the most faithful of all. They were one in a million.

At the edge of the Jordan, here's what the Lord told the Joshua generation: "Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. . . . Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:7-9, NIV).

And then the young adults—and their two mentors—crossed into the Promised Land.

## TODAY'S JOSHUA GENERATION

Here's a message for the newest generation of young adults in the Adventist Church.

You also have come through a desert. You've endured more than you realize, and you're stronger than you realize. The pandemic has toughened and refined you. You've learned adaptability and fortitude. And if you've clung to Christ through it all, you're ready to cross into the abundant life, to lead the church into the abundant life.

As you enter in, be sure to follow the three things the Joshua generation did before you:

**1** Know God's Word for yourself. Immerse yourself in Scripture—verse by verse, chapter by chapter. Don't just study beliefs; study the scriptures that undergird those beliefs.

**2** Don't turn to the right or left. You don't need the dry sands of legalism or the bitter waters of liberalism.

Remember: (1) salvation is the work of Christ alone—He drenches you in His blood; (2) the abundant life is the work of Christ in you. Your daily decisions and behaviors do matter. They directly impact your entry into the abundant life.

**3** Be strong and courageous. You've been equipped with something very special: the Judeo-Christian faith of the Adventist Church. We celebrate "new treasures as well as old" (Matt. 13:52, NIV): the treasures of Jesus and His enduring words at Sinai.

Now enter in. 🗡️

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**Andy Nash** (andynash5@gmail.com) is a pastor and professor who leads Israel tours for all ages, including a special "Joshua Generation" tour from Egypt to Canaan March 1-19, 2024.

THE LIFE  
OF FAITH  
ANDY  
NASH



THERE WAS  
SOMETHING VERY  
SPECIAL ABOUT A  
GENERATION OF  
BABIES BORN IN THE  
SINAI DESERT  
DURING ISRAEL'S  
40-YEAR SOJOURN.



# THE CHANCE TO LIVE

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*God gives only good gifts.*

It was an ordinary day when the phone call came. “Mom,” my son said, “the blood test indicates a problem with the baby. She may have Down syndrome.”

“Oh, Carlos, let’s pray.” Stunned, I hung up the phone not knowing what else I could do or say to my hurting child. Our family had faced many trials, but this one seemed different. My child and grandbaby were in heartbreaking trouble!

The second phone call verified our greatest fear: their baby girl had Down syndrome. “Mom, we will send you an ultrasound picture. Molly is in her third month.” There was a pause before he added, “The doctors want us to consider an abortion.”

I didn’t realize until later the anguish Carlos and Molly felt. They didn’t go to work for a week after hearing the news. It was a struggle as they wrestled with the idea of aborting their baby. The picture of my unborn grandchild arrived in the mail a few days later. I held it to my heart and cried to God, “They can’t abort this child! Her little body and head are formed perfectly. Oh, Lord, I don’t care if she has Down syndrome; I love her already. I want her to have a chance to live.”

**MARIA-LOUISA ESCARRA**



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**Happiness and peace came with the decision to place this little life in God's hands.**

### **A HARD DECISION**

The worst day was the one the doctor asked Carlos and Molly to meet with a hospital committee about whether or not to have the abortion. They met for four hours and couldn't come to a decision. The meeting ended with the hospital staff telling them they would call in a few hours for their decision. During those hours waiting to hear from the hospital, they decided to keep the baby. Carlos called and told me their decision, and we all cried for joy. Happiness and peace came with the decision to place this little life in God's hands.

After we finished the call, I picked up the picture of the unborn baby and again held it to my heart. All the concern of Down syndrome and the problems that may come were placed where they belong, into the hands of the One who made her.

Carlos and Molly began fixing up the nursery.

Pretty wallpaper, cute animals on the curtains, and, of course, a rocking chair. When Stephanie was born, I heard the excitement in my son's voice. I knew for him the baby was perfect. I couldn't wait to hold her close to my heart for real.

### **LEARNING NEW LESSONS**

I wish I could put into words how very special Stephanie is to all of us. She did all the things other babies do. She reached her milestones in her time. While there have been health concerns, her parents have met these challenges with little effort, because of their love for her. The love in turn she gives to her mother, father, big sister, and the rest of the family is beyond amazing. Best of all, when I'm there, all her attention goes to Grandma. The cuddling and kisses are so precious, and I know she knows I love her.

I must confess that in the past, I have shied away from a Down syndrome child. I didn't understand that it's a chromosomal disorder. Although different in their appearance, these children more than make up for it with their love. Their understanding may be limited, but they are able to grow up and contribute not only to their family, but to society. Each Down syndrome child is precious. It took Stephanie to teach me this. But there is a greater lesson.

The doctors looked at the test results and saw an imperfect child. Our concerns and fears early on made my children struggle with what the right decision should be. But our family learned we are all imperfect. When Stephanie came into our world, we didn't see what made her different; we saw only that she belonged to us. God does the same. He looks beyond our limitations and simply loves us.

Stephanie's future is uncertain, but her parents and grandparents are committed to helping her in every way that we can. Her parents know that giving this child the right to life was the right decision. God's commitment to us was seen on a cross. His love for us abounds. He, too, if we choose to live for Him, has given us the right to life—eternal life. One day Jesus will return to take us home, where all our imperfections, not just Stephanie's, will be changed in the twinkling of an eye. We will live forever with Him. I can't wait. What about you? ♣

\*All names have been changed.

**Maria-Louisa Escarra** is a pseudonym.



# HIS Impact On Me



## Finishing Strong

Quentina came to HIS when she was in the fifth grade. Her lack of academic focus reflected her unstable circumstances. “I grew up with my grandma. My father was not there for me physically, and my mother was not there for me emotionally,” Quentina reflects. “The other kids bullied me a lot whenever the teachers weren’t looking. I always got caught reacting to the teasing and got sent to the principal’s office daily.”

Quentina’s frustrating experience with school gave her a dislike for reading and learning. “One time I told the teacher, ‘Just give me an ‘F!’” Despite her contempt for learning, Quentina said she loved being at HIS. “I liked staying here. Home was a bad atmosphere. It gave me suicidal thoughts from all the negativity.”

Through intervention and coaching from her mentor, Quentina’s relationships with her peers improved. Through patient help from teachers, she grew an appreciation for reading and learning. Finding something at HIS that was missing

at home, Quentina would stay on campus for the entire summer break.

Over the past four years, Quentina has been on the honor roll. There was a time, however, when circumstances almost forced her to stop attending HIS. “My grandma was going to withdraw me from HIS because of the cost of travel,” Quentina recalls, “I was going to change schools, and the day I was waiting for my grandma to come and get me, I was sitting on the side of the curb, ready with my withdrawal forms, when Mrs. Adams (former Vice Principal) asked where I was going. After I explained the situation, she said I didn’t need to withdraw because the school would help.”

Quentina, now a senior, reflects very positively on this life-defining moment. She was able to remain at HIS and has had significant academic and emotional growth since. Many former and current students like Quentina benefit from the whole-person approach to education at HIS.

You can help other students like Quentina find wholeness, despite their circumstances.  
To to make a gift, visit [HolbrookIndianSchool.org/donate](https://HolbrookIndianSchool.org/donate).



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PETER N. LANDLESS ZENO L. CHARLES-MARCEL

## COLDS, FLU, AND COLD NOSES

*The cold facts*

**Q:** Winter is a respiratory infection jungle in my home. Is it the cold that gives us the cold? What can we do besides moving to a warm climate?

**A:** The chilly temperatures do not cause colds, but they may inhibit our body’s ability to fight off viruses and facilitate virus survival on hands and surfaces. Lower temperatures and humidity levels in winter aid the survival and transport of virus-laden aerosols and droplets generated by infected individuals. Many viruses survive longest when the relative humidity falls below about 40 percent, while drier air can damage some airway-lining cells, leaving microcracks in our protective barrier, which viruses can exploit.

Moreover, winter’s shorter days (less sunlight) reduce our potential vitamin D production and impair our immune defenses. Huddling indoors to warm up close to potentially already-infected persons further increases our infection risk. However, it was only last summer that researchers uncovered the biological mechanisms involved in the “winter cold” situation.

Cells in the nose are studded with sensor proteins that detect viruses. When these proteins are activated by viruses, they signal the cell to release a swarm of tiny mucous bubbles called extracellular vesicles (EVs). The viruses attach to EVs via their receptors instead of attaching to the nasal mucosal cells themselves. The EVs serve as decoys! Moreover, the EVs chemically neutralize the attached viral invaders and trigger a cascade of other antiviral responses. The vesicle-trapped viruses and those deactivated by the immune responses in the mucus layer of the nasal cavity form a slimy nasal secretion—or “snot”—which we then eliminate.

So here is the new discovery: cold exposure (in the nose) decreases both the total amount of EVs and their attractiveness to the invading viruses. This leaves a greater number of “free viruses” available to directly attach to the nasal



|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Keep:               | ■ hands clean   |
|                     | ■ away from people if sick                                      |
|                     | ■ away from sick people and crowds                              |
|                     | ■ surfaces clean  |
|                     | ■ hands away from eyes, nose, mouth                             |
| Get adequate:       | ■ nose and mouth covered when coughing/sneezing outside in cold |
|                     | sleep, water, sunlight, exercise                                |
| Wear mask or scarf: | if it’s cold outside  |

mucosal cells and cause a respiratory infection.

Our advice? Keep the nose (nasal passages) warm! This can be done by using a hood that extends far over the face, a scarf that loosely covers the nose and mouth, or a mask that covers the nose and mouth. In each of the cases, the warmth of the exhaled, moist breath helps maintain a beneficial nasal inhalation temperature and humidity. Also, there is some degree of physical barrier protection when scarves and masks are donned.

So moms and grandmas were onto something when they told us to “use a scarf around your neck, mouth, and nose” when it’s cold outside. And despite objections, the mask is a useful tool. This is much easier than moving to a warmer climate! 🎯

**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.

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# CLOSER LOOK



## Prayer Plus

Cindy Mercer, *Pray Big: God Can Do So Much More* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2020), 176 pages (available on Amazon.com or [adventistbookcenter.com](http://adventistbookcenter.com), \$16.99). Reviewed by Merle Poirier, operations manager, Adventist Review Ministries.

**T**he office was closing for the holidays, and several sample books were on the table. Thinking I'd have more time to read, I swept them up and brought them home. That's how *Pray Big* and I came together.

To be honest, I'm not typically into books on prayer. Don't get me wrong: I believe in prayer. I know prayer changes things, but I'm not drawn to books on improving one's prayer life. I primarily decided to read this book first because of its cover—both the image on the front and the summary on the back. But expectations weren't high as I settled down to read.

But I was surprised—this book was a page-turner. While it is about prayer, it's much more. The story, told by Cindy Mercer, centers on her life with her

## Between Immanence and Transcendence

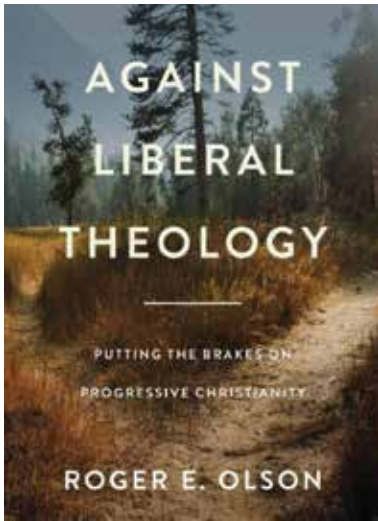
Roger E. Olson, *Against Liberal Theology: Putting the Brakes on Progressive Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022), xi + 180 pages (US\$18.99, available on Amazon.com). Reviewed by Frank M. Hasel, associate director of the Biblical Research Institute.

**R**enowned Baptist theologian Roger E. Olson has written a thought-provoking book in which he compares basic Christian beliefs with liberal theology. From his experience with liberal theologians Olson issues a clarion call for all Christians to examine and evaluate liberal theology and its implications for authentic, orthodox Christian faith. His "aim is to inform people what liberal Christianity is and why they ought to think critically about it" (p. ix).

While liberal theology is not monolithic or homogeneous, it has some common, unifying features (pp. 2, 15). Olson astutely points out the cultural and secular mindset of modernity that lies at the foundation of liberal theology. Liberal Christians give too much authority to modern culture in an attempt to liberate Christianity from its biblical and

husband, Rick. They marry young. While Rick appears to be a great "catch," he's not what he seems. Their journey as a married couple quickly deteriorates as Cindy deals with Rick's many problems with addiction. Eventually she encounters Christians and churches, both Adventist and non-Adventist, who surround her with love and prayer. Cindy develops her own prayer life that wanes and grows with her circumstances. Toward the end a surprise event happens that I won't reveal, but it was then that I realized how emotionally wrapped up I'd become in the story and the people.

Recommending this book to others is easy, but I would expand my endorsement beyond a book on



ecclesiastical houses of authority (p. 167). “In most cases that means a nonsupernatural interpretation of the Bible and Christianity—a Christianity without miracles” (p. 7). In eight chapters Olson gives a concise overview of the historical background of liberal theology (chapter 1), its sources and norms (chapter 2), its understanding of the Bible (chapter 3), God (chapter 4), Jesus Christ (chapter 5), salvation (chapter 6), the future (chapter 7), and the crisis of liberal theology (chapter 8). In each chapter Olson examines leading representatives of liberal theology, which mainly, but not exclusively, come from North America, and looks at their understanding of the key tenets of Christianity.

The conclusion that Olson draws in his insightful

and fair examination is sobering. Liberal Christianity is not a valid variation of Christian belief. Rather, it’s “an entirely different religion from orthodox Christianity” (p. 33). Liberal theology has, among several other things, overemphasized God’s immanence to the point of losing God’s transcendence (p. 52). It has thus “cut the cord of continuity between itself and classical, orthodox Christianity so fully and finally that what is left is unrecognizable as authentically Christian” (p. 73). Liberal theologians often use the same terminology but thoroughly redefine its meaning. But “a word can be redefined only so thoroughly before it loses meaning. A religion can be revised only so thoroughly before it becomes something else” (p. 119). One problem with liberal theology is that “liberal congregations neglected the Bible, showed little or no interest in evangelism, and sneered at revival preaching. Their own preaching was sentimental and psychologized; they prized gradualism and niceness, looked for God only in the universal, and had no concept of divine judgment or the fear of God” (p. 168).

Olson’s book is a perceptive analysis of liberal theology, and the numerous examples he lists are eye-opening. For all who want to understand better the nature and impact of liberal theology today, this book comes highly recommended. ♣

prayer. It’s much more. Cindy and Rick’s story is also about the importance of investing in people—more specifically, sinful people. While we are all sinners, Rick’s addictions dominate the marriage. There were times Cindy thought of walking away, and I found myself inwardly urging her to leave. Without giving away the end, I can say that it was prayer and more that made a difference.

Not only were Cindy’s efforts praiseworthy; so were the actions of the churches. They offered a circle of love and encouragement that makes one glad that Christians like this truly do exist. While reading of Cindy’s experience, our family experienced something similar—overtly sinful choices

made by someone close. Just when we were wondering what to do, Cindy and Rick’s story gave a much-needed perspective on how to treat those who aren’t easy to love.

If you are looking for a volume about how prayer makes a difference, this is a great place to start. If you like miracle stories, it’s a winner. If you’re struggling with someone unlovable in your life, you’ll find encouragement. If you’re overseeing a church ministry and need a new perspective on how to treat those hurting in your community, this book may be the injection of faith you need. ♣

## WHEN JESUS CHANGES YOUR LIFE

We asked readers the following question: What changed in your life when you committed yourselves to Jesus? The responses are as diverse as the people who wrote them, so take a look at what they said.

I lived with traditional belief, and I've lived without traditional belief. My faith has left me in trouble at times, but my hope changed my heart once I understood grace. All the arguments were gone, and all the self-centered beliefs fell away.

**MELVIN LEMKY**

---

I became filled with gratitude to Jesus for pursuing me, catching me, and loving me—these three things became my daily practice:

1. Spending meaningful time in Bible study for a relationship with Him.
2. Spending meaningful time in prayer for a relationship with Him.
3. Engaging in Christian witness by sharing Jesus and what He's doing in my life.

**NADINE MCHUGH**

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Although a Christian, my real commitment didn't happen until I attended a Vandeman Revelation Seminar. I thought I knew my Bible. But coming to Jesus and His plan for His people was life-changing. I received major pushback from family and friends. I had to be able to respond with the Bible. I lost the opportunity to work in some jobs because of the Sabbath. But I love my Lord and my church, and I have never looked back.

**SYLVIA BROWN**

---

I gained experiential knowledge and faith in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Reading and following the Holy Word, the Bible, has been a source of constant inspiration in both good and challenging times.

**WINSTON GEORGE**

---

Lots! But four things come to mind now.

1. Realizing it was Jesus finding me through the Holy Spirit, and not my finding Him, although I thought I was.

2. Peace.

3. Everything is true about coming to Jesus and seeing your flaws more and more (the words in *Steps to Christ* about this are true).

4. I learned there was such a thing as sacred emotions—there is a big difference between crying over the many bereavements in my life and crying because of repentance. That is the inexplicable crying in the presence of the Holy Spirit (inexplicable in any other way than through the Holy Spirit).

**IDE-ULTANA SORCHA**

---

I now truly believe that all things are possible with God when I believe and do my part. I overcame seizures and survived two brain surgeries. My God is an awesome God!

**MURIEL MAXIS**

---

I wanted to tell the world how wonderful and loving He is.

**LYNDA TATARYN**

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Since the powerful book *Steps to Christ*, by Ellen White, was mentioned, we thought it would be inspiring and encouraging to share an excerpt from the chapter “The Sinner’s Need of Christ.” We hope you find the words presented here exactly what your heart may be yearning for.

**T**he heart of God yearns over His earthly children with a love stronger than death. In giving up His Son, He has poured out to us all heaven in one gift. The Savior’s life and death and intercession, the ministry of angels, the pleading of the Spirit, the Father working above and through all, the unceasing interest of heavenly beings—all are enlisted in behalf of man’s redemption.

“Oh, let us contemplate the amazing sacrifice that has been made for us! Let us try to appreciate the labor and energy that Heaven is expending to reclaim the lost, and bring them back to the Father’s house. Motives stronger, and agencies more powerful, could never be brought into operation; the exceeding rewards for right-doing, the enjoyment of heaven, the society of the angels, the communion and love of God and His Son, the elevation and extension of all our powers throughout eternal ages—are these not mighty incentives and encouragements to urge us to give the heart’s loving service to our Creator and Redeemer?

“And, on the other hand, the judgments of God pronounced against sin, the inevitable retribution, the degradation of our character, and the final destruction, are presented in God’s Word to warn us against the service of Satan.

“Shall we not regard the mercy of God? What more could He do? Let us place ourselves in right relation to Him who has loved us with amazing love. Let us avail ourselves of the means provided for us that we may be transformed into His likeness, and be restored to fellowship with the ministering angels, to harmony and communion with the Father and the Son.”

## WHAT DO YOU SEE?

I am always intrigued to learn more about how our brain works with the data it receives from our senses. How do we make sense of what we see? How do we process different stimuli that may communicate contradicting messages?

Visual illusions are one of those intriguing examples that help us realize that some things are not what they seem to be.

Researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) have recently concluded that some of the processing involving visual illusions are actually resolved at low-level anatomic functions instead of requiring major processing work of our brain. They used a classic visual illusion called simultaneous brightness contrast, which shows two gray dots on a background that consists of a gradient from light gray to black. Although the two dots are identical, they appear very different based on where they are placed against the gradient background.

**WARPED  
PERSPECTIVES  
AND FEARS  
ARE OFTEN  
CLOSELY RELATED.**

Scientists have studied this phenomenon for more than 100 years and wondered if the brightness estimation happened on the brain's visual cortex or somewhere else. "All of our experiments point to the conclusion that this is a low-level phenomenon," noted Pawan Sinha, a professor of vision and computation neuroscience in MIT's Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences. "The results help answer the question of what is the mechanism that underlies this very fundamental process of brightness estimation, which is a building block of many other kinds of visual analyses."<sup>1</sup>

We see—and then we process what we are seeing. Visual illusions are fun, but our

lives are impacted by real challenges and actual obstacles. How do we process these moments when our problems seem too big to look beyond them or around them?

When faced with the real danger of being captured by a large enemy force, Elisha's servant processed what he was seeing with "Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?" (2 Kings 6:15).<sup>2</sup> Elisha's answer suggests a completely different processing: "Don't be afraid' . . . 'Those who are with us are more than those who are with them'" (verse 16).

Then he pleads with God to do something fundamental. "Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see" (verse 17).

Warped perspectives and fears are often closely related. We see something, we hear something—and then we often respond to what we think we have seen or heard with fear, anger, resentment, or even aggression.

God reminds us in the story of Elisha and his servant that we need a low-level fix—we need our eyes opened to see God's realities because our own thought processes and the conclusions we reach are often misguided and warped.

What do we see in the world that surrounds us? How do we relate to the realities of our church families? Do we see only conflict, anger, sinfulness, or hopelessness, or have we learned to view others through God's lens, tinted with grace?

"Open my eyes, Lord, so that I can see Your reality in this world and in my life." ♣

<sup>1</sup> Anne Trafton, "Study Sheds Light on a Classic Visual Illusion," *MIT News*, June 16, 2020, <https://news.mit.edu/2020/study-visual-illusion-brightness-0617>.

<sup>2</sup> Bible texts are from the New International Version.

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

# Bill and Jill

now realize more than ever  
that life is not guaranteed

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



To learn more about Bill and Jill's story, scan the QR code or visit [BillandJill.willplan.org](http://BillandJill.willplan.org)



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