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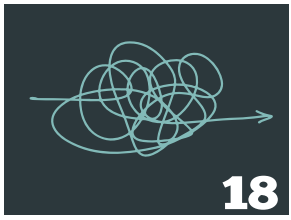
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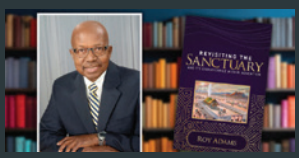
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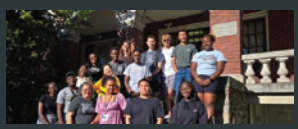
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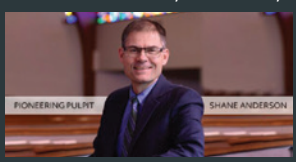
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The more we think we need to extend grace to others is evidence that we are in the greatest need to receive grace.

Annoying Adventism

Boy, are there some annoying people out there! They might not have the very basic social skills to determine whether their own vocal volume, length of speech, or conversational demeanor might be inappropriate.

Some might have a lack of hygiene, producing unpleasant aromas. Some might commit faux pas by aggressively correcting your *grammer*, *spalling*, and *pronunssiaccion*. They can be socially sticky, gossipers, contrarians, downers, complainers, or any combination of the above. They might cause you to sigh and cry (and not of the Ezekiel 9:4 kind). There are various categories of them, but whatever their taxonomy, when you see one who is annoying, chances are neurons are firing like crazy to think of escape strategies.

But what do you do when it's at church? in the potluck line? Are there annoying people even among God's remnant people? Of course. The acronym EGR (extra grace required) is used in Christian circles to refer to those who require extra grace. Now, we know that basic Christian ethics implores us to be kind, loving, understanding, and forbearing toward all. We are to extend grace to all, irrespective of their social skills. But does that mean regular grace isn't enough?

Hopefully this issue will provide many practical strategies to help manage these difficult relationships. But let me add three more points that may help frame our topic specifically from an Adventist perspective:

We are an eternity-bound people. Imagine what heaven will be like. I may be assigned to live in heavenly mansion apartment 1603. My neighbor in 1604 might be someone who grates at my nerves. Now, this wouldn't be a temporary residence, but one for eternity. How could this heaven continue to be *heaven* for me? If we couldn't abide under these conditions, God in His mercy and wisdom would have never allowed for it to begin with, which should cause us to think. Adventists should always see the long-term, eternal picture.

We believe in the grace to forgive, but also the grace to change. Grace isn't merely pardon for sin, or unmerited favor. A true understanding of righteousness by faith holds that God erases our past deeds, but also that God imparts supernatural power to transform by His Spirit. Both sides of the coin point to a biblical understanding of grace. Adventists should always see the potential for change.

We are the ones who require this grace. We do not need extra grace from God, for all things are sufficient and perfect that come from Him. But we do need extra grace for each other. Perhaps this is the area where we most need God's grace to be applied. We are to dispense grace as much as we need grace. Adventists should always see the need for precious grace.

We all require extra grace for each other because we are sinners. We are all self-centered and fall short of His glory. We are short-sighted and earthly-minded. We don't like change. And we think we are above the need for grace, thinking we have good self-awareness. But the reality is that the more we think we need to extend grace to others is evidence that we are in the greatest need to receive grace.

In short, imagine a church in which everyone realizes they are an EGR themselves and thereby daily seeks the Holy Spirit's power and grace, not only to receive but also to dispense it to everyone they encounter.

EGR. That's what I am. That's what I need. That's what's required. And that's what I pray for.

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INBOX

We must combine the love for the truth with love for our neighbors.
JAMES ENGLE

I TOO HOPE HE'S RIGHT

Thank you so very much for Nikolaus Satelmajer's review of *The Oxford Handbook of Seventh-day Adventism* in the October 2024 *Review*. As does Satelmajer, I hope Durham University professor Alec Ryrie "is right" that Adventists' focus is not on politics but on more important things. I pray that our greatest passions will not go to political sparring, but proclaiming the Savior and His soon return!

Gary Moyer



LOVE TRUTH, LOVE PEOPLE

Clifford Goldstein's column "The Importance of Prophecy" (October 2024) is excellent. It combines the ideas of love for our neighbor and standing for truth—not turning a blind eye to what we know is truth. We must combine the love for the truth with love for our neighbors, praying for God's help in explaining Scripture and witnessing to others.

James Engle

ADVENTISTS AND POLITICS

The following Facebook exchange was in response to Shane Anderson's "Politics, Liberty, and the Christian Vote" (October 2024).

In what ways can Adventists engage in the political process without compromising their spiritual values and mission?

Kyle Gael Shim

I think for a start, the answer could be at a local, more limited level: that is to say, supporting initiatives in your local government, getting involved with local councils to improve your community and be a blessing. I know of several Adventists who are doing this, finding fulfillment and telling others about God and our church in the process.

Marcos Paseggi

EXCLUSIVELY ONLINE

Here are comments on our additional online-only content (www.adventistreview.org). You might enjoy the series based on the Adult Sabbath School Bible study guide where authors share reflections on each week's lesson.

NO FORCING NECESSARY

When your heart is at peace with your Savior, good stuff just happens. It doesn't have to be forced. Grace and truth just grow naturally in that kind of soil. ("Great Is His Faithfulness," by Nestor Soriano, posted September 19, 2024.)

Robert Martin Campbell

WHY WE GET DEFEATED

Elise Linné Harboldt shares a powerful quote from Bonhoeffer ("Intimacy Versus Isolation," posted September 12, 2024). I believe isolation and shame are the reason we get defeated by the enemy, whereas true connection and community would strengthen and sustain us.

Shaina Strimbu (via Instagram)

NO NEED FOR CONSPIRACIES

I really appreciate Valentin Zywietz's Sabbath School reflection "Prophecies and Expectations" (posted September 5, 2024). So often we get into sensationalism and conspiracy, rather than living our lives day by day in a state of readiness for whenever the time comes.

Mack

Check our website each Friday for a new Sabbath School reflection. The link or the QR code will take you directly to the page: **adventistreview.org/category/theology/sabbath-school/.**


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"Just as deacons are consecrated, deaconesses, who work equally hard and perform similar roles, must also be dedicated."

Jude Bien-Aimé, p. 13

NEWS



The Voice of Prophecy team gathered with their executive committee to celebrate the ministry's ninety-fifth birthday. PHOTO: VOICE OF PROPHECY

THE VOICE OF PROPHECY TURNS 95 YEARS OLD

MEDIA MINISTRY CELEBRATED MILESTONE IN OCTOBER.

AMANDA BLAKE, VOICE OF PROPHECY, NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION, AND *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

Seventh-day Adventist media ministry The Voice of Prophecy (VOP) celebrated its ninety-fifth birthday in October. From its first day until now, VOP has used cutting-edge technology to proclaim the everlasting gospel of Christ, touching millions of lives worldwide, ministry leaders said.

The ministry began on October 19, 1929, when Adventist preacher Harold Marshall Sylvester (H.M.S.) Richards, Sr., started regularly broadcasting biblical messages on California radio stations. Although some church leaders at the time called radio "the devil's tool," Richards was determined to harness the recently popularized invention for Christ.

Soon the young evangelist was broadcasting his program, *The Tabernacle of the Air* (renamed *The Voice of Prophecy* in 1937), on a daily basis. His headquarters, a renovated chicken coop in his garage, reflected his humility, a trait he retained even as his broadcast's fame grew.

In 1942, just weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor, listeners across the United States turned on their radios to hear, "Lift up the trumpet, and loud let it ring: Jesus is coming again!" *The Voice of Prophecy*, which began each segment with its uplifting theme song, had become the Adventist Church's national radio program. This brand-new appointment, created in 1941 by the General Conference Radio Commission, distinguished *The Voice of Prophecy* as one of the first religious programs to be broadcast coast to coast.

Five years later the broadcast



Shawn Boonstra has led Voice of Prophecy ministry as speaker/director since 2013. PHOTO: VOICE OF PROPHECY

went international, and communities around the world became acquainted with the sound of VOP's signature male quartet, the King's Heralds, the contralto Del Delker, and the friendly voice of Richards. By the 1960s more than 1,300 stations in 30 languages carried *The Voice of Prophecy*.

Also growing was the ministry's Bible correspondence school (now called the Discover Bible School), established in 1942. A month after the school was announced, more than 2,000 students had enrolled. By 1946 that number had soared to 85,000.

H.M.S. Richards, Jr., succeeded his father in leadership in 1969. He was followed by Lonnie Melashenko, Fred Kinsey, and current speaker/director Shawn Boonstra. Under these leaders and their associates, the Voice of Prophecy expanded its reach, developing specialized radio programs, branching into television, and organizing preaching campaigns and evangelistic crusades across the country and the world.

"Ninety-five years—and look at the way God blessed a spark in a young preacher's heart!" Boonstra said. "The ministry started so humbly—in a chicken coop—and now it's across the face of the earth, ministering in more than 70 languages. It's become a frontline evangelistic agency for the church."

Boonstra, alongside his wife, Jean, has been leading VOP for 12 years. The ministry is now based in Loveland, Colorado, the city where Richards grew up and was baptized.

VOP's current flagship program is the weekly television show *Authentic*, in which Shawn Boonstra pursues answers to the deepest questions of human existence. Jean Boonstra leads the children's ministry, *Discovery Mountain*, a weekly Bible-based audio adventure series that has captured the imaginations of kids worldwide—it even hosted the nightly broadcasts of the recent International Pathfinder Camporee in Gillette, Wyoming.

The Discover Bible School continues to offer free courses for both children and adults. It now supports more than 2,000 churches in North America and hundreds more across the globe. United States graduates alone exceed 1 million. Far higher is the sum of worldwide graduates, which has soared into the millions.

More than ever before, Voice of Prophecy is focused on supporting local church evangelism by producing high-quality media resources and bridge events. Its next series, *Primordial*, decodes the origins of existence to point audiences toward their loving Creator. VOP's partnership with Pentecost 2025, a North American Division initiative, will allow participating churches to host *Primordial* and other VOP events for free.

"I can't believe I get to be a part of this enduring ministry," Shawn Boonstra shared. "I'm looking forward to the report we can give H.M.S. Richards, Sr., on resurrection morning about the way God continued to expand his vision."



Adventist Community Services and other church leaders recently came together to celebrate ACS Bermuda's fiftieth anniversary.
PHOTO: BERMUDA CONFERENCE

BERMUDA ADVENTIST COMMUNITY SERVICES CELEBRATES 50 YEARS

ACS AND CHURCH LEADERS GATHER FOR SPECIAL REMEMBRANCE.

TAMMY ROBINSON, BERMUDA CONFERENCE, NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION, AND *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

Fifty years ago a small but dedicated group of individuals in the Bermuda Conference set out with a profound mission—to serve and uplift their community, regional church leaders recently shared. What began as a modest initiative has blossomed into a cornerstone of support, providing vital resources and services to countless individuals and families, they said. Today Adventist Community Services (ACS) Bermuda offers everything from food, shelter, and health care to educational programs, counseling, and job training.

"Over the past five decades, ACS Bermuda has touched the lives of thousands, bringing relief, hope, and opportunities to those in need," they said. "ACS has addressed food insecurity through feeding programs by providing cooked meals, food baskets, and vouchers to vulnerable community members. These efforts have been a lifeline for many struggling families, ensuring no one goes hungry."

Since 2004 ACS Bermuda has sponsored General Educational Development (GED) programs that have empowered hundreds of individuals, allowing them to complete their education and pursue better employment opportunities. ACS also offers financial aid for medical needs and in-home assistance for seniors, supporting their well-being during the golden years.

In collaboration with Bermuda Conference health ministries director Leonard Gibbons and his team, regular health screenings and lifestyle workshops have been instrumental in promoting healthy living, leaders reported. "These initiatives have raised awareness about chronic disease prevention and inspired community members to adopt healthier habits for a longer, more fulfilling life," ministry leaders said. "ACS Bermuda's programs are more than just services; they are lifelines that have strengthened the community and restored hope in the face of adversity."

As ACS Bermuda commemorated its fiftieth anniversary, it honored the pioneers who laid the foundation for this impactful ministry. ACS Bermuda had Eulene Simmons and Betty Reid, two surviving members of the original Community Services Federation (CSF), present during the celebrations. These women, along with the late Lois Wilson, Mary Scott, David Bento, and John Mello, worked tirelessly to establish today's organization.

The vision they had 50 years ago, combined with the dedication of countless staff members, volunteers, and donors, has allowed ACS Bermuda to thrive and grow, ministry leaders said. "Their contributions were honored as the bedrock of its success, and ACS Bermuda is eternally grateful for the legacy they helped build," they emphasized.

"This fiftieth anniversary is more than a celebration of past achievements; it is also a call to action," ministry leaders said. "It is a reminder of the power of community, the importance of serving God and humanity, and the lasting impact that can be created when uniting for a common purpose."

Leaders added that as ACS Bermuda looks ahead, everyone—those who have been with the organization since the beginning and those who have just recently joined the effort—is invited to recommit to the shared vision. "There is still so much work to be done, and together, ACS Bermuda can continue to make a profound difference in the lives of those served," they said.

ACS Bermuda has been filled with hope and gratitude for the past five decades. The organization has come a long way, but the journey is far from over, ministry leaders emphasized. "With God's guidance and the community's continued support, the next 50 years will be even more impactful. Until Christ returns, ACS Bermuda will remain steadfast in its mission to serve, uplift, and bring hope to those in need."



The Hopeful, a film that retells the beginnings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, became available for streaming worldwide on October 22.
IMAGE: HOPE CHANNEL INTERNATIONAL

HOPE CHANNEL INTERNATIONAL LAUNCHES *THE HOPEFUL* FOR STREAMING

RELEASE SEEKS TO SHARE A MESSAGE OF HOPE AND HEALING, LEADERS SAID.

HOPE CHANNEL INTERNATIONAL AND *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

Hope Channel International (HCI) announced the global on-demand release of *The Hopeful* for streaming worldwide through Wonder Events. This release, which began to be streamed on October 22, seeks to share a message of hope and healing, offering a meaningful opportunity for viewers to connect and spread the story of the Advent hope, TV network leaders said.

The Hopeful is a riveting historical drama that follows the journey of William Miller, a simple farmer turned influential preacher, whose predictions about Christ's return led to the emergence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, producers said. Directed by Emmy Award winner Kyle Portbury, the film explores themes of faith, perseverance, and the power of community in the face of disappointment. Originally created in English, the film also provides closed captions in additional languages.

"This is an inspirational story of courage, love, and hope for the future. You are going to be surprised and swept away by this story of people who dared to risk it all. May their bravery inspire us in our own mission," Portbury said.

October 22 holds deep significance in the story of *The Hopeful* as it marks the anniversary of William Miller's predicted date of Christ's return. Although the prediction did not materialize, this disappointment soon turned to hope, leading to the birth of a global faith movement—the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The film captures the profound events that unfolded. In honor of this pivotal moment in history, Hope Studios chose to release the film globally on October 22, paying tribute to the lasting impact of this faith journey.

Kevin Christenson, director of Hope Studios and executive producer of *The Hopeful*, said, "This film has impacted tens of thousands since its release in North America and the South Pacific, sharing the good news of the Advent hope with many who might not enter a church, watch a sermon, or read a book. We are eager to see what God will do with it."

Vyacheslav Demyan, president of Hope Channel International, added, "The global release of *The Hopeful* marks a significant milestone in our mission to share hope with the world. By leveraging our own AI-powered translation technology, we're making this inspiring story accessible to more people, in more languages, than ever before. This effort directly supports our 2030 vision of reaching 1 billion people with the message of eternal hope, and we invite you to join us in spreading this powerful message with your communities and beyond."

Pastors and individual church members can use discounted viewing code bundles as an evangelism tool to gift a rental to friends, neighbors, and coworkers, while churches can host screenings through Wonder Events to fund-raise for initiatives such as Pathfinders and mission trips.

The release of *The Hopeful* film is also supported by various additional resources. The book *The Hopeful: Hope Is on the Way* is available in hard copy and e-reader on Amazon, and the *Steps to Christ: The Hopeful Edition* devotional book is available at AdventSource. The film's music can be found on Apple Music and Spotify, and an interactive Bible study is available on Hope.Study.

ABOUT HOPE STUDIOS

Hope Studios, the cinematic arm of Hope Channel International, crafts and shares stories across the globe through a network footprint in more than 100 countries. With content rooted in faith and values, its mission transcends entertainment. Hope Studios strives to inspire positive change through the universal language of storytelling.



Deaconesses stand during the special ordination ceremony in the Central Haiti Conference on September 29. PHOTO: HANS LARSON JOSEPH

ADVENTIST CHURCH IN HAITI BEGINS ORDAINING DEACONESSES

CEREMONY BECOMES THE FIRST SUCH EVENT IN THE CENTRAL HAITI CONFERENCE.

CARMY FELIXON AND LIBNA STEVENS, INTER-AMERICAN DIVISION NEWS

In a historic ceremony at Shekinah Seventh-day Adventist Church in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 77 deacons and deaconesses from the Adventist Church's Central Haiti Conference were recently ordained, marking the first large-scale ordination event in the region. Hundreds of fellow deaconesses, church members, and Seventh-day Adventist leaders attended the consecration ceremony.

"This is a momentous occasion," Jude Bien-Aimé, ministerial secretary of the Central Haiti Conference, said. "Although the laying of hands on deaconesses has been a part of Adventist practice for more than a century, it wasn't until 2024 that we formally adopted this practice in Haiti." Bien-Aimé explained that while this act has been included in the *Church Manual* for many years, it took time for leaders in Haiti to fully grasp the significance of ordaining deaconesses.

"The Bible is clear," Bien-Aimé emphasized. "Just as deacons are consecrated, deaconesses, who work equally hard and perform similar roles, must also be dedicated. Women contribute significantly to the church, preparing Communion and serving in various ministries. If men must be consecrated for these roles, so should women who carry out the same responsibilities."

In Haiti, the role of deacons and deaconesses is particularly vital, church leaders said. Many church members, especially those in difficult circumstances or with special needs, rely heavily on the church for support, they added. Deacons and deaconesses not only keep the places of worship in order but also safeguard resources and distribute food to those in need.

The ceremony, held on September 29, was the fifth such event since the Haitian Union Mission (HUM) executive committee approved the practice during its 2023 year-end meetings, HUM secretary Jean-Philippe Extrat explained. "Today's laying on of hands signifies the commitment of these women who have dedicated their lives to serving the Lord and His church," Extrat said. "Both men and women are called by God for this important work, and I hope this ceremony will inspire more women to deepen their involvement in the church's mission."

Hude Charles, a deaconess from Eben-Ezer Adventist church, expressed her excitement at being part of the ceremony. "I am thrilled to receive this blessing and continue my ministry as a deaconess," Charles, who has been serving since 1981, said. "This is the first time I've witnessed such a significant ordination for women. Becoming a deaconess was one of the best decisions of my life."

Jeannine Extrat, HUM women's ministries director, called the event a milestone for the region. "This initiative breaks new ground and sets a precedent that will help normalize the practice of ordaining deaconesses across our churches," she said. Extrat also praised local leaders for adhering to church guidelines. "We hope this example will be followed by all Adventist churches, recognizing the sacrifices deacons and deaconesses make to serve our communities."

Keven Kelly Pierre, a district pastor, expressed his optimism about this development. "This ceremony is a great beginning," he said. "Although there's still some reluctance, I am preparing my district to follow this direction. As a global church, it is important to align with our established guidelines."

Jean Bernard Banatte, president of the Central Haiti Conference, echoed the importance of this step. "Ordaining deaconesses is not a matter of personal preference, but a directive from the global Adventist Church that we must follow," he said. "Our goal is for all churches in the conference to adopt this practice."



Students help remove damaged baseboards and drywall from a home in Fletcher, North Carolina. PHOTO: SOUTHERN ADVENTIST UNIVERSITY

SAU STUDENTS ASSIST WITH HURRICANE HELENE CLEANUP

VOLUNTEERS WORK ON SOME OF THE AREAS MOST AFFECTED BY THE DISASTER.

ALLISON GRUNDY AND TINA FRIST SMITH, SOUTHERN ADVENTIST UNIVERSITY

The first of three groups of student volunteers from Southern Adventist University, joined by employees and family members, left the school campus in Collegedale, Tennessee, on October 2 to quickly respond to the devastation in North Carolina in the wake of Hurricane Helene.

Even before the category 4 storm struck the coast and moved inland, killing upward of 300 people, the university's Disaster Response Program coordinators—Laura Racovita, dean of the School of Social Work, and Cheryl Craven, director of Christian Service—began recruiting volunteers and coordinating with partner organization 2Serve to move into areas of need as soon as routes were cleared. Processes to excuse students from classes were preapproved, allowing Southern to deploy help more speedily as a result.

Hosted by the Fletcher Seventh-day Adventist Church in Hendersonville, North Carolina, Group 1 included 44 volunteers who stopped along the way to pick up supplies ranging from bottled water to baby food. Once on the ground, the Southern crew helped run points of distribution, clear debris, place tarps on roofs, and remove drywall and flooring as well as mud in flooded homes of local residents.

In a message to Southern president Ken Shaw, Fletcher Academy president and CEO Chris Carey noted that volunteers' "enthusiasm and dedication were evident from the moment they arrived, ready to make a difference." Despite nights spent in sleeping bags on the floor of the church's fellowship hall, nothing dampened the courage and willingness of those who chose to live out the university's mission statement to "pursue Spirit-filled lives of service."

When Group 2's trip was canceled because of infrastructure challenges at the base site, many students were quick to ask if there was space to join an alternate group instead. Four students and a professor from the physical therapist assistant program spent the weekend of October 5 assisting in cleanup efforts, and Group 3 joined the work on October 8 with 20 more volunteers who were ready to "model the hands and feet of Jesus."

Nearly 400 of Southern's 3,229 enrolled students hail from the states hit hardest by Helene—the Carolinas and Georgia—and many more have family and friends who live in flooded and damaged areas. One student from North Carolina is senior marketing major Mason Harmon, who described the trip as unlike anything he had ever experienced before.

"Witnessing so much destruction and seeing people's entire livelihoods and communities completely devastated was such a sobering reality. I definitely feel that my assistance in the cleanup efforts made a positive impact, but because of the magnitude of the situation, I wish that I could have done more."

Harmon also shared how the response holds personal significance for him. "I'm beyond grateful for Southern's willingness to serve in my home state and proud of my university family for stepping up to support the communities of western North Carolina."

In addition to coordinating recruiting and trip logistics, Racovita also oversees predeployment orientations and postservice debriefings. Students have reported being "enriched by these missions where even the smallest things had a big impact, not only on the people they serve but also on themselves." Campus volunteers with servant hearts will continue to explore ways to help rebuild damaged communities, initiative coordinators said, especially those so close to home.



John Graz was the guest of honor at a religious liberty event in Vannes, Brittany, France, on October 26.
PHOTO: FRANCO-BELGIAN UNION CONFERENCE

A DAY FOR FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE AND RELIGION

EVENT IN FRANCE WELCOMES EXPERTS FOR DISCUSSIONS, GREATER AWARENESS.

FRANCO-BELGIAN UNION CONFERENCE, INTER-EUROPEAN DIVISION, AND *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

On October 26 the Vannes Seventh-day Adventist Church in Vannes, Brittany, France, organized a day of awareness and debate on freedom of conscience and religion. The event, entitled "Religious Freedom in the World," brought together local religious leaders at the Palais des Arts in Vannes, and members of Seventh-day Adventist churches in Brittany.

The guest of honor was John Graz, former secretary-general of the International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA) and IRLA's representative to the United Nations. Graz shared parts of the expertise he acquired during two decades of dialogue with heads of state, ministers, and religious leaders around the world.

A Franco-Swiss, Graz holds a doctorate in the history of religions from the Sorbonne (Paris 1). He served for 20 years (1995-2015) as director of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. During his career he visited more than 80 countries and met with many leaders, including the secretary-general of the United Nations.

As the organizer of four world congresses on religious freedom and initiatives such as international festivals that brought together more than 270,000 people, Graz also contributed to the drafting of the Beirut Declaration on Religious Freedom. Now retired, he directs the International Center for Religious Freedom and Public Affairs (CILRAP) near Geneva, continuing his commitment through conferences, seminars, and publications.

During the October 26 event in Vannes, Graz's presence enriched the discussions and allowed for deeper reflection on this crucial theme, event organizers said.

David Milard, secretary-general of the International Association for the Defense of Religious Liberty (AIDLR) France, was also present to introduce the association and answer questions from guests.

COMMITMENT TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Event organizers Fabien Artock and Mireille Lannuzel welcomed this first initiative in Brittany. Artock, a specialist in the Muslim world and someone committed to interreligious dialogue, stressed the importance of taking a stand on the issue of religious freedom.

"The topic of religious freedom has never been so hotly contested, and the moment shared in Vannes alongside the AIDLR reminded us, once again, of the need to take a stand on this essential issue. It was a first in Brittany, and we hope that there will be many more to come," he said.

Founded in 1946 with the support of Eleanor Roosevelt, AIDLR enjoys consultative status with the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Its first secretary-general, Jean Nussbaum, established important diplomatic relations. Its current honorary committee is chaired by Adama Dieng, former under-secretary-general of the United Nations. Its current secretary-general is Paulo Macedo.

In France, the AIDLR relies on Article 6 of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief to defend the right to observe days of rest and celebrate religious holidays. The association has collaborated with political figures such as François Bayrou and Jacques Lang on the issue of the Sabbath.

The AIDLR monitors and analyzes trends in religious freedom, disseminates objective information, and engages in dialogue with the authorities. It organizes international conferences, publishes the magazine *Conscience et Liberté*, and contributes to the United Nations Faith4Right program. Leaders said the association remains a major player in the defense of religious freedom, adapting its actions to contemporary challenges.



The entrance to Glacier View Ranch in Ward, Colorado.
PHOTO: GC ARCHIVES, ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

GLACIER VIEW RANCH WILL UNDERGO RENOVATIONS AS IT TURNS 75

THE CAMP WELCOMED THE SANCTUARY REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETINGS IN 1980.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN CONFERENCE AND *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

The Seventh-day Adventist Church's Rocky Mountain Conference (RMC) acquired Glacier View Ranch in Ward, Colorado, in 1950. The year 2025 will mark 75 years of ownership of this facility that has historical significance for the church in the area and beyond.

The camp has had 75 years of impactful ministry through church retreats, ministry training events, summer camp programs, Pathfinder camporees, and a host of other ministry moments, regional church leaders said. Scores of people, both young and old, have been baptized in the lake and the pool.

Glacier View Ranch (GVR) was also the venue for "a historic and controversial theological consultation" in August 1980, for a meeting of the Sanctuary Review Committee, which involved approximately 115 international Bible scholars and church administrators, according to Adventist historian Gilbert Valentine. The unprecedented gathering was tasked with evaluating nontraditional interpretations of the church's sanctuary doctrine, which had caused widespread ferment when publicly expressed nine months earlier by Australian theologian Desmond Ford, Valentine wrote in the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*.

Through the years the camp has witnessed faithful stewards come and go; lake levels rise and fall; trees spring forth and trees die away; and wildlife populations ebb and flow. And through it all, the structures at GVR have endured seasonal changes and extreme weather conditions. The task of maintaining these structures is always formidable, regional church leaders said.

"While it is good for us to remember with fondness the efforts of good people and the way the Spirit has led in the past, on the eve of GVR's seventy-fifth year, we are choosing to look forward," RMC youth director Brandon Westgate said. "Looking forward not only to how the Lord will bless GVR with grace and peace, but also looking forward to making some much-needed improvements on some structures that have needed some help for quite a while."

Darin Gottfried, RMC vice president of finance, said, "I am very excited about improving everyone's experience at Glacier View Ranch and am very thankful to those who are investing their time to make that happen."

Westgate explained the region's plans to fund part of the project. "We will calculate the total cost for rehabbing a lodge room and a cabin, and we will make an appeal to our churches to sponsor a room or two, or perhaps a cabin or two," Westgate said. "We know that we can accomplish great things when we partner together. That has been true at GVR since its inception, and we trust that it will continue to be true as we approach this exciting seventy-fifth year of operations!"

Glacier View Ranch director of camp ministries Jonathan Carlson shared, "Remodeling the cabins and the lodge rooms help us do ministry better. It demonstrates that God wants us to strive for bigger and unimaginable things. Projects like this help bring us together and make us realize that anything is possible with faith in God's purpose for our camp."

"To continue to operate GVR in this challenging time in earth's history, we will need your support through offerings of prayer, time, effort, and yes, finances," Westgate added. "I know that the Lord is able to do more than we can even hope to imagine, so it is with great confidence that we begin this project, leaning on the everlasting arms of a truly loving Lord and relying on the faithfulness of His people."



ADVENTIST PUBLIC CAMPUS MINISTRY CELEBRATES 10 YEARS OF MISSION. The 10-year anniversary took place in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, and served as a reminder of the reason Public Campus Ministry (PCM) was established and what achievement it has had in reaching Adventist students on public campuses. Several hundred attendees gathered to recommit themselves to the goals of the ministry and to support its purpose. Public university campuses are unentered areas, and Adventist students and staff on these campuses need support from church administrators and local church leaders.



PHILIPPINE PUBLISHING HOUSE CELEBRATES 110 YEARS OF LITERATURE MINISTRY. The commemoration, held at the publishing house headquarters in Silang, Cavite, Philippines, brought together leaders from various Adventist organizations. All gathered to honor the institution's enduring legacy and its significant role in advancing the mission of the church through literature ministry. The event featured a rich program, including historical presentations showcasing PPH's journey from its modest beginnings to its present-day role as one of the leading Adventist publishing houses across the Southern Asia-Pacific Division.



ADVENTIST CHURCH IN MEXICO ACHIEVES RECORD EVANGELISM DIGITAL IMPACT. For the fourth consecutive year, the Adventist Church in Mexico held a live evangelistic series across digital platforms, television, and radio networks. The eight-day event took place September 14-21 from Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, and marked the culmination of extensive mission initiatives that had been held throughout the year across the country's five major church union territories. The campaign reached high digital engagement, with more than 27,000 devices connected live via Facebook and YouTube.



AMBASSADORS GATHER FOR 10,000 TOES CAMPAIGN LIFESTYLE MEDICINE SUMMIT. More than 150 ambassadors gathered for the summit in Fiji September 27-29. The three-day summit focused on health, wellness, and diabetes prevention, combining physical activities, expert-led training sessions, and spiritual reflections to promote wholistic well-being. Attendees participated in practical workshops on natural treatments, including therapeutic juicing, hydrotherapy, poultices, plant-based cooking, and massages. The summit concluded with presentations on potential health threats, mind-body connections, and managing depression in people with diabetes.



SOUTH KOREAN ADVENTIST HEALTH FOOD COMPANY BUILDS WELLS AND SCHOOLS WORLDWIDE. Sahmyook Foods recently shared a report, during the church's 2024 Annual Council, held at the denomination's headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, on October 14, on its mission to serve beyond its nation's borders. As South Korea's second-largest soy milk producer, the company sees nutrition as only one aspect of its work. Leaders have fostered a corporate culture that provides national and international funding for social, educational, and community service projects.



ADRA AUSTRALIA CELEBRATES 40 YEARS OF SERVICE. The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Australia celebrated its fortieth anniversary on October 26 at Avondale University Church in Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia. During the event current and past staff, board members, volunteers, and supporters shared memories and fellowship. More than 600 people from across the country gathered for this celebration. ADRA is a global humanitarian agency with more than 5,000 employees and 7,000 volunteers serving in more than 120 countries.

ADVENTIST REVIEW MINISTRIES NEWSLETTER
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EXTRA GRACE REQUIRED?

CHAD STUART

Every part of the church body is indispensable.

Every church has them. I've been in big churches and small churches, and I've met them.

Churches that speak Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, and English, I've seen them there.

They are equally distributed across white-collar and blue-collar churches and in country churches and city churches. You find them everywhere!

EGRs.

EXTRA GRACE REQUIRED

What is an EGR? An EGR is that person in your church you see on Sabbath morning, and extra grace is required not to turn and run in the other direction.

Is there a face that just popped into your mind? If you can't think of anyone, then, as one pastor said, "you're it."

There are different types of EGRs. While there are many categories one might list, some specific EGRs that come to mind for me include:

The awkward EGR: These individuals might be close talkers, loud talkers, random storytellers. Or maybe they are quiet, but after they say a barely audible "Hi," they then hover as you move around the foyer.

The annoying EGR: These individuals interrupt your point midsentence. They must always have the last word or one final story to one-up your story. They talk louder and sing louder than everyone else, or maybe they are just way too happy!

The aggressive or argumentative EGR: These individuals come to Sabbath School looking for a fight. Their answers are always contrarian. If no one debates them, they debate themselves, taking both sides of the argument just to hear themselves talk and raise the tension in the room.

The complaining or negative EGR: Anything and everything at church can be spun into a negative light by this EGR. After the entire church has just finished singing, "Joy to the world, the Lord has come," they'll find a complaint. "The person singing next to me was breathing so heavy through their nose."

I'm sure the list could go on, and even as I write down these EGR types, I see faces with every example. And if I'm honest, I see myself in some of these examples as well. For instance, I'm probably an awkward EGR to some people. I'm a hugger, and I know many a stoic man who has gone home and thought, *It is going to require a lot of extra grace for me to go back to a church with a hugging pastor.*"

EGRS IN THE CHURCH

Unfortunately, many church members decide the value of a church based on their likes and dislikes. These likes and dislikes range from such things as the style of music, length of preaching, and the church decor. And yes, even "This church has fewer EGRs than the one up the street, so I'll transfer or join here."

While all these reasons for choosing a church are problematic, the latter might be the most unbiblical because it completely ignores the biblical teaching of 1 Corinthians 12.

"For the body does not consist of one member but of many" (1 Cor. 12:14, ESV).

And if there are many, there is always an EGR in the mix. Our human nature might be to turn and run from these people. Or maybe we are more subtle, and our instinct might be to enter through the church door where we are least likely to run into these people or to sit as far away from them in the sanctuary as possible. But does such an attitude recognize that the EGR person is an essential part of the church, and without them, you would suffer?

IMAGE: PERI PRIATNA / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS / GETTY IMAGES



If we come to church and avoid EGR members, or even worse, we leave a church to get away from them, we are sinning against God by not loving our neighbor as ourselves.

WHAT?

Yes, it is true. Continue reading 1 Corinthians 12 with me,

"The parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable" (verse 22, ESV).

Most of the time we look at this text as a statement to encourage those who feel they don't have any spiritual gifts to bring to the church that they belong and are needed.

But will you look at it with me from a different perspective?

Every church EGR member who seems a little annoying, odd, frustrating, or challenging to be around (to put it bluntly, a person who doesn't add much to the enjoyment of the church): what if that is part of their contribution to the church?

Hear me out!

If we come to church and avoid such members—or even worse, we leave a church to get away from EGRs—we are sinning against God by not loving our neighbor as ourselves (see Matt. 22:39).

As Sam Allberry puts it: "It is impossible to be in Christ and not belong to others. A Christian, by definition, has a connection with and a responsibility to other Christians. You cannot claim Christ and avoid his people."*

But we are also hurting ourselves because we fail to learn to love like Jesus loves by avoiding these people. We fail to grow in patience. Worst of all, we might fail to realize that they are not an EGR but a beautiful brother or sister in Christ.

GROWING IN GRACE

I was only 30 years old, still a young pastor, and the Sunday after my second week as the senior pastor in a new church, I opened my email and found the following:

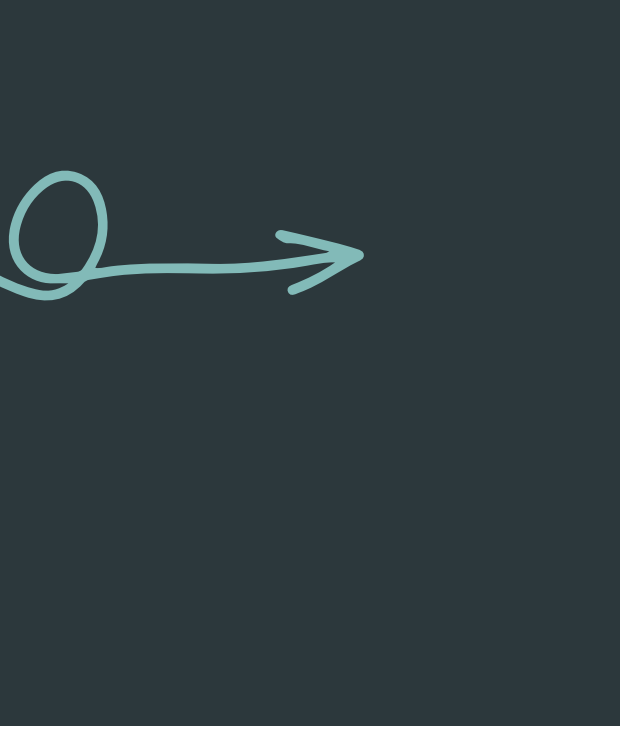
Dear Pastor Chad,

I attended church yesterday wanting to hear the new young pastor. I could not even stay for the sermon. When I heard you compliment that song before your sermon, I had to stand up and walk out [yes, I remembered seeing a woman leave abruptly]. To listen to the pastor call it beautiful, even though I know the angels of heaven were embarrassed to hear it—I don't think I can even be a part of this church with such a pastor.

Sincerely,

Sherry *(name changed to protect the innocent).*

In my book this was for sure an EGR. There I was, a young pastor, a new pastor whom she had never met, and the first correspondence I got from her was to inform me that she had walked out of my sermon



and that she didn't even want to be a part of the church I am pastoring.

EGR, EGR, EGR for sure!

Unfortunately, I didn't have any extra grace.

And so I immediately wrote back:

Dear Sherry,

I'm sorry my statement was so upsetting to you. Since there are many other churches within driving distance, I gladly invite you to join one of them.

Sincerely,

Chad

When I read my email to Christina, my wife, *after* I had sent it, she looked at me with shock and appropriately rebuked me.

Sherry read the email too, because within weeks she had transferred out of our church. Good riddance; one less EGR to deal with.

A few months later Sherry attended a funeral at our church. It was then that my secretary, knowing of the correspondence that had transpired between us, felt we should meet. So she brought me over to Sherry and, without warning me of whom I was meeting, introduced me using the woman's full name so that I would know exactly who it was. We could barely see each other because the ice between us was so thick. Neither of us extended hands. We feigned a courteous nod and went our separate ways.

I went home and told my wife again of this EGR and how icy she was. Once again Christina reminded me that the ice was well deserved after my email and told me I should have extra grace toward this difficult woman.

This time Christina's words sunk in, and my heart was convicted. I began to pray for God to give me grace toward Sherry and to show that grace if I ever received a chance again.

That chance came in a grocery store. I saw Sherry from a distance, and with prayer I mustered up the nerve to approach her. When I walked up, smiling, she was startled, and she seemed none too pleased to see me. But I greeted her warmly, asked her how she was doing, and then did something that caught her off guard. I told her I hoped to see her at our church again sometime. Her response was layered with a tone that said, "ARE YOU SURE?"

I just smiled and walked away.

One Sabbath several months later Sherry did show up at our church. And as soon as I saw her, I made a beeline for her, and without hesitating, I hugged her. She did not reciprocate the hug, but she did stay for the sermon.

During the next few months Sherry began to show up more and more, and every time, she got a hug and a warm greeting from me.

Then the real test came one Sabbath at the end of the church service. As Sherry was leaving, she shared with me several things about the music, my sermon, and our service that she did not appreciate. How would I respond to this EGR?

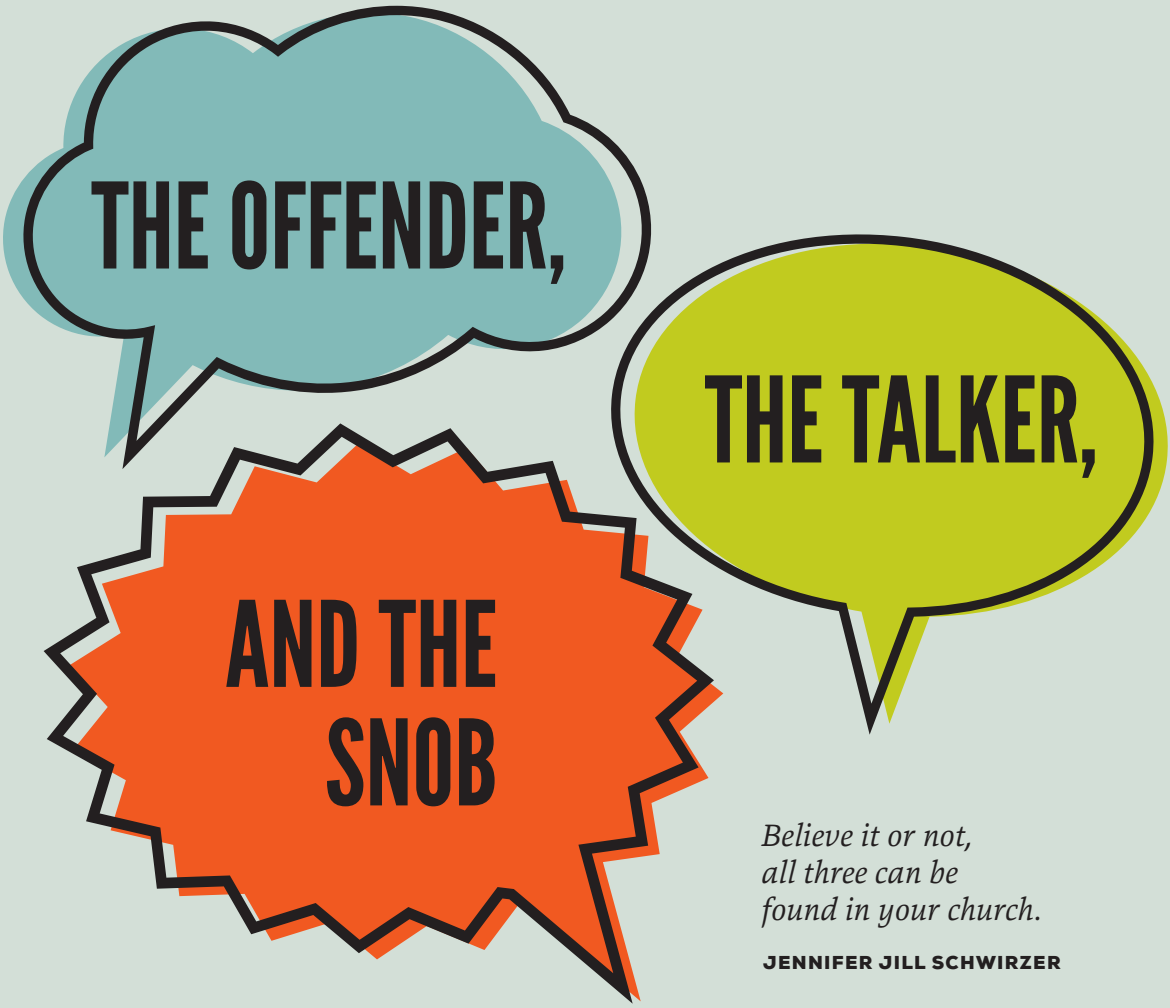
I smiled big, hugged her, and thanked her for her perspective. A few weeks later Sherry transferred back to our church, but more important than that, Sherry became my greatest advocate in that church. And while a pastor is not supposed to have favorite members, if I did have a list of favorite members she would be at the very top because it turns out that Sherry, the EGR, was someone who was not actually an EGR at all. She was just another child of God that was indispensable to that church and to me.

So go forth and find the EGRs and love them! Because just as I needed Sherry, you need your EGRs too, and you'll find they aren't any more EGR than you, but indispensable children of God.

* Sam Allberry, quoted from Brett McCracken, *Uncomfortable: The Awkward and Essential Challenge of Christian Community* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2017), p. 123.

Chad Stuart is the senior pastor of the Spencerville Seventh-day Adventist Church in Silver Spring, Maryland.

IMAGE: PERI PRIATNA / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS / GETTY IMAGES



Believe it or not, all three can be found in your church.

JENNIFER JILL SCHWIRZER

I once volunteered for a ministry alongside a woman with a bad temper. From time to time she'd feel compelled to lay me out for some infraction. I'd freeze, stunned under a shower of hostile words. Without exception she'd later reach out to apologize just as emotionally, only this time she felt sadness and shame instead of anger. I'd forgive, and we'd move on.

I forgave this woman somewhat easily, knowing a bit about her home environment growing up. The example set by her parents taught her to funnel frustration into tirades. Her core beliefs of "Everything must go my way" and "I'm entitled to my anger" fueled her habit of lambasting coworkers and friends. God impressed me to extend to her the very grace she hadn't learned to extend to others.

And it paid off. Over the long haul of her life, the transforming power of God turned this woman into a different person.

As I mulled over the subject of church EGRs (extra grace required persons), I identified three categories of difficult members—rough members, draining members, and snobby members. All three of these classes need extra grace in different forms. While noting that we *all* fall into these patterns from time to time, we must also acknowledge that some people come to embody them. I'll explain each one, along with some biblical wisdom on how to interact with them most constructively. Perhaps you will relate.

When people lack boundaries of their own, we must reinforce ours.

ROUGH MEMBERS

An elderly woman needed help climbing the stairs to a church, and a member gladly assisted her.

"Let me walk you in," he said. "Where would you like to sit?"

"In the front," she said.

"Don't sit there," the man said. "The pastor is very boring."

"Do you know who I am?" she asked, quickly adding, "I'm the pastor's mother!"

"Do you know who I am?" he asked.

"No," she said.

"Good."

Most offenses don't stay so well hidden. A pastor wanting to illustrate the low social status of fishermen in Bible times said, "They were like, I don't know . . . truck drivers!" The problem was that his congregation was full of truck drivers. One of them stood up and told him off right then and there in the middle of the sermon.

Most of us have difficulty forming trust bonds with rough people. Just when we start to lower our guard to let them in, they issue another zinger. Up come the walls again, this time thicker and higher than before. Jesus said, "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come!" (Luke 17:1). Rough people earn a reputation for offending others. Why don't they stop, given the high social cost?

Very often people with social deficits grew up in a poor home environment. Ellen White explains it like this:

"The reason why there are so many hardhearted men and women in the world is that true affection has been regarded as weakness, and has been discouraged and repressed. The better nature of these persons was stifled in childhood; and unless the light of divine love shall melt away their cold selfishness, their happiness will be forever ruined."[1]

As we grow in Jesus, we become more intelligent in our relational lives. We learn to trust wisely. One of the keys to loving rough people is knowing how to create emotional boundaries. We learn not to absorb their hurtful words for the simple reason that their words reflect more on their harshness of character than anything in us. Or perhaps if there is some truth in what they say, we "eat the meat and leave the bones." But we learn not to give them the direct access to our souls we would give a more sensitive and trusted friend.

Sometimes a direct conversation will be needed. Tell the rough person how their words hurt. They will likely defend themselves and shift blame but stand firm. It is for the lack of honest feedback, withheld out of fear of their reaction, that rough people lack evidence of their impact. Say something like "I'm not trying to win a court case against you. I'm simply stating what I experienced. Please consider it and pray about it." "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone" (Matt. 18:15). Direct, frank conversations require courage, but often prove to be highly rewarding.

DRAINING MEMBERS

Listening is a powerful healer. Emotional disclosure, or the ability to admit one's feelings to another person, predicts posttraumatic growth.[2] Emotional openness facilitates bonding.[3] But a culture of self-disclosure carries risks, one of them being that some people overtalk and drain those listening.

Compulsive talking is a thing. One talk show host recommends pocketing some ketchup packets so that if one finds themselves stuck with a compulsive talker, they can burst one open and run away, cry-



ing, "I've been shot!"[4] Of course that wouldn't be honest, but entrapment with a compulsive talker can tempt a person to take extreme measures. In all honesty, which of us hasn't been tempted to just hang up the phone on an overtalker?

We know the drill. While the compulsive talker carries on, the listener sits frozen, eyes wide but slightly unfocused, and, having lost track of the monologue long ago, longing for escape but seeing none, instead zones out to the tune of their own voice saying, "Uh-huh . . . un-huh . . ."

Or perhaps the draining person doesn't overtalk so much as focus entirely on themselves. Typically this takes the form of that person processing their woes and sorrows continually, as if human suffering began and ended with them. Yet "all have trials; griefs hard to bear, temptations hard to resist."[5]

When people lack boundaries of their own, we must reinforce ours. Loving draining people means setting boundaries and declaring them clearly. This sounds like:

"I have only 10 minutes to talk. Then I simply must go." Then when the 10 minutes rolls around, interrupt with "I must go now. Thanks for understanding."

"You've been talking about your depression symptoms a lot. I'd like to encourage you to find a professional. Can I help you with that?"

"You've already shared three times with the class. I'm going to call on a person who hasn't shared anything yet."

And so on. I know, it sounds easy. But note that setting boundaries with a draining person always feels off. We may be tempted to think we've been rude, heartless, or cold. But false guilt must be deflected if we are to successfully maintain our limits.

BETTER-THAN-YOU MEMBERS

I once sat across from a friend of a family member at his yacht club luncheon. He explained that he wished the club could go back to the days when the law allowed them to exclude everyone but white people. I never went back to his club.

Exclusivity, whether based on race, status, wealth, or other factors, should be foreign to the faith of Jesus. He has made of one blood all nations (Acts 17:26). Yet these things defy regulation. When the spirit of superiority seeps into the heart, even professed Christians can become arrogant. Paul encountered this problem when a group of Jewish converts to Christianity began requiring circumcision of Gentile converts. He called Peter out publicly for refusing to eat with Gentiles (see Gal. 2:11-16).

We cannot assume that only the strict, conservative types engage in religious arrogance. People form social cliques around any number of things, whether demographics, practices, or ideologies. Conservative snobs exist, but so do liberal snobs. And some people simply have cold, standoffish personalities.

Of all the types of EGRs, snobby EGRs require the most grace simply because our first impulse is to hurt them back. It can be helpful to remember that well-hidden insecurities lead some people to appear arrogant. Many experts believe that narcissistic personality disorder begins with deep, unresolved shame. Social anxiety can make a person appear rejecting when in fact they are terrified of rejection. A healthy sense of our inability to read hearts will soften our own hearts toward people who seem to have hard hearts.

Our patience toward EGRs will pay off in rich dividends of grace abounding toward us. We should remember that "there but by the grace of God go I" and that as we pray for extra grace to love EGRs, someone is praying for extra grace to love us.

[1] Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898, 1940), p. 516.

[2] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3525957/.

[3] https://www.verywellmind.com/how-does-self-disclosure-influence-relationships-4122387#:~:text=Stronger%20emotional%20bonds:%20Sharing%20details,thoughts%2C%20feelings%2C%20and%20memories.

[4] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHrpFrjEXCQ.

[5] Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), p. 119.

Jennifer Jill Schwirzer is an author, speaker, TV host, professional counselor, musician, wife, mother, lover of Jesus, and a friend to many.

HE SLEPT WITH HIS FATHERS

Rethinking a deeply held belief

Outside of the gospel and the hope that it offers us in Jesus, I have appreciated no doctrine more than what the Adventists have taught me regarding death: that according to the Bible, the dead sleep until the resurrection, and the lost are eternally destroyed, not eternally tormented in hell. These are beautiful doctrines that tell us so much about the character of God.

As we know, however, our brothers and sisters in most other denominations not only reject this teaching but are often inflexibly resistant to it, even in light of overwhelming biblical evidence. Recently I gave a Bible study to a Messianic Jew, a Jew who believes in Jesus, about hell not being eternal torment but eternal destruction. What he said was enlightening, in that it helps explain the resistance to what you'd think most Christians would gladly accept, especially the good news that God will not torture Aunt Milly in hell forever, no matter how unrepentantly mean she was.

"You're scaring me," he responded. Why? Not because of the teaching itself, but because for 40 years he had believed one way, and to now be shown that not only what he had believed for all those years was wrong, but that so many other Christians, even those of his own fellowship, were wrong as well.

Yes, that could be scary.

I next studied with him the state of the dead. Before we were done, he said, "I have never heard this before." For someone like me, who was taught, and accepted, from my earliest Adventist days that the dead sleep until the resurrection, I found his response enlightening as well.

During the study, however, I noticed something that I had never seen before. I shared with him the dozens and dozens of Old and New Testament texts that the dead sleep. For example, if you look up the phrase "slept with his fathers" in the KJV, you will find dozens of hits. "David slept with his fathers" (1 Kings 2:10). "And Asa slept with his fathers" (1 Kings 15:24). "And Hezekiah slept with his fathers" (2 Kings 20:21). "And Ahaz slept with his fathers" (2 Chron. 28:27). "So Omri slept with his fathers" (1 Kings 16:28). "So Baasha slept with his fathers" (1 Kings 16:6). And so forth.

Did you notice the vast difference between the destiny of the good kings, David, Asa, Hezekiah, and the bad kings, Ahaz, Baasha, Omri? You didn't? That's because there was none. When each king, good or bad, died, he "slept with his fathers." Surely if the good kings had immediately soared off to "be with the Lord" while the evil kings had gone straight to hell, the Bible would have made some distinction, would it not? Instead, each king, good or bad, "slept with his fathers" and will so until either the first resurrection or the second.

How unfortunate that so many Christians have never heard of anything like these foundational, and important, biblical truths. And, even more unfortunate, some get frightened when they do. Such is the power of entrenched belief.

CLIFF'S EDGE
CLIFFORD GOLDSTEIN



OUR BEAUTIFUL DOCTRINES TELL US SO MUCH ABOUT THE CHARACTER OF GOD.

Clifford Goldstein is the editor of the *Adult Bible Study Guide*. His latest book is *An Adventist Journey*, published by the Inter-American Division Publishing Association (IADPA).



HOLIDAY GIFTS

We should remember to give back to God during this holiday season.

ELLEN G. WHITE

The holiday season is fast approaching with its interchange of gifts, and old and young are intently studying what they can bestow upon their friends as a token of affectionate remembrance. It is pleasant to receive a gift, however small, from those we love. It is an assurance that we are not forgotten, and seems to bind us to them a little closer.

GIVE TO GOD FREELY

Brethren and sisters, while you are devising gifts for one another, I would remind you of our heavenly Friend, lest you should be unmindful of His claims. Will He not be pleased if we show that we have not forgotten Him? Jesus, the Prince of Life, gave all to bring salvation within our reach. Oh, matchless love! He left His royal home, His high command, and stooped to share our poverty and shame, that we might be exalted to share His riches and His throne. His glorious perfection called forth the admiration of the angelic host; yet He, their adored Commander, came down to a world sunken in sin, that He might give us a perfect example in His life. . . .

It is through Christ that we receive every blessing. We may come to Him in our poverty and need, and He will listen to our petitions, and supply our every want. We are dependent upon Him every moment for grace and strength to maintain our integrity and to continue in His love. . . .

Shall not all these precious tokens of His love call forth a response from us in freewill offerings for His cause? Shall not our heavenly Benefactor share in the tokens of our gratitude and love? Come, brethren and sisters, come with your children, even the babes in your arms, and bring your offerings to God according to your ability. Make melody to Him in your hearts, and let His praise be upon your lips. Let us rejoice that our Saviour liveth to make intercession for us in the presence of Jehovah. As a people we have backslidden from God; let us return unto Him, and He will return unto us, and will heal all our backslidings. Let us, upon the coming Christmas and New Year's festivals, not only make an offering

to God of our means, but give ourselves unreservedly to Him, a living sacrifice.

From this time till the opening of the new year, let the theme of our thoughts be, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people." You have taxed your inventive powers to prepare something that will surprise and gratify your friends. Let us in these last days of 1882, be as anxious, as earnest, as persevering, to render to God that which is due Him.

HE DESERVES OUR BEST GIFTS

While our heavenly Father has crowned our lives with abundance to supply our temporal wants, His mercies have been abused because they were so full and free. Many forget that their obligations to God increase with the continuous manifestations of His love and care, and that all these call for acknowledgment from us in gifts and offerings to sustain the various branches of His work. Such have now a precious opportunity to redeem the past, and to show that God has the first place in their affections. Let not our best thoughts, our most earnest efforts, our most precious offerings, be given to earthly friends, while our Creator is neglected and forgotten. I speak to those who profess to be His dear children: What will you bring to God as a token of your love and gratitude? However small the offering, He will accept it, if it is the best you have to bring, and is given in love and sincerity of heart.

I feel sad as I think how many are so engrossed with thoughts of their friends and the gifts they are preparing for them that they will lose sight of their obligations to God. They will not seek to purify the soul temple from defilement that they may present to the Lord an offering in righteousness. During the past year, Satan has been making most earnest effort to sow discord and dissension among brethren. Now, as the old year is passing away and the new year coming in, is a good time for those who have cherished alienation and bitterness to make confession to one another. . . .

Here is work for every family and every church. Make haste, brethren and sisters, to improve the few remaining days of [this year] in setting your own hearts in order, and making every wrong right. Remember that we shall be forgiven only as we forgive. Let all enmity, dissension, and bitterness die with the old year. Let kindness and brotherly and sisterly affection revive in our hearts. We may open the new year with a clean record. How happy the thought! Let us draw near to God "with a true heart in full assurance of faith," that the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, may keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

LET'S GIVE HIM OUR ALL!

I entreat the followers of Jesus not to let the precious opportunities of these coming days pass unimproved. Let not time and means be spent in preparing gifts which will benefit neither giver nor receiver. Remember that both your time and means are intrusted you of God, and that He will call you to account for the manner in which you employ His gifts. As Christians we cannot honor a custom which is not approved of Heaven. Let us, rather, seek to bring our hearts into a right condition, to free ourselves from pride, vanity, selfishness, and every other evil, and let mercy, truth, goodness, and love dwell therein. Let us remember the Lord our Creator, and bring to Him the offering of gratitude, and He will accept not only the gift but the giver. We may have such a spirit of love and joy in our hearts and homes as will make angels glad.

If all the means that will at this holiday season be expended to gratify unsanctified desire, or that will be needlessly invested, were brought as an offering of gratitude to God, to be used in advancing His cause, what an amount would flow into the treasury! Who are willing this year to deviate from their usual custom? How many will turn their thoughts and plans into a more elevated, heavenly channel? In this time of peril and backsliding from God because of selfish indulgence, will we not look from the human to the divine? Will we not show our remembrance of God and our gratitude for His continual mercies, and, above all, for the gift of His dear Son? Shall we not seek to conform to the Divine Model? to imitate Him who went about doing good?

Seventh-day Adventist believe that **Ellen G. White** (1827-1915) exercised the biblical gift of prophecy during more than 70 years of public ministry. This excerpt was taken from *Review and Herald*, December 26, 1882.

PHOTO: UNSPLASH / DIETTE HENDERSON

IF ONLY IT COULD BE LIKE CHRISTMAS

Celebrating God's gifts of family and the Sabbath

CHARLES EVANS

If I were to think of one time of year when happiness seems to shoot through the roof, when families lay their differences aside, when neighbors are more neighborly and we all seem to go out of our way to help, the season of Christmas would be that time of year.

Yet, even to the casual observer, it is clear that the season has become largely commercialized and motivations for doing good have become suspect, to say the least. But I can't deny the delight I derive when family members visit from other parishes or countries to which they have migrated to work and establish their own family chapters. I can't deny the thrill and sometimes shrills of stories shared, the excitement gained from grueling games as we huddle together in the crammed living and dining rooms, and the eventual resort to our makeshift beds as space is made for everyone. I do believe that whatever your religious convictions are, there's no denying the joy of family togetherness. This book of families not only makes a great read but is one that we all get to contribute to as well.

I wonder: Is it Christmas that is significant, or is it the family and friends that we share it with? I really believe that it is the latter, because the fond memories of my childhood are not confined to this time of year. I fondly remember the fun days we had when it rained for long spells and we would be gathered inside playing games and singing our favorite songs. What made it fun? Family.

GOD'S GIFT OF FAMILY AND FELLOWSHIP

You may now wonder what God had in mind when He established the family. He created us with the capacity to experience happiness and joy, emotions that are evoked whenever the family gets together in harmonious activity. None of this is by chance, but is consistent with the thought that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17). As God Himself declares in Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope." Our God is a God of relationships, and we were made like Him (cf. Gen. 1:26).

I recall when I just became a Seventh-day Adventist. It was such a special time for me. My best sleep of the week was on a Friday night. The worship with my mother was super-special. By the time I became a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I was the last of eight siblings left at home—not all my siblings are Adventists. My mother was baptized into membership in 1981, and I followed in 1982. I have two other siblings who are Adventists, and the others belong to another faith. Our father, my mother's first husband, died before I (the youngest living child) got to know him.

I recall the very first time I entered an Seventh-day Adventist sanctuary. It felt like stepping into another world; so serene, so awesome, the presence of God was so real.



Almost any Sabbath I could expect, as a young member of the church, to have lunch with a family from church. My mother and I would walk four to five miles to church each Sabbath morning. But you know what, we'd sometimes be the first to arrive some mornings. It really helped that we'd be invited home to lunch by someone each Sabbath.

Is it Christmas that is significant, or is it the family and friends that we share it with?

CELEBRATING GOD'S GIFT OF SABBATH

Sabbath was established by God (Gen. 2:1-3), as was the family (verse 24). But what did God have in mind when He fashioned them? Is it possible that the excitement and delight that we have come to associate with Christmas are the very things He planned for us to associate with the family and with Sabbath? I'm not attacking Christmas—I'm only wishing that our family life and Sabbath experiences could be a lot more delightful than we currently know them to be, much like the joys of Christmas.

It all comes down to the choices we make. Why not make every Sabbath a time of sharing, a time of togetherness, a time of excitement as we prepare—much like we do for Christmas? I remember well how we'd tidy up around the house; places that hadn't been cleaned for the whole year got cleaned for Christmas. Houses would be painted, and even trees and stones would get whitewashed. Let's go that extra mile each Sabbath.

Sure enough, many prepare for and spend Sabbath in special ways, but I can't quite say that it reaches the scale of intense excitement that Christmas generates—even among Sabbathkeepers. I wonder how God must feel about the way we observe Sabbath. How must He feel that some who profess faith in Him don't even acknowledge the sanctity of Sabbath? It is up to us to make Sabbaths extra special and joyous. If many do it for Christmas, a human tradition, certainly we can do it for the Sabbath, a God-instituted sanctuary in time.

This Christmas I recommend for every family the daily joy of Sabbath preparation and its weekly thrill of celebrating on the seventh day God's creation of the world and His re-creative work within us as individuals.

Charles Evans is an assistant professor in the College of Business at Northern Caribbean University.



PHOTO: JACOB WACKERHAUSEN / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS / GETTY IMAGES

The Joy of Giving

A heartwarming Ingathering encounter

EMMA NADEAU



It was three weeks before Christmas, with no snow on the ground, cloudy skies, and not very cold—a good night for Ingathering. Many of the houses were already decorated with bright lights that encouraged a cheerful feeling on a dark night.

With my lighted candle and the chimes of "Silent Night" urging me on, I was calling at every house on my side of the street. My partner was working on the opposite side, and we were feeling happy that we could do our share.

After calling on a few homes, I came to one that looked much like the others in that vicinity—made of brick, sidewalk leading to the front porch with wide cement steps, lawn in front, hedge separating it from the next lot. As usual, I rang the bell. A little boy not more than 9 or 10 years of age, clad in red pajamas and bedroom slippers, quickly opened the door. Immediately he invited me to come in. Inside, I asked whether his mother or father was home.

"No," he answered, "there's nobody home but me."

He listened to the chimes and watched my little lighted candle while I told him in a simple way what I was doing. I gave him the booklet and said, "Give this to your mother; maybe she can help when we come back next year." I reached for the doorknob.

"Wait," he said, "I can give you something," and he disappeared into the next room. I heard the rattling of coins, and soon he was back with three pennies and a nickel and dropped them into my can. His face was all smiles when I said, "Thank you; you're a good boy," and bade him good night.

I continued on my way and had called at three or four more houses when I heard a childish voice calling me: "Lady, Lady, I have some more money." Coming across the lawn was the same little boy in his red pajamas, anxious to drop more pennies into my can. "Thank you again, sonny," I said, and before I could say more he had disappeared through the hedge and was running back home.

I kept on with my work. It was an enjoyable evening. A light breeze was blowing, and sometimes a few snowflakes would flutter down and play around the lights. Once in a while I would catch a glimpse of my partner's candlelight bobbing along on the other side of the street. Hoping she was doing well, I breathed a silent prayer that God would bless all those who were out that night Ingathering.

Once again I was startled with the sound of a now-familiar voice: "Lady, Lady, I'm coming." All out of breath, the same little "cheerful giver" had caught up to me again with a handful of pennies. He dropped them happily and carefully into the can.

By this time I was worried over what his mother might say, were she at home, so I said, "Sonny, are you sure your mother would want you to do this?"

Clad only in red pajamas and slippers, he clutched a handful of pennies.

"It's my money, and Mom doesn't care what I do with it," he replied, and soon he was gone.

After some time, when I had finished my side of the street and was crossing to meet my partner, I heard again the voice of my little friend. This time he was on his bicycle, still clad only in his red pajamas and slippers. With one hand he clutched the handlebars and with the other he held the last of his pennies, a whole handful of them. "I got them all out," he called as he slid off his bicycle and let it drop to the sidewalk. I shall never forget the smile of triumph and the look of joy on that little boy's face as he gave me his last pennies, and I wondered how his little fist held so many.

"Thank you very much," I said. "God loves little boys like you, and He will bless you for being so kind. You must be cold with no coat on. "

"Oh, no," he answered, "it's not far, and I go fast on my bike." And before I could ask him his name or his house number, he had gone into the night.

This story was originally published in the December 24, 1981, issue of the *Adventist Review*. At the time of its writing, author **Emma Nadeau** lived in Oshawa, Ontario, Canada.

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ARt

GOD IS THE ULTIMATE ARTIST

Beauty, creativity, truth, and uniqueness are His fingerprints and signatures in all that He creates, says, and does.

He has given us, as His image bearers, creative abilities to express, portray, capture, and communicate our experiences, thoughts, feelings, and worship.

ARt, a new, regular section of the *Adventist Review*, will continue the *Adventist Review*'s appreciation of the arts in a more intentional way by featuring various original art created, written, and/or performed by Adventist artists.

This issue focuses on Christmas and winter.

POEM

LIKE MARY WILL I SING

By Frank M. Hasel

Like Mary will I sing
of beauty and the King,
who as a helpless child
came in this world to die—
That we can live!

Like Mary will I ask
why God has chosen me,
to open up my life
for Him to grow in me—
That we can live!

Like Mary will I trust
God's goodness and His love,
Will sing a song of praise:
He'll lead me in His ways—
That we can live!

Like Mary will I have
the strength to carry on.
The power of His grace
brings peace that leaves a trace—
That we can live!

Frank Hasel is an author and associate director of the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference. He enjoys poetry and little acts of kindness.

Erwin Nanasi, minister of music of the Spencerville Seventh-day Adventist Church, put this poem to music.

Scan the QR code to download the SATB sheet music.

DIGITAL WATER COLOR PAINTING

"Even in the freezing winter, your guardian angel watches over you on your journey."
Artist: Mugi Kinoshita

Mugi Kinoshita is an illustrator with production experience, specializing in digital watercolor illustrations for story-driven arts. See more at www.mugikinoshita.com and on Instagram: @mugikinoshita.



ARt

Art featured in the **ARt** section is curated by Jonathan Walter, assistant editor of the *Adventist Review*.

To submit any type of Adventist original art, please contact **art@adventistreview.org.**



MUSIC

Scan this QR code to access a short playlist of **original** Christmas music, written and composed by Seventh-day Adventists.



GRACE AT CHRISTMAS

When Christmas and family collide

TIFFANY GOODSTREET



As I write, Christmas is 100 days away. Here's a glimpse into a conversation that my husband and I repeat every other year.

Me: "Honey, what if we went to a restaurant for Christmas? This year it's your family's turn, and I'm not sure I can handle it. I just don't want to spend my holiday listening to your uncle Ned."

Husband: "Uncle Ned's a good guy. I know he can be annoying sometimes, but give it time. He grows on you."

Me: "I've given it time. Have you forgotten it's an election year? Doesn't matter who wins, we'll be 'educated' on why his candidate won (or didn't). And if not the election, it'll be sports. Or gardening or cooking or any other topic. He's the expert in *everything*. He's just hard to take."

***

Ever have an Uncle Ned in your life? Some of us may be blessed with multiple family members who make any family gathering one we'd just as soon miss. For me, it wasn't just Uncle Ned. My sister-in-law is always stuck on her phone instead of helping with the food. My nephews are terrors that can wreck a house in five minutes all while their parents (and grandparents) talk about how wonderful they are. And my mother-in-law talks on anything without taking a breath—a full stream of consciousness. Lest one thinks I'm the problem, holidays can also be challenging in my family, too, although I'm fairly certain my husband's family has more than their share.

I recently discovered an apt description for these wonderful family members—extra grace required (EGR). Not limited only to family members, these individuals are exactly what the name implies. They require a bit (maybe a lot) of extra kindness and understanding. Now, before we begin to label and excuse everyone as an EGR, we should first remember these points.

- Some people who demand extra grace also may need professional help. Don't overlook a serious problem by calling it EGR. Get your pastor or a professional counselor involved if an EGR may need professional assistance.
- Be careful how the EGR label is used. It may be judgmental. If we consider human-to-human grace, there's no room to boast. We could be someone else's EGR person.
- Keep in mind that when the term "extra grace required" is used, we're speaking of human-to-human grace. Only God, through Jesus, can offer the gift of grace that brings eternal life. This kind of extraordinary grace is His alone.

So now I've found a label for those family members that I may wish to avoid. While it might give a reason for their behavior, how do I control my irritation when my sister complains repeatedly about her weight during holiday gatherings when she's skinny as a rail and, well, I've been battling the same 15 pounds for years and am twice her size? Since I'm guessing that at least some readers can relate, here are some thoughts to consider.

Attitude. Consider that God's plan for our lives includes the family into which we were born and the one we connected with through marriage. If we recognize that God can work through us to reach others, we can then realize that our thoughts and actions have significance. Let the grace that God has given become the model for our attitude toward those in our everyday world.

PHOTO: DEAGREEZ / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS / GETTY IMAGES

Extending grace to others does not mean that we approve of the annoying behavior or that we must be resigned to never-ending tolerance.

Admit. An EGR person can absorb too much of our focus. We may be the one who benefits most when we learn to extend extra grace. In fact, in a typical EGR situation, God may want to work more on our hearts than theirs. Many if not most EGR people will never know that their constant complaining is irritating or their endless talking and opinions are annoying. Silently gift them the kind of grace "that is a nearly invisible act of compassion and requires no reciprocity."[1]

Ask. As we look forward to these holiday get-togethers, ask for God's guidance and grace. When we remember God's call to love one another, we understand that our role is to be responsive. Specifically, pray to be able to see others as Jesus sees them, as well as to find ways to show love and patience.

Acknowledge and Accept. Extending grace to others does not mean that we approve of the annoying behavior or that we must be resigned to never-ending tolerance. Determine to accept the EGR situation. God can work in redemptive ways of which we are totally unaware.

Act. Set boundaries or limits when appropriate. Be proactive when it makes sense. Knowing Uncle Ned is likely to talk about politics at the family gathering, the host can declare the occasion a "no politics zone." Perhaps a few games to entertain the children would help with their behavior. Acknowledge the ever-dieting individual with a plate of healthy snacks. If hosting, assign tasks to family members to help with the meal. And if not hosting, perhaps decide ahead of time a good time to leave the festivities.

Allow. Just as God gave Jesus before we knew of our need for Him, so we have the opportunity to share forgiveness with people who probably have no idea that they are bothering us. Let's allow God's forgiveness to flow through us. "The simple act of letting go of slights, seeing the best in others, and recognizing the invisible generosity of our friends, family, colleagues, and strangers leads to a sense of mental well-being that spreads like a ripple of water. It takes work, and it's not easy, but having a mindset that seeks to find the good in others tends to make us happier, strengthens our social bonds, and leads to better mental health."[2]

Be Amazed. Chances are I may never know how God changed Ned. I will only know that either I changed in my view towards him, or God worked on the heart of Ned. Remember "Our heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us of which we know nothing."[3] For me, I believe I can extend this to mean an unlimited number of ways for God to answer my prayers. Maybe the change in our hearts and behavior toward family members such as those like Ned is the spark God needs to ignite a new attitude in Ned. Stand back. Let God do His work.

By now we may realize that offering extra grace is mostly about us. God, it seems, rarely asks us to change *others*. He's looking for chances to help *us* grow and become all that we were created to be. Offering extra grace, grace beyond our human ability to produce, is one of the many ways God uses to gift His love to a desperate world.

I'm convinced. I've decided to volunteer hosting my husband's family for Christmas this year, including all the EGRs. I might even invite a few EGR friends. I'm already planning how to make everyone comfortable. I'm anticipating some of the things that might happen and communicating things ahead of time. I'll be sure to alert people to the "no politics zone." I've gone to the basement and found some games and puzzles. And I'm already making a list of compliments for my sister.

But more important, I'm spending the next 100 days working on me with God's help. I'm praying daily for my family members as well as for my own attitude. I'm already practicing on others who might be within my sphere of influence at work or church. But most important, I'm getting excited for the holidays. I can't wait to be amazed to see how God works not only on others but on me.

In fact, I'm ready to coin a new label—changing "extra grace required" to "extraordinary grace revealed." Interested in joining me? It's never too late to become more of what Jesus wants us to be.

[1] https://wellbeing.uiowa.edu/news/2023/04/profound-importance-nearly-invisible-act, accessed September 18, 2024.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), p. 481.

Tiffany Goodstreet is a pseudonym.

Bill and Jill

now realize more than ever that life is not guaranteed

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

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REFLECTING THE HOSPITALITY OF GOD

Following Jesus by loving others for eternity

William Miller, a prominent Baptist preacher, had a profound influence on the early development of the Seventh-day Adventist movement. He called Christians to delve into Bible prophecy, urging them to consider that the second coming of Jesus was imminent. One unforgettable experience for me was visiting the chapel on Miller's property, where he preached some of his most famous sermons. This chapel was built after Miller was disfellowshipped from his own church as his teachings began to draw large crowds, prompting people to seriously ask themselves: "Are we ready to meet our Savior?"

During my visit something very special happened. Our group was invited to sing hymns that once filled the hearts of the Millerites—songs about heaven and the soon return of Jesus. I found myself deeply immersed, not only in the historic atmosphere but also in the spiritual reality these songs evoked. It felt as though I was momentarily transported back to the 1800s and, in some ways, even to heaven itself—to that glorious day when Jesus will return to take us home.

SABINA VIEIRA



The leader of our group then suggested we divide into two sides to sing the chorus of a beloved hymn called "Never Part Again," which envisions the joy of reunion in heaven. One side of the chapel sang: "What! Never part again?" And the other side responded: "No, never part again."

As we echoed this back and forth, the hope of eternal reunion filled the air. The promise of no more separation, no more sorrow, weighed on me as I reflected on my own hope of heaven. I imagined the joy of seeing my father again and all the other blessings awaiting me in that perfect place.

But then something startling happened.

As I stood there, lost in the beauty of the moment, my eyes drifted across the chapel. There, on the opposite side, I saw someone who had recently wronged me—deeply, painfully—just a few weeks earlier. The realization hit me like a wave: Heaven isn't just for me. It isn't just for my favorite people—the ones who bring me joy and comfort. It's not about my personal happiness or even about reuniting with those I love. Heaven is for people—even those who've hurt me, even those I struggle to forgive.

In that moment I had to ask myself: Do I really want to be there? Let that question linger for a while.

THE HOSPITALITY OF JESUS

Ironically, of all the aspects of Jesus' character that captivate me, the one that moves me to worship most often is His hospitality—His open, embracing nature. I've always been drawn to the stories of Jesus welcoming sinners, healing the sick, and teaching His disciples to reach out to the marginalized. These stories reveal a God who consistently extends grace to those on the fringes. Whenever I reflect on them, my heart fills with praise, and I fall more in love with God.

Think of His encounter with the woman at the well (John 4:1-26), where He broke societal norms to embrace someone deemed an outcast. Or His healing of the leper (Matt. 8:1-4), which showed His deep compassion for the physically and socially isolated. Perhaps the most striking example is His interaction with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), a tax collector despised by his community. Jesus didn't just notice Zacchaeus—He chose to dine with him, demonstrating a profound acceptance of those society rejects.

I love this about Jesus. His openness fills me with joy, knowing I am loved by a God who embraces even the most broken and undeserving. But here's the hard truth: living out this openness as a follower of Jesus is anything but easy.

Walking in His footsteps isn't glamorous or effortless. Extending grace to others—especially to those who don't share your values or who are difficult to deal with—often leads to frustration, misunderstanding, and conflict.

CHALLENGES AND UNCOMFORTABLE REALITIES

I could share countless examples. I recall facing hostility from an individual who felt a strong sense of ownership over a particular program. When I, alongside other leaders, made decisions that impacted its direction, they responded aggressively, sending a series of hurtful, borderline abusive text messages, insisting their way was the only way. Navigating this conflict was both painful

PHOTO: NISERIN / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS / GETTY IMAGES

and challenging. Sometime later this person shared that they had undergone a deliverance process in which multiple demons were cast out, revealing that, despite attending church, they had unknowingly allowed dark forces to influence their behavior. This helped me better understand the source of much of their anger.

More recently I encountered another challenging scenario at our food bank. A client displayed aggressive behavior while waiting in line, resulting in several verbal confrontations. Afterward the leaders of the food bank asked the client to leave permanently. The client contested the decision, offering a version of events that differed drastically from the leaders' accounts. They insisted that they had only pointed out someone cutting in line and had apologized, but felt unjustly expelled.

Now, both sides feel wronged. The leaders believe their authority was undermined, while the client feels alienated from the community. I'm still working to find a resolution, but it's a difficult balance between justice and grace.

These examples show that embracing the openness Jesus modeled is fraught with challenges and uncomfortable realities.

So how do we emulate Christ more faithfully? How can we, as communities of faith, reflect the hospitality of God that I find so captivating? I don't pretend to have all the answers, but I will share some insights from my experiences working directly with a diverse public through the Acts of Kindness Centre, the charitable arm of Church in the Valley, where I serve as a pastor.

GOD'S HEAVEN: LIKING PEOPLE

The first and most important step is to learn to genuinely like people.

God loves people, and the death of Jesus on the cross is, above all, God's loudest cry of love for humanity. It speaks volumes about His deep desire for a loving relationship with people—and not just temporarily but eternally! "For God so loved the world . . ." (John 3:16).

People are amazing, and none of us would thrive—or even exist—without the contributions of others. Learning to appreciate how people enrich your life and living in anticipation of the ways every person you encounter can impact you positively can transform your perspective. God likes people, and looking at others from that perspective changes everything.

LOVE COVERS A MULTITUDE OF SINS: FORGIVENESS

Engaging with people, especially those who are difficult, isn't about avoiding conflict but learning to navigate it well. One of the keys to this is cultivating a culture of forgiveness. Instead of expecting every interaction to be smooth, enter relationships knowing that issues will arise.

Because God has forgiven us, we have the power to forgive others. We don't forgive out of our own strength. We forgive by embracing God's forgiveness. And even when we don't feel like forgiving, we humbly acknowledge that forgiveness is a divine act. Forgiveness isn't just about our feelings—it's about acknowledging the fact of someone's guilt and choosing to extend the grace that God has already extended to us.

KNOW YOUR LIMITS: BOUNDARIES

Creating a welcoming environment often involves establishing healthy boundaries. While you can't control other people's behavior, you can control your own. Determine clear boundaries in your relationships with everyone, from the easiest to the most difficult individuals. A colleague of mine often says, "Clarity is kindness," and I've found that to be true.

ONE ENEMY HAS DONE THIS: SPIRITUAL AWARENESS

Finally, remember that Satan is our true adversary. Prayer and spiritual awareness are crucial. I've realized that some of the most difficult people I engage with may be unwittingly allowing avenues for the devil to operate. We need to remain vigilant in prayer and ask God for wisdom in these situations.

Ultimately, choose to prefer heaven as God designed it to be—a shared space where everyone experiences the fullness of life together. And remember, the goal is that one day we will never part again.

Sabina Vieira is an associate pastor at Church in the Valley in Langley, British Columbia, Canada.

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MIRACLES THEN

Miracles now

During this season, as we remember the birth of Jesus, let's pause to recall the historical but miraculous facts that provide a sure foundation for our faith. Let this be a time to celebrate the past events leading up to the birth of Christ. Then go further and let this grateful realization flow into a present celebration of God's current miracles that He daily performs, as He brings life, hope, and salvation in the most unexpected ways.

The fulfillment of the prophecies in the life of Jesus is, in fact, astonishing. The angel Gabriel visited Mary, a young Jewish woman, and told her that she would give birth to the Son of God. This announcement was met with both awe and confusion—"How could this be?" Yet Gabriel reassured her with the memorable words: "For with God nothing will be impossible" (Luke 1:37).

PROPHESIED MIRACLES

Centuries before Jesus was born, prophets spoke of a coming Messiah, a Savior who would redeem His people. These prophecies were precise and detailed, yet they seemed almost impossible to fulfill. Isaiah foretold that the Messiah would come from the lineage of David (Isa. 9:7), be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14), and would enter the world in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

Jesus' life on earth was a testament to the fulfillment of God's promises. He healed the sick, made the blind see, the deaf hear, and the lame walk. He proclaimed good news to the poor, comfort to the brokenhearted, and freedom to the captives (Isa. 35:5, 6; Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:16-19).

The prophets also foretold Jesus' death with amazing detail. Though innocent (Isa. 53:9), He was betrayed by a close friend for 30 pieces of silver (Ps. 41:9; Zech. 11:12), despised and rejected (Isa. 53:3), beaten, and pierced (Isa. 56:6; Ps. 22:16).

The cross, an instrument of shame and death, became the ultimate symbol of God's power to turn the impossible into the possible (Ps. 22:16; Dan. 9:26). Jesus' resurrection from the dead, as foretold in the scriptures (Ps. 16:10, 11), validated His divine identity and established a new covenant of grace and eternal life for all who believe (Jer. 31:31-34; Eph. 1:19, 20; Rom. 6:14).

PRACTICALLY SPEAKING
DELBERT W. BAKER



JESUS OUR SAVIOR BRINGS HOPE, HEALING, AND REDEMPTION TODAY, NO MATTER HOW CHALLENGING THE CIRCUMSTANCES.

PRESENT-DAY MIRACLES

As we reflect on the incredible details of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, we are reminded that the sovereign God, who providentially facilitated the miraculous in the past, is still performing miracles of grace in the present (Rom. 1:1-5). Just as He brought forth a Savior from a virgin in Bethlehem, Jesus our Savior brings hope, healing, and redemption today, no matter how challenging the circumstances.

Whether it's a diagnosis, broken relationship, financial struggles, or deep grief, remember nothing is impossible with God. Be reminded and encouraged that the same God who fulfilled every prophecy about the Messiah is active today (Rom. 8:31-39). He is not surprised or limited by your circumstances. His plans and purposes always prevail.

May this season fill your heart with renewed hope and confidence in our miraculous God.

Delbert W. Baker, Ph.D., is director of research and development for the Regional Conference Retirement Plan/Office of Regional Conference Ministries in Huntsville, Alabama.

REACHING THE ADVENTIST WORLD

The advance of technology pushes the reach for younger members.

MERLE POIRIER



Bill Knott

"We need a magazine, a common vehicle, to help keep Adventists united throughout the world church."

—JAN PAULSEN

The *Adventist Review* was a weekly magazine consisting of four individual titles targeting four different audiences. In addition, *KidsView*, a monthly magazine for children, was also published. As this might suggest, the office was busy with weekly deadlines. Four editors were assigned each of the four weekly editions, with general oversight by editor in chief Bill Johnsson. One can imagine the staff's reaction in 2004 when Johnsson told the staff of a burden on the heart of then General Conference (GC) president Jan Paulsen.

"We need a magazine, a common vehicle, to help keep Adventists united throughout the world church," Paulsen said. "And I would like the *Adventist Review* staff to explore ways to do that."[1] While it took two short sentences to say, it was an enormous project he had suggested.

CREATING A NEW MAGAZINE

I remember the day Bill Johnsson shared the request with the staff. To say that the staff was less than enthusiastic is an understatement. The weeks were already full of planning, editing, and publishing, so adding another publication, one that needed development from the ground up, was overwhelming. "We were already putting through four editions of *Adventist Review* each month," said Roy Adams, associate editor. "And lurking in the background of the relentless deadlines those editions entailed was the fact that a General Conference Session was coming,[2] an event that entailed months and months of exhaustive preparation, not to mention the 'rat race' to cover the event itself."[3]

Adams' views were shared by many around the table that morning. But the *Review* staff was a team that was close, responsible, and committed, which is why we accomplished the work already required. These same traits led us to support Bill Johnsson in attempting such a difficult project. "It was a breathtaking assignment, comprehensive, global in its dimensions," wrote Johnsson.[4] It included not only editorial planning and design, but financial support as well as distribution.

There were two "Bills" on the staff, referenced by the staff as "Bill J." and "Bill K." Bill Knott was an associate editor. Bill J., an early riser who walked or ran each morning, seemed to do some of his best thinking at that time. The staff were often recipients of his early-morning ideas or concerns. On one particular day a few months into this project, he sat uncharacteristically gloomy at the end of the table. The data, the meetings, the "red tape," had simply overwhelmed him that morning. I met him in the hall afterward and offered to help. Maybe if he had an assistant it would make a difference. He took me up on the offer.

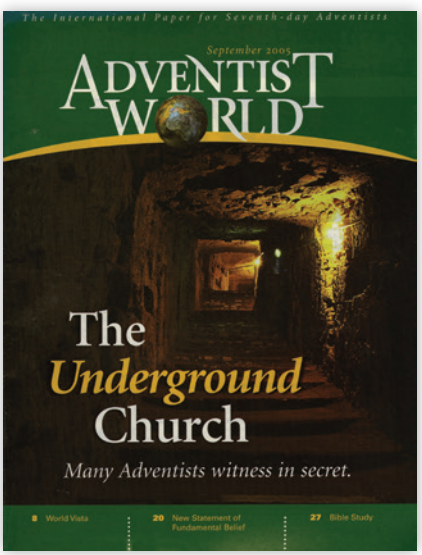
It wasn't just planning that was needed; a number of meetings were required with GC and North American Division leadership. That's when Bill K. stepped into the project. It wasn't that I couldn't meet with these leaders. I frequently did, but Bill K. knew how to navigate church leadership better than I, so was a welcomed partner. While the two of us supported Bill J., the other staff not only contributed to the project but also kept the *Review* moving forward.

There is much more that can be told of the *Adventist World* story, including its name, miraculous financing, as well as the partnership with the Korean Publishing House, but this is a story of *Adventist Review*, not its sister publication.[5] *Adventist World* was first published in October 2005. Bill J., always concerned with circulation, made it a life goal to reach 100,000 *Review* subscribers. Before he retired in 2007, *Adventist World's* reach exceeded his wildest expectations. While not subscribers, there are now 1.3 million copies distributed monthly worldwide, in 21 languages in print and online free to all members.

> "I began to see this as an extension of what I felt called to do."
>
> —BILL KNOTT

A CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP

Bill Knott joined the staff in 1997. He admitted that the decision was a struggle. "I had been called to pastoral ministry—I *am* called," he said in an early interview. "It was a difficult time to think through what that transition might mean to that core calling in my life."[6] He later resolved that inner conflict: "It was when I began to understand not only the history but the continuing pastoral ministry of this magazine in the lives of tens of thousands—even hundreds of thousands—of readers that I began to see this as an extension of what I felt called to do."[7]



The first issue of *Adventist World*, October 2005.

PHOTO: TOR TJERANSEN / ADVENTIST REVIEW



Adventist Review, October 2008

Knott felt the publication needed to relate to the readers of that day; not an easy task with a publication approaching its 160th birthday.

He was appointed editor-elect in October 2006, and became the senior editor in January 2007. The editors that had preceded him may have had different methods, but there was one thing on which they agreed—the *Review* was the great pastor of the church. In Knott's first editorial he acknowledged the 10 editors who had preceded him, mentioning six qualities that must continue in the *Review*: it should be timely, clear, welcoming, informative, inspiring, and faithful. "You'll be glad you're an Adventist—a clear-eyed, informed, grace-filled believer—each time you finish reading an issue," he assured readers.[8]

A NEW LOOK (AGAIN)

Maintaining this course did not preclude Knott from redesigning the product. Hours were spent in studying, planning, dreaming, inquiring, surveying, and more. Knott felt the publication needed to relate to the readers of that day; not an easy task with a publication approaching its 160th birthday. "The experience of Adventism is quite different today for many people than it was even 50 years ago," said Knott.[9] Aiming to reach younger readers, the new design was remarkably different. On October 9, 2008, a magazine with an entirely new and contemporary look arrived in mailboxes. In his typical poetic way Knott wrote: "Now the thing is done, the fledgling is launched, the melody begun, and only time and faithful readers will let us know if we've done it well."[10]

The "reimagined" *Review* front-loaded an expanded news section, included fresh explorations of key Bible teachings; an emphasis on wellness and preventative medicine; opinion and commentary; stories; a focus on the Second Coming; and, as expected, a special focus on attracting young adults.[11] Feedback overall was positive. One reader was direct and to the point: "It was my intention *not* to renew my subscription this time, as I believed my money could be better utilized elsewhere. This situation has altered during the past several months, and I'm pleased that it has. . . . I *am* renewing the subscription for a year."[12] Other accolades poured in. It seemed the right chord had been struck. To flip through subsequent issues reveals articles on the cutting edge of Adventism, chosen specifically to meet readers in the pew. Topics such as entitlement, abuse in the church, and living authentically, as well as such provocative titles as "Is God the Silent Candidate?" during an election year.

WANTED: MORE YOUNG ADULTS

If circulation motivated Bill Johnsson, it was seeking younger members that seemed to motivate Bill Knott. Not only was this evident in articles, but it was also in the exploration of technology. In his time as editor Knott sought to reach these "readers" through various platforms. The website was continually updated. Adventist Review TV began in 2016 providing a thousand videos on a variety of topics informing Adventists around the world. Knott began a podcast platform in 2018 where articles would be available for those who wanted to listen instead of read. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (now X) accounts were opened to share news and articles. GraceNotes, a personal project of Bill Knott's, grew through text messaging, social media, and apps. Soon thousands of people enjoyed Knott's 200-word

meditations on grace each Friday that still continues today (moregracenotes.com).

It was that reach for a younger generation that led to a complete redesign of the *Review* again in 2015. Again, through a series of surveys and focus groups, a bold decision was made. The *Review* would no longer arrive weekly but monthly. "Many have told us that they'd like to receive a more substantial magazine less often. As a result, we've engaged in a process of planning and designing a completely new magazine format for *Adventist Review*," an announcement alerted readers.[13] Creative advertising addressed what was anticipated to be one of the biggest complaints—no longer receiving the magazine weekly. One depicted an older woman saying, "I love to sit down with my *Review* every Friday night and read it cover to cover. I certainly hope you're not planning to change my routine." The response was "It's so packed full of inspiring stories, thought-provoking commentary, and faith-building devotionals that one Friday night would never be enough."[14]

This redesign was significant. The size of the publication grew smaller, small enough to fit into a backpack or purse making it portable. The paper was more substantial, as was the cover. Page count increased from 32 to 72, divided into four sections: News and Commentary, Discover, Connect, and Engage. The reader could choose how to read the magazine. For those who wanted a "weekly," these four sections were robust enough to keep any Friday night reader occupied. The hope was not only to reach those desired younger readers but to retain legacy readers as well. Clearly the redesigned *Review* caught some attention, receiving the 2018 Best in Class Award for a denominational magazine from the Associated Church Press—a first for the *Review*.



Adventist Review, April 2015

The hope was not only to reach those desired younger readers but to retain legacy readers as well.

PHOTO: MATTHIAS LINDNER / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS / GETTY IMAGES

[*Adventist Review*] remains, but its appearance and intentionality will become more distinct as new methods are found to connect, unite, and strengthen the church.

THE VISION CONTINUES

Beginning in June 2018 the four sections were dropped, followed by a seven-part Digging Deeper series featuring such key Adventist ideas as the mark of the beast, the Trinity, and deception. From then until today the *Review* has offered themed content each issue—one topic with a variety of authors.

Knott's vision of the *Review* as a pastor was reflected in a 15-month series between 2019 and 2020. Each month The Church I Want to Belong to is . . . explored a value as it related to the church with words such as *healthy, courageous, safe, prophetic, selfless,* among others.

Another goal, to have the staff more reflect the internationality of the church, was achieved with the hiring of staff members whose origins were from different parts of the globe other than the United States, adding not only new perspectives but several languages other than English.

A significant event that impacted the reach of the *Review* was the COVID pandemic that hit the world in March 2020. For the first time the *Review* staff, isolated from each other, worked remotely through online meetings. Touching base each day, the staff discovered COVID caused a major pivot toward increasing our digital presence. In addition to continuing to produce multiple print products, the staff posted 10-plus online features each week all while continuing a robust news presence.

In late 2022, after 15 years as editor, Knott accepted a position in the GC Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department as the General Conference representative to the United States government, major international organizations, and embassies. Interviewed at the end of his tenure, Knott said, "I would say a highlight for me has been the transformation, from historic journaling of the life of the church, to a multimedia platform. The irony is that it happens to be someone who is deeply in love with books and paper who demanded that transition! . . . It's been a dynamic time and required all of us to embrace more risk and more change than we probably ever thought necessary."[15]


Justin Kim

Justin Kim was appointed editor at the 2022 Annual Council, beginning his editorship January 1, 2023. Kim is making some fairly significant changes to the *Review* as he works toward balancing the digital product with the print. As the world moves toward more digital and social media platforms, deals with a progressive decrease in attention span, as well as the secularization of society, the *Adventist Review* that we've known for 175 years may continue to look increasingly different. The brand remains, but its appearance and intentionality will become more distinct as new methods are found to connect, unite, and strengthen the church.

[1] Sandra Blackmer, "To the Whole World," *Adventist World*, May 2023, p. 11.

[2] The meeting referenced is the 2005 General Conference Session, which met that year in St. Louis, Missouri. Preparations for sessions in the *Review* office begin almost a full year in advance.

[3] Blackmer, p. 12.

[4] William Johnsson, *Embracing the Impossible* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2008).

[5] The *Adventist World* story can be read in the May 2023 issue (adventistreview.org/world-magazine/may-2023).

[6] Bonita Shields, "The Good 'New' Review" (interview with Kenneth Wood, Bill Johnsson, and Bill Knott), *Adventist Review*, Mar. 15, 2007, p. 14.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] Bill Knott, "New—And Old—Directions," *Adventist Review*, Jan. 11, 2007, p. 5.

[9] Shields, p. 15.

[10] Bill Knott, "Drumroll, Please," *Adventist Review*, Oct. 9, 2008, p. 6.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] *Adventist Review*, Dec. 11, 2008, pp. 4, 5.

[13] *Adventist Review*, Mar. 26, 2015, p. 5.

[14] *Ibid*., p. 2.

[15] Interview by David Neal and Vanesa Pizzuto, Trans-European Division, Oct. 26, 2022, accessed online.

Merle Poirier is the operations manager of *Adventist Review.*

MORE THAN "THINKING THINGS"

Learning to embrace all the dimensions of our humanity

The French philosopher René Descartes, to whom much of Western thinking is indebted, spent substantial time trying to figure out what exactly he was. In his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, published in 1641, he pondered this question and came up with an intriguing answer. "What therefore am I?" he wondered. "I am nothing other than a thinking thing."[1]

One doesn't have to be a philosopher to recognize the significance of Descartes' move. He essentially reduced humanity to its reasoning capacities, prioritizing the intellect over all other aspects of personhood. Human beings, he concluded, are primarily "thinking things" (the Latin term is *res cogitans*), able to exist apart from the body. As such, he introduced a dramatic dualism between the body and mind (or soul), maintaining that the latter was superior to the former.

Seventh-day Adventists are typically on "high alert" when it comes to anything that smells of "dualism." Because we believe we exist as a unified whole, where the body and the mind (or soul) can't exist apart from one another, we often have an allergic reaction to anything that hints at a distinction between the two. Indeed, we often insist that we don't *have* a soul, but that we *are* a soul.

There are many teachings that exist downstream from this idea—from our belief about what happens at death, to the nature and duration of hell, to how we treat our bodies. All of these things are good, important, and valuable.

Yet, on a practical level, it seems like we're often a lot more Cartesian than we may recognize—which makes sense, since we, like most people who've been shaped by Western culture during the past 400 years, are the offspring of Descartes and the Enlightenment he helped nurture.

Simply put, while Adventism does place significant emphasis on the body and our "health message," we're also, at our core, mostly a "thinking person's" religion. So much of our evangelism and shared worship experiences focus almost exclusively on informing the intellect and engaging the mind. We pride ourselves on being the most biblically informed, the most theologically astute.

To be clear: these things are good and important. We shouldn't downplay them. I'm simply inviting us to more fully put into practice what our theology says about the nature of human beings: to recognize that we're so much more than "thinking things." We're also "feeling things," "relational things," "physical things."

REIMAGINING FAITH
SHAWN BRACE



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMAN IN ALL OF OUR VARIED DIMENSIONS?

Indeed, we're not simply a "brain on legs," as John Mark Comer says, but people who have emotions, in all their multidimensional splendor, and who are being shaped and formed by many different factors apart from our pure intellect.[2] This is, after all, why we celebrate the Incarnation during this season—when the Word became *flesh* for our redemption.

So what's the invitation? Let's explore more fully what it means to be human in all of our varied dimensions—seeking to grow not only intellectually but also emotionally, relationally, physically, and whatever other dimensions we have as humans.[3]

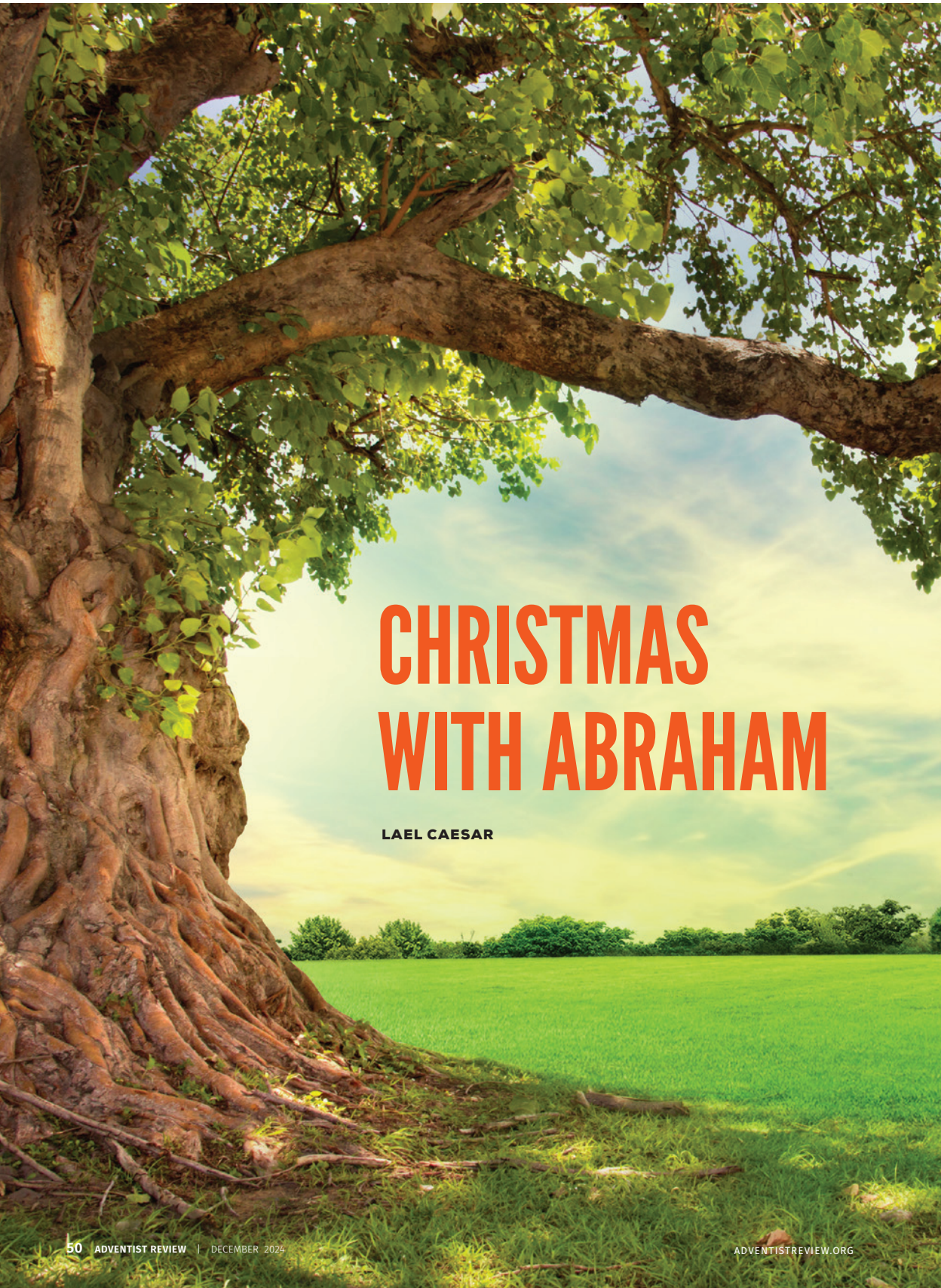
Then we can truly be people who more fully reflect Christ's image.

[1] René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Michael Moriarty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 20, 32.

[2] John Mark Comer, *Practicing the Way* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Waterbrook, 2024), p. 86.

[3] For more on this, see my book *The Table I Long For* (Warburton, Victoria, Australia: Signs Publishing, 2021).

Shawn Brace is an author, pastor, and church planter in Portland, Maine, who is also pursuing a D.Phil. in Ecclesiastical History at Oxford University.



CHRISTMAS WITH ABRAHAM

LAEL CAESAR



PHOTO: POTOWIZARD / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS / GETTY IMAGES

This month features an article in the December 12, 2013, issue of the Adventist Review, *in which Lael Caesar reflects on Christmas in light of Abraham's encounter with God by the trees of Mamre long before.*

The man under the tree is God.[1] It is a thing of wonder. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6).

And now He's sitting under a tree. But why? How? What wonder is this—God under an oak tree out in the desert!

UNDER THE TREE—GENESIS 18:1-5

Well, for one thing, He's God. This tree is as much His as any other. He can sit there if He wants. But the principal reason why is different, very different from divine right, or coming to His own and getting rejected. He's really here as a stranger receiving Bedouin hospitality.

For all we know, someone has just spotted Him and two of His companions on their break during a walk across the Middle East's Middle Bronze Age desert. Or maybe He hasn't been walking at all. Maybe He simply let Abraham see them standing there over against him. That was all Abraham needed to race out to the three men, prostrate himself to the earth, and hold out his wonderful Bedouin invitation before one of the three: "Come to my house for a while, please, sir, if it's all right with You," he says in the singular, because there is this one among the three who compels more respect than standard decency requires.

You see three strangers; you see them all for the first time, standing together; but you know immediately that this man is in charge. Not that you mean to take Him away from His friends: "I'll get a little water, wash everybody's feet, and all of you can rest under my oak tree; we'll get some food for you all, refresh your souls, then, if you want, you may continue your walk. After all, that's the reason why you all came to visit me."

Christmas celebrations are not all created alike, because it is not Jesus, but we, who determine the celebrations. And He would not have it otherwise, for He cannot oblige us by fiat to welcome and adore Him, or give ourselves in self-sacrificing service. "The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of [His] government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority."[2]

Yet it does not follow that heaven's King must be rejected when He comes to earth. The Savior who is Christ the Lord is not, by some eternal ideal, designed to be nailed to a tree. His self-offering does not, per se, demand our utmost brutality. Whatever divine genius

makes of our fiend-inspired madness, rejecting Him is still our blight. "The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him," Jesus explained. "But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born" (Mark 14:21).

No, He does not have to be the victim of our vilest treachery. He would have come just because of Adam's first betrayal in Eden. It did not require our multiplications of evil.

He comes seeking a place in somebody's heart, and a seat under his oak tree. He comes because He yearns to be among us (Ex. 25:8). Abraham's Christ-coming celebration is not attended with a luminous cloud, or a flame of fire, or shining, celestial songsters in full cry—only by two beings from the companies of glory garbed as men like himself. And yet his must be among the most precious welcomes that our blighted, fallen earth may conceive—an earnest act of gift giving to God-in-a-body among men.

CHARITY, BY ABRAHAM

Though Abraham, it must be said, cannot have the foggiest notion of what his kindheartedness is getting him into.

Not that it matters. Wilderness travelers deserve the best. And Abe lays it out like few around him ever would. His wealth is for service—whether leading forth hundreds of his own servants, born and trained in his own hacienda, in a campaign of deliverance for the poor victims of a grand Mesopotamian invasion; or setting out a sumptuous meal of deliverance from desert heat and loneliness for three wandering strangers in need of food, water, and a tree under which to rest.

Abraham needs no idea who his guests might be. He already knows the maxims of his stewardship: "Cast thy bread upon the waters" (Eccl. 11:1, KJV). Looking for returns on investments of charity is not charity. "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers" (Heb. 13:2, KJV). Commitment to entertainment based on guest list quality is not the basic message of Hebrews 13:2.The text does report what has been known to happen—that by disinterested benevolence some have received heavenly visitors in their homes. Abraham is into entertaining, into the least of these, not into entertaining angels. Much less the Lord Himself. True hospitality will be for hospitality's sake.

Abraham doesn't expect his guests to return any compliment. That isn't why he asks them in. He simply cares that there are better ways to be diligent than fainting in the desert at high noon, or drinking at mirages. The proffered cups of cold water that bring reward are offered for service, not for gain.

GETTING THE QUESTION

But Abraham is in for the reward of his life. The conversation he starts with a simple invitation goes off in directions he could never have dreamed: he will have a son next year, he learns; and he is not to ask how come. How come he is not to ask, he wants to know. Whereupon he, in turn, is asked another question: "Is anything too wonderful for the one whose name is wonderful?" (see Gen. 18:14).

Abraham does not get it all at the beginning. Maybe because no one has yet told him what Isaiah will say. But we have heard Isaiah. And as surely as the awesome truth of that question finally dawned upon Abraham's astonished consciousness, just so certainly should it arise upon ours. The fact that God sat under Abraham's oak tree, chatted, and ate fatted calf with him, and promised him a son, is no more incredible than the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 12 centuries later that a son named Wonderful Counselor would be born to us, or its fulfillment in Mary's arms about 800 years after that. This is the testimony of the text: "The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day" (Gen. 18:1).

WONDERFUL IS HIS NAME

Yahweh was seen by Abraham, the Hebrew more literally announces.

Yahweh let Abraham see Him near the Mamre oak trees as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. Incredible, we might say. Or wonderful! And Yahweh, who would not let His servant Abraham miss the truth about his noon meal guest, will not have us miss the implication of His question in Genesis 18:14.

The idea that "something is hard" in the Lord's question "Is anything too hard?" rests on the Hebrew root *pl'*. Isaiah's utterance on the messianic name immortalized in Handel's chorus "For Unto Us a Child Is Born" is no different. Twelve centuries after Abraham hears the question, Isaiah echoes its word in his answer: "His name shall be called Wonderful *[pl']*, Counsellor" (Isa. 9:6, KJV).

The man under the tree is God. It is a thing of wonder. The intimacy of our communion, the warmth of our mutuality, teaches us to trust Him.

Between Abraham and Isaiah a frightened Danite named Manoah speaks with his saner spouse: "'We are doomed to die!' . . . 'We have seen God!'" (Judges 13:22). What makes him think that he has seen God? "When the angel of the Lord did not show himself again to Manoah and his wife, Manoah realized that it was the angel of the Lord" (verse 21).[3] Privileged dimwit Manoah is the model of ourselves that we dare to mock, we whose generations of human minds have been darkened by Satan's distortions. God, the ineffable, incomprehensible, wonderful, presents Himself to souls in need of light, and instead of seeing the light, we say that His self-revelation is proof of doom.

What was true a millennium later was certainly so in the days of Israel's judges when men could be consigned to slaughter for having the wrong accent (Judges 12:1-6): "The earth was dark through misapprehension of God."[4] We rather flee before such deep consideration on His part that lets His veiled presence visibly come among us. We so prefer the hideous that we seek it out in Halloween entertainment, while we must flee, at the frightful thought of quiet communion with Him, to obsessions with cell phones, or the roar of subways and rush hour traffic, lest we die.

Manoah will die because the God who twice appeared to his wife has deigned to make Himself known to him, and accepted his burnt offering. The God who would be with us is a threat to us with whom He would be. His dialogue with us fails to bring the edification it should: "What is your name?" Manoah has already asked, "so that we may honor you when your word comes true?" (Judges 13:17). "Why do you ask my name?" is the response. "My name is Wonderful" (*pl'y*, verse 18).

The words *pl'* and *pl'y* speak to and of our human lack of capacity, our creaturely inability to fathom the reality we encounter. We know that we are standing before unfathomable things. So we are, whether or not we sense it at first, when we stand before the Lord, invite Him out of the desert heat, and into our tent for a meal. Or when He boggles our mind with promises of blessings we have ached for but never received. We are, too, when late and benightedly, we think we shall die because He has shown Himself to us.

CONCLUSION

But we shall not die. He does not come to us in the desert of our need to slay us. He does not come to our groping in the dark so His brilliance may blind us. He does not come in the wonder of Himself to overwhelm and frighten us. One lone angel of His frightens the breath out of a legion of our macho, weapon-wielding, battle-hardened military heroes. He need not come Himself if it were for fear. He comes that we might have life, life in all its fullness (Luke 19:10).

And so He comes as a desert wanderer who accepts our fatted calf, our fine flour cakes, our curds and milk, and drinks of our water, and sits under our tree. He is still God. The man under the tree is God. It is a thing of wonder. The intimacy of our communion, the warmth of our mutuality, teaches us to trust Him. He wins our confidence. Then He offers us the water of life (John 4:10, 13, 14; Rev. 21:6, 17). We take and drink deeply of the cup of His salvation, give thanks with all our heart and soul, and call Him our wonderful Lord (Ps. 116:13, 17).

And He comes as a babe bedded in cow feed, cooing and gurgling, crying to be fed and burped. The vulnerability of His innocence teaches us not to tremble as we do before the awful shining of His messengers and their mighty anthems.

We shall not flee. No, we shall bow before Him, offer our gold and incense, or play upon our drum. We shall, like Abraham, give Him the best we have. He is still God. It is a thing of wonder. The baby in the manger is God.

[1] Lael Caesar, "Christmas With Abraham." *Adventist Review*, Dec. 12, 2013, pp. 16-19.

[2] Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898, 1940), p. 22.

[3] Sometimes, as here, "angel of the Lord" is periphrastic for "the Lord"—see Genesis 16:10-13; 22:15-18.

[4] E. G. White.

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REDUX:

A KITE, A STRING, AND A BRIDGE

How do we make peace among us?

This article was first published in January 2019 when Bill Knott served as editor of the Adventist Review. *This article has been reduced due to space limitations, but the full article may be accessed at https://adventistreview.org/magazine-article/a-kite-a-string-and-a-bridge.*

BARBARA CEROVSEK / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS / GETTY IMAGES

BILL KNOTT

I've been living with this ever since I first was caught by it on a gray January day in my fourth-grade classroom. Back then, and naturally enough, it was a story about the derring-do of a child only a bit older than me.

Later on, it became a story about cool-headed, tactical planning, perhaps because that was the quality I needed most as a young and middle-aged adult when unbridgeable chasms yawned at every turn, and professional and personal disruptions filled my days.

More recently, the story has become for me a potent metaphor for how we bridge the great divides that naturally enough grow up between individuals, in groups, in congregations, and even between large Christian organizations.

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By the fall of 1847, three decades of thawing relations between the United States and Canada had largely obliterated memories of the shooting war that had erupted over the boundary Niagara River during the War of 1812. A booming economy south of the river and great economic potential north of it had convinced government and business leaders on both sides. A bridge was needed to span the turbulent river that marked the border between the British Empire and the nation that had declared its independence from Great Britain just 70 years earlier.

An engineering firm was hired to design the first suspension bridge over what was deemed an unbridgeable and treacherous chasm—the Whirlpool Rapids, just above the famous falls. At 800 feet across, and 225 feet above the water, it was the narrowest point between the two sides. Depending on which version of the story you prefer, supervisor of the building works Theodore Hulett either personally solved the architectural puzzle of how the bridge could be built, or else got his brainstorm from watching boys fly kites out over the Whirlpool Rapids.

Hulett organized a kite-flying contest with the goal of landing a kite—and its string—on the other side of the chasm. Dozens of Canadian and American boys responded to the challenge, which included a prize of $5, worth more than $150 in both Canadian and U.S. currencies today. One talented kite-flier, 16-year-old Homan Walsh, crossed the river well above the rapids and successfully landed his kite on the American side early in the contest, only to have the string break. Walsh tried again two weeks later, letting out hundreds of feet of string as the prevailing westerly Canadian winds carried his kite—symbolically named "Union"—out over the swirling rapids. Toward nightfall, as the winds died down, "Union" settled in a tree on the U.S., and the string was secured by Hullet's associates.

All reconciliations ultimately depend on things as fragile as kite strings.

Now a single string—a kite string—united the two territories.

And over that string, Hulett's engineers drew a slightly heavier string, riding on a silver ring. And over the slightly heavier string, an even heavier string. And over the heavier string, a rope. And over the rope, the first, thin metal wire—until strand by strand, one small step at a time, incrementally but irresistibly, the foundation for the first suspension bridge over the Niagara River was built.

And it all rested on a kite string.

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This isn't the usual plotline for a story about how big divides get crossed. As we typically tell such tales, a great, even heroic, gesture is required to bridge the unbridgeable. But behind the grand heroic gestures that capture our imaginations and the headlines, there are a hundred smaller moments on which all reconciliations ultimately depend. Someone picks up the phone and calls a person long deemed an "enemy." Two diplomats from warring sides go for an unobserved walk. A private note passed from hand to hand around a tense negotiating table signals a new solution to an old and intractable quarrel.

Yes, let it be said: there's a string—a kite string—beneath all hopeful moments when our broken, proud humanity makes peace with other broken, proud human beings. Someone swallows hard, and deliberately puts aside the memory of the latest injury to send an olive branch—or just a twig—to an opponent on the other side of the boardroom or the church business meeting. Someone prays for weeks about the apostle Paul's admonition—"Forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you" (Col. 3:13)—and hesitatingly picks up a basin and a towel. Leaders—yes, even church leaders—deliberately put aside the clamoring of partisans and the assertions of correctness, and send the text that simply, elegantly says: "Let's talk."

All reconciliations ultimately depend on things as fragile as kite strings.

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You don't need me to tell you that we live in fractious times. The toxic, intensely partisan political culture in all nations of the world has seeped into the company of those who say they "keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 12:17, KJV). From behind the barricades of blogs and lava-infused newsletters, we launch fusillades against the decisions and integrity of those who disagree with us.

In His prophecy of the turmoil that would precede His second coming, Jesus unflinchingly described the end-times as an era when "the love of many will grow cold" (Matt. 24:12, NRSV).[1] It follows just as logically that the hatred of many, even for other "believers," will grow hot as well, for like the dragon who inspires such enmity, they sense that their time is short (Rev. 12:12).

Is there still a way to bridge what seems unbridgeable? Is there still a moment when we could imagine—even fleetingly—a kite string landing on the other side? Are there still thousands—no, millions—of honest-hearted Seventh-day Adventists who have heard and listened to the appeal of Paul?

"From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" (2 Cor. 5:16-19, NRSV).

I believe that there are, in fact, a nearly uncountable number of faithful members of this pilgrim movement who still yearn for reconciliation, even with those who have injured them.

The future of this movement doesn't, in fact, depend preeminently on leaders in far-off conference or division offices who will agree to talk, mend fences, and resume their trust in those with whom they disagree. Let it be clear: they have a helpful role to play, but they can lead only when others choose to follow.

The future of this movement will be built on a hundred—no, a hundred thousand—small and fragile kite strings landed gracefully in places that haven't seen enough of grace or kites in recent years. It will be built through reconciliations made across kitchen tables between spouses, and across board meeting tables among elders. It will occur when sharp-tongued Sabbath School combatants agree, at last, that "he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us" (Eph. 2:14, NRSV).

Here's how it could happen.

Pray for a reconciling spirit. All great things begin with prayer, "and the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13). This means frequently praying "against the grain"—against the natural tendency of our hearts to assume our own correctness, especially in matters we deem "truth." And we'll never move an inch, never mind ascend the hill of the Lord, unless we begin praying with a sincerity heretofore unknown for an attitude of reconciliation with those whom we are sure are "wrong." Such inner change doesn't spontaneously appear in a moment when the church business meeting sings "Side by Side" or "Kumbaya." The emotions of any given moment will disappear as quickly as they came when there's a consistent, persistent commitment to pray for reconciliation, first in our own hearts, and then in the hearts of those with whom we disagree.

Be alert for olive branches—and kite strings. The smallest, slenderest of strands became the base of a bridge that ultimately carried

locomotives. An olive branch may first appear as insubstantial as a twig. But those who have, through grace, acquired a reconciling spirit see signs of life where others just see fuel. In boardrooms this may be as momentary as a sigh, an opening of the chairman's hands, a brief acknowledgment that there's at least a little legitimacy in other ways of seeing. Practice spotting—and offering—olive twigs, which may yet grow into branches.

Avoid the demagogues. These are the ones who insist that talking with "the other side" is "traitorous," a sign of "creeping compromise," a first step into error. Such misinformed and maladapted men and women haven't been reading their Bibles much, for Scripture calls us repeatedly to demonstrate the same deep respect for those who oppose our ideas as we usually reserve for those who are our greatest cheerleaders. Ellen White similarly reminds us of the unmatched example of Jesus: "Jesus did not suppress one word of truth, but He uttered it always in love. He exercised the greatest tact and thoughtful, kind attention in His relationships with the people. He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave needless pain to a sensitive soul. He did not censure human weakness. He spoke the truth, but always in love."[2]

Those who can both imagine and help to build bridges should expect that their motives will frequently be misunderstood by the partisans on both sides. "Talking with the enemy" is not, as some would claim, a sign of unfaith, but of faith. Only confident faith, which rests on the merits of Jesus and not on the cleverness of logic, is competent to negotiate with those of opposing views. Those who build bridges from fragile kite strings should expect to get "walked upon," for the test of a bridge is ultimately whether it can bear traffic and become the path of communication and connection.

Stay at the task of peace. We frequently remind each other that "Rome wasn't built in a day." But then again, neither was Jerusalem. And if Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us (John 14:2), He has chosen to make the new Jerusalem a hallmark of His craftsmanship, even as His Spirit shapes the men and women who will, by grace, inhabit it. The multiple references in the book of Acts and in the epistles of Peter, John, and Paul to conflict in the church illustrate that the task of reconciliation is as essential to the church of Jesus Christ as are the tasks of proclamation, evangelism, pastoral care, and compassion.

As long as there are humans in God's church, reconciliation will be necessary, for even the closest of friends will frequently have to choose to be reconciled to each other instead of letting a difference of opinion blossom into a new world war. This can't be accomplished by occasionally mumbling a prayer. There will be hours—days, weeks, and months—of hard and often thankless effort for those who understand that unity is forged in fire, not dropped from the sky. Like every welding job, the welding of believers' lives together will show both some heat and some friction if the bond is going to last. We will prize our unity only when we have given—and given up—something to achieve it.

[1] Bible texts credited to NRSV are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission.

[2] Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), p. 12.

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All reconciliations ultimately depend on things as fragile as kite strings.





"NOT HOME

ALDEN THOMPSON

The memorial service for my former colleague Jon Dybdahl was a moving and powerful event.[1] But in my view the most moving lines came from his son Paul, who played a key role in the service.

He had read the official obituary, which said that Jon had died at home, surrounded by his family. But in his conclusion Paul said that he wanted to make a correction to the official version.

After an emotion-laden pause, he simply said, "Not home yet." "Not home yet." And he stepped away from the podium to go sit with the family.

Any Adventist will know what he meant. This is a people who have often been disappointed. But the flame of hope continues to burn brightly.

In Romans 8, Paul puts it this way: "For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience" (Rom. 8:24, 25, NRSVUE).

All Adventists know about hope, beginning with two disciples on the road to Emmaus, who said to their mysterious Companion: "But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21). Note that the disciple used the past tense.

Luke's other book, Acts, gives us the precious quote that embodies the Advent hope for us today: "While they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven'" (Acts 1:9-11).

PHOTO: PEXELS / SZABOVIKTOR

YET."

When believers have been waiting for hundreds, yes, thousands of years, it's hard to be patient.

Believers have been waiting "patiently" for his return ever since. I say "patiently," because that is the ideal. After all, it was the apostle who said, as was noted earlier, "we wait for it with patience."

But when believers have been waiting for hundreds, yes, thousands of years, it's hard to be patient. We can take heart, to be sure, in the first lines of Hebrews 11: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1, ESV). And Seventh-day Adventists can take courage from the thrilling lines at the close of *The Great Controversy*:

"And the years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. As knowledge is progressive, so will love, reverence, and happiness increase. The more men learn of God, the greater will be their admiration of His character. As Jesus opens before them the riches of redemption and the amazing achievements in the great controversy with Satan, the hearts of the ransomed thrill with more fervent devotion, and with more rapturous joy they sweep the harps of gold; and ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of voices unite to swell the mighty chorus of praise.

"'And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.' Revelation 5:13.

"The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love."[2]

Now when the apostle said in Romans 8, "For in hope we were saved," he spoke in the past tense. But that past event is what gives us hope for the present and the future. And I sense that Paul, Jon's son, is ready to speak more emphatically of the present: "Not home yet." "Not home yet."

[1]The entire service is available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yY9T-YRufww.

[2]Bible texts credited to NRSVUE are from the New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

[3]Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 678.

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TO ENCOURAGE MY PASTOR

WENDY BOYD ENNIS

I attend a large church, and we have some extraordinary pastors. Having been a pastor's wife years before, I realized one day that praying for my pastor should be a top responsibility of a church member. My thought was *If I want my pastor to encourage me in God's Word, I need to keep him in my prayers.* I resolved to make this commitment for the rest of my days, until Jesus comes.

In a town a few hours away is a church I sometimes visited with relatives. There was a new pastor taking over, after the previous one had moved to another district. At first the new pastor was making some inroads with the church family. But soon it became obvious there was a reason this man moved around often. His people skills lacked. At least that's what many began to think. People were becoming offended, creating whisper campaigns, taking sides, and calling the conference office to complain.

I visited the church one Thanksgiving, and the tension could have cut the turkey even though we had already eaten it two days before. Instead, we had pastor for lunch. I tried to doze a little as my husband and his aunt discussed the church drama. Then his aunt began to tell us her story.

In frustration she had called the previous pastor to complain about the new one. After she voiced her concerns, her pastor friend gently redirected her thoughts.

"Do you want the conference office to do something about him?" he asked kindly.

"They must! The church will dissolve if this guy continues these antics. Already several families are making plans to leave. He's offensive to visitors, doesn't care about . . . "

"So what are you going to do about it?" the pastor interrupted.

"I don't know," she replied. "That's why I'm calling you."

The pastor became quiet for a moment. Then he spoke.

"Here's what I want you to do. Until something changes, you are to spend an hour every day praying for your pastor. Specifically: 'God, change his heart or have him leave.' Oh, and while you are doing that, ask God to change your heart as well."

The aunt paused for a moment.

"So what happened?" my husband asked.

She took a breath and replied, "I began doing this hour prayer time every day. At first it was hard. I couldn't stand the man. But over time I began to understand why I'd been given this assignment. I honestly thought the man would change. He didn't.

PHOTO: JACOB WACKERHAUSEN / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS / GETTY IMAGES



“I found myself praying more for my heart problem than his.”

In fact, it got worse . . . so bad the conference representatives began to get involved. Shady things financially began to crop up. The pastor’s bully tactics could no longer be masked. He was making the wrong people angry. Meanwhile, my own feelings began to change. I hurt for his embarrassed wife and adult children. Worse, I saw reflections of my own sullied attitudes, and God asked me to address myself. I found myself praying more for my heart problem than his. Then out of nowhere it was announced that the pastor would be leaving, immediately—early retirement or something. And he was gone.”

GOD COMES NEAR

With this story as a backdrop, for several years I have chosen to pray for my pastor, though not necessarily to get rid of him, but to encourage him. Early in this endeavor I had stayed late after Tuesday evening Bible study to spend time with God. Just before I left to head home, I remembered I hadn’t yet prayed for my pastoral team. I stepped back to the front of the sanctuary, to the left side of the rostrum under the stained glass. My prayer for my senior pastor went something like this:

“God, this coming weekend at church, I want to hear from You. I want You to be so physically present, I want Pastor Jerry to recognize this. In fact, in front of the entire congregation, as You affirmed Moses, I want You to come alongside Pastor Jerry, put Your arm around his shoulders and remind him how much You love him, how much You value him, how much he is worth to You. Do this for me, please.”

Then I left.

The remainder of the week I didn’t think about the Tuesday night prayer, until I was sitting in the church service on Sabbath. The sermon ended, or so I thought, when suddenly Pastor Jerry stepped back from the pulpit, put his left arm in the air as though he was giving a shoulder hug to someone, and said strongly, “It’s as if God comes alongside me, puts His arm around my shoulders, and reminds me how much He loves me, how much He values me, how much I am worth to Him.” As he spoke, he walked back and forth across the platform in front of all of us, his arm still held in the air.

I was stunned. I could hardly move. I could hardly breathe. Even as I write this, my heart beats rapidly. To date, it was the most amazing moment I have ever witnessed. I hold it close to my heart, as God holds His pastors close to His.

Wendy Boyd Ennis writes from Chattanooga, Tennessee, and attends Collegedale Community church.



Bake Sale for Halima

BARBARA FROHNE

PHOTO: PEXELS / JONATHANBORBA

In the middle of our English language lesson my Afghan student, Halima, burst into tears. They were not quiet tears leaking into the corner of her eye. No. She was downright sobbing. When I leaned forward to give her a hug, she reached out and clung to me, still crying.

What had I done? Had it been a mistake to use an article about the current hunger situation in Afghanistan? In the preceding months aid agencies had pulled out of the country, leaving many people without access to food. The article described widowed women without money to buy food for their children, and mothers resorting to giving bottles of warm tea to their babies. One widow outside of Kabul had a fruit and vegetable stand by the side of the road for years. The Taliban came and told her she must abandon her stand because she no longer had a man in charge. They told her to go home. She said she had no food to feed her children, and they didn't care.

After Halima's tears died down, I gently asked, "What's the matter?"

In the broken English of a woman still learning to speak a new language, she replied, "My brother call. He say, 'No eat food, three days.' "

GOD IN ACTION

I had been unaware of how critical the situation was for her family back home in Afghanistan. Her mother and father, three brothers, their wives, and their children, 20 people in all, live together in one home in a small village. When the Taliban took over two years prior, her brothers lost their jobs. Now they were out of money and food. Her mother had serious health problems, but was unable to afford the needed medicine or to visit the doctor. Her two older brothers shared one pair of boots between them. Each morning they decided who would wear the boots and who would go barefoot.

I gave Halima a little money right then to send over for food. Then I called my friend Marci to pray and ask God what more we should do. We realized we needed to act immediately.

Marci remembered having bake sales before and raising money for various projects. Could we have a bake sale in January? Would anyone buy baked goods when it was freezing cold outside? It seemed that it was worth a try.

We were witnessing God in action.

We decided on a Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and made arrangements to hold it in front of a local grocery store. Several woman volunteered to bake bread and various sweets for the sale. They spread the word, and more women volunteered. Local churches put the announcement in their bulletin. Soon we had 19 volunteers! What an amazing thing God was doing! We were witnessing God in action.

Marci brought the bake sale idea to her morning prayer group, and together they prayed.

GOD'S LOVE IN THEIR EYES

A week before the bake sale I looked at the weather forecast. Freezing rain was now predicted for the day of the bake sale. With fear in my heart I called Marci. I was willing to do the bake sale in all weather conditions except freezing rain. What should we do? We talked, prayed together, and claimed Bible promises—then chose to proceed with the sale. Weather predictions are often wrong.

There were now 24 people signed up to make baked goods. Thanking God, we requested His assistance with the roads and the weather. The forecast changed to no precipitation. But weather predictions are often wrong.

The day before the bake sale I called Marci again. "Should we postpone the sale? It is freezing rain right now and is predicted to continue all day." We prayed together again over the phone. We had no idea how to cancel a sale like this. So much of the advertising was by word of mouth. To cancel would be so complicated, and surely we would miss someone. Plus, we felt an urgency that the funds were greatly needed. The sale needed to go on. We were trusting God. We didn't believe He would bring together so many bakers and then have the sale canceled.

I was amazed when I pulled up to Andy's Market that freezing cold Friday morning before 8:00 a.m. I had dressed very warmly in layers because the





PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

The amount raised allowed the family to purchase an auto rickshaw, cow, and calf.

temperature was in the low 20s. Snow had fallen overnight and schools were closed, but there was a bustle of activity as tables were set up and baked goods were set on them. Everything looked delicious! We were witnessing God's mighty hand at work. A local pastor volunteered to bring us two more tables, as there was not enough room on the four tables we already had set up. Women had baked whole-wheat bread, sourdough bread, gluten-free bread, pies, cookies of every kind, bars, brownies, rice crispy treats, and several kinds of fudge. There were even cinnamon rolls on the table!

But then came the question. With so many kinds of food donated, would they all sell? Would people come out to buy when the roads were slick? Once again we prayed and asked God to bless the generosity of the bakers and send people to buy what they had made.

Some other women came to the sale and stayed to help us. We had a steady stream of customers. We would talk to each one and tell them why we were there. We told them of my student's family and their needs. So many of the kind people who stopped by were so generous with their donations; we saw the love of God in their eyes.

GOD GOES BEYOND

Later in the afternoon Halima and her teenage daughter came to the sale. She had baked some traditional Afghan treats to sell. They stood with us in the freezing cold and helped customers.

As the store's closing time neared, we started to clean up. Six tables full of baked goods had turned into only five boxes of goodies remaining. God had blessed abundantly. We were cold, but God had sustained us all the way through. There had been neither a lack of customers nor precipitation.

I went home to warm up and count the donation money. When I sent Marci a text of the total, she thought I had made a mistake. God had blessed far beyond our wildest dreams for that sale. He had impressed people to donate generously. The bake sale raised close to $5,000!

"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Eph. 3:20, 21).

It was not anything one person did that brought in so much in monetary donations. It was all God. He did exceedingly abundantly above what we asked or thought He would do. We give Him glory and praise.

Now there is a lovely family in a small village in Afghanistan with an auto rickshaw to drive as a taxi to earn money for the family's daily needs. There was also enough money to buy a cow and a calf so that they have milk and the beginnings of a future herd.

Now when I visit Halima for her English lessons, she often tells me of her family and says they are praying for us. The children are no longer hungry. They have milk to drink. Her mother has medicine and has seen the doctor. Her father too has medicine. Her brothers have work. Her sisters-in-law have food to cook. They are so happy they have enough to share with others.

We are happy too. It is such a blessing to give.

Barbara Frohne is a specialized reading teacher who helps children with dyslexia learn to read. A mother of two college graduates, she lives with her husband in Walla Walla, Washington.

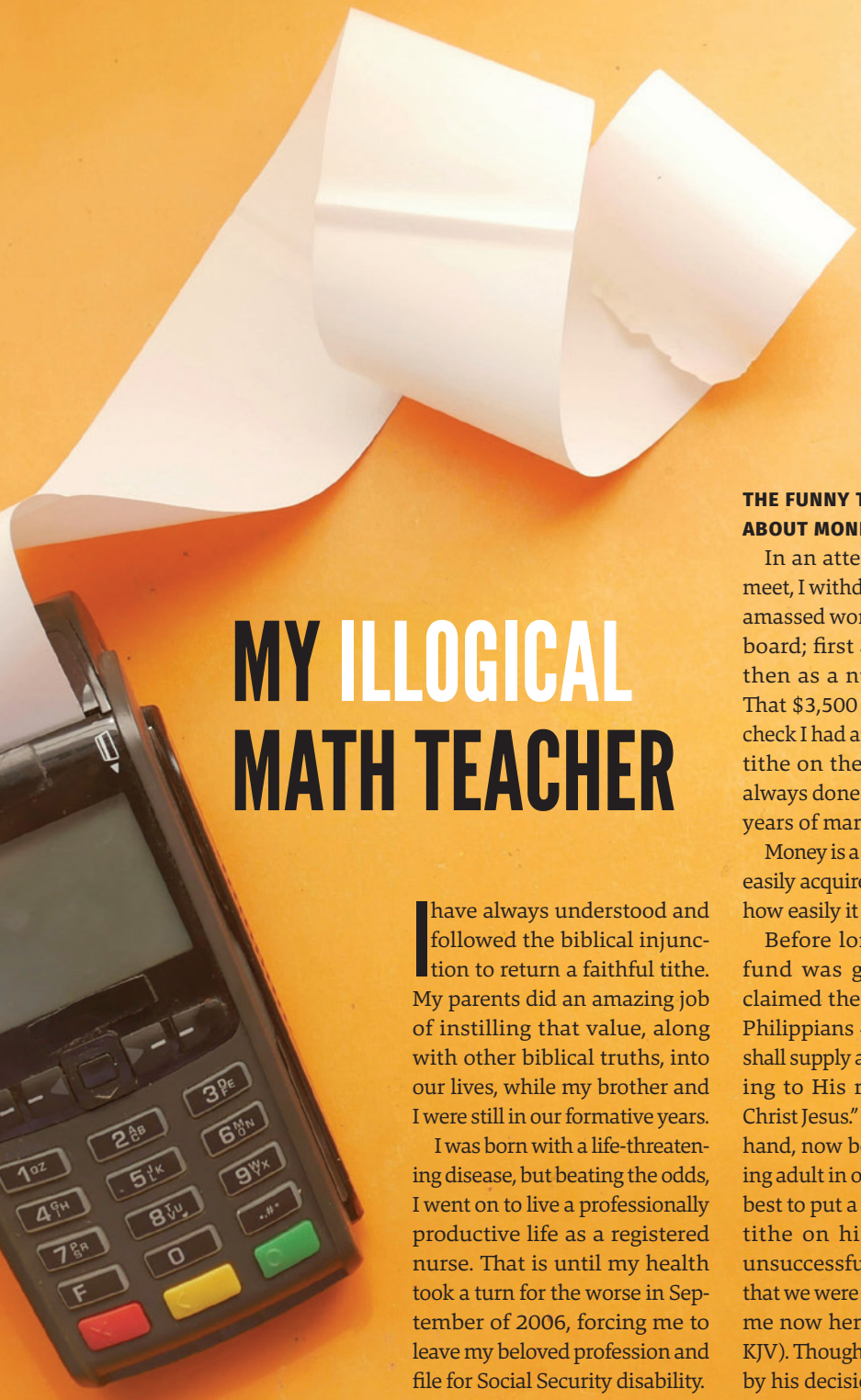


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MY ILLOGICAL MATH TEACHER

HEATHER BARTLEY

I have always understood and followed the biblical injunction to return a faithful tithe. My parents did an amazing job of instilling that value, along with other biblical truths, into our lives, while my brother and I were still in our formative years.

I was born with a life-threatening disease, but beating the odds, I went on to live a professionally productive life as a registered nurse. That is until my health took a turn for the worse in September of 2006, forcing me to leave my beloved profession and file for Social Security disability.

By the middle of the following year, my husband and I had reached the lowest point in our financial lives as a couple. With finances stretched thin, dark, uncertain days lay before us.

THE FUNNY THING ABOUT MONEY

In an attempt to make ends meet, I withdrew the funds I had amassed working for the school board; first as a school nurse, then as a nursing instructor. That $3,500 check was the last check I had any say in. I returned tithe on the check, as we had always done throughout our 16 years of marriage.

Money is a funny thing. It is not easily acquired, yet it is uncanny how easily it gets depleted.

Before long my retirement fund was gone. I resolutely claimed the promise found in Philippians 4:19: "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Hubby, on the other hand, now being the sole working adult in our home, thought it best to put a pause on returning tithe on his income. I tried unsuccessfully to remind him that we were counseled to "prove me now herewith " (Mal. 3:10, KJV). Though I was disappointed by his decision, I gathered I had no further say in the matter.

I am sure my parents and brother were all wondering how we could possibly be making it through financially. No family or friend was ever

PHOTO: UNSPLASH / TOWFIQU BARBHUIYA

brought into our financial affairs throughout our marriage.

By the fall of 2007, though I had never before brought family or friends into our financial affairs, I felt compelled to tell my parents about our hardship. Learning about our situation, my brother added $400 to the $400 my parents were gifting us each month.

It was while living in a state of receiving "charitable donations" that we visited a church in Miami, Florida, one Sabbath. Unbeknown to us, God had a message earmarked for my husband.

While I do not now remember who the pastor was, or the title of his sermon, I owe a debt of gratitude to him for allowing God to speak through him that day.

We live on 80 percent of our income only because God fills 100 percent of our needs.

10 PLUS 10

Stewardship was the meat of his message. He ended it with an altar call and prayer of commitment. His call, in essence, was for us to prove to ourselves that we cannot outgive God. He asked the congregation if we would be willing to do the 10 plus 10 plan, or a double tithe.

Quite shockingly, my husband stood and answered the call while I sat dumbfounded.

On our way home I jokingly asked my husband if he had gone mad. It had already been three months since he had stopped returning tithe. Yet here he was now indicating that he was not only going to resume returning the tithe on our limited funds, but he was going to return a double tithe.

"All the money is God's anyhow," he responded, "so I am going to let God figure out how we are going to survive on 80 percent of one check when we are not making it on 100 percent." Again I looked at him, flabbergasted.

From the time we began living from paycheck to paycheck, I had furtively been mulling over Psalm 37:25 and was silently seeing its truthfulness. "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread."

Eighteen months after starting the 10 plus 10 plan, I was awarded Social Security disability. I gladly returned a double tithe on the retroactive check I had been awarded. God had proved Himself faithful to us, "the least of these."

HIS FAITHFULNESS

I would not want to leave you, dear reader, with the impression that our faithfulness was never again tested. But each time the test came, God again proved faithful.

When COVID-19 came, Hubby's company did a massive layoff in April 2020. Every job was on the chopping block. Yet when it came down to it, his position was tagged "safe." In the ensuing mass terminations nearly one third of the workforce was relieved of their duties.

During that same time period our car insurance came due, but the promised stimulus check we had earmarked to pay for it had not yet arrived. The very day the payment was due, I checked our bank account and found that our stimulus check had been deposited. As Isaiah 65:24 says: "It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear."

Without fail, we have returned 20 percent of our income for the past 15 years. After I have subtracted funds from my account, I find that God has added it back. When I divide out the portions allotted for tithe, offerings, bills, and savings, God multiplies my savings. We live on 80 percent of our income only because God fills 100 percent of our needs.

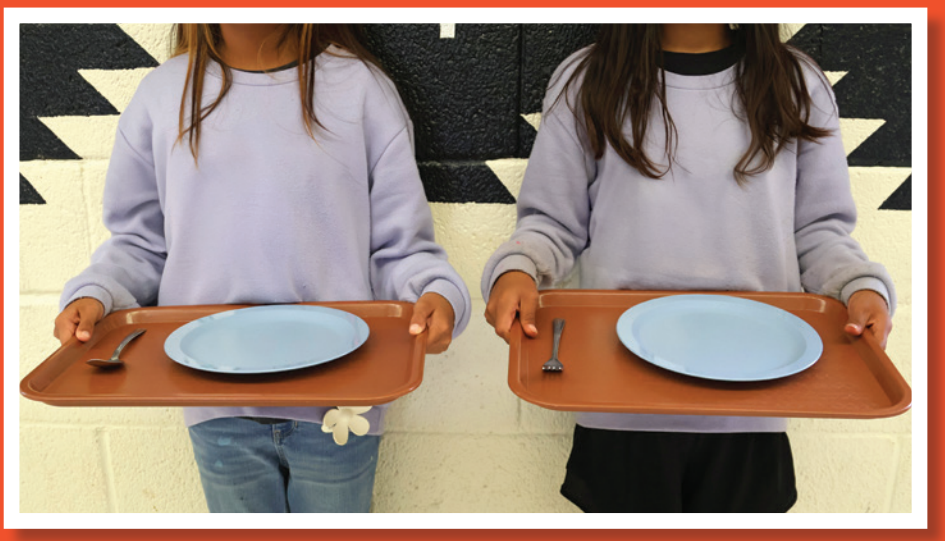
Now, every other Friday, neighbors can often hear me singing at the top of my voice, "You can't beat God's giving, no matter how you try!"

Heather Bartley is a registered nurse, certified Christian lay counselor, and author who lives in Florida.

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PETER N. LANDLESS ZENO L. CHARLES-MARCEL

Grace Under Pressure

Grace, boundaries, and mental health

Q: My husband thinks I should quit my job because of a coworker who causes me endless problems with her words, actions, and attitude. How can I balance showing grace and kindness toward her while protecting my mental health?

A: Dealing with a difficult coworker can be emotionally draining, especially since we spend so much time at work. Your husband's urging you to change jobs may be because he sees what the current situation is doing to you. Here are some faith-based suggestions that may help answer your question:

Prayer is a high-priority tool for gaining clarity, wisdom, and strength in difficult situations. Pray for your coworker and yourself. We can't change people, but God can change situations. Ask for emotional resilience to prevent her actions from affecting your mental health. Consider that there may be some things in you that also need changing. James 1:5 promises, "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you" (NIV).

Set Clear Boundaries. Establish professional limits with her. Keep interactions focused on work-related matters and avoid personal discussions that could lead to stress. Document inappropriate behavior and involve human resources or supervisors when necessary. If your employer has an employee assistance program (EAP)[1] and you have not already sought their help, please do so. Disruptive situations and employee feuds hamper workplace effectiveness. "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person" (Col. 4:6, ESV).

Maintain Grace Under Pressure. Instead of reacting defensively to provocations, respond calmly and kindly, reflecting Christ's character. Address issues when needed, but do so without aggression. This doesn't mean being passive—rather, it means speaking truth with respect and maintaining professionalism even in challenging encounters (see Eph. 4:29).

Know When to Move On. While persistence is valuable, recognize when a situation has become unhealthy. If your coworker's negativity remains unbearable despite your best efforts to resolve conflicts, consider whether it's time to take your husband's advice and seek new opportunities (even in the same company). Get trustworthy counsel before making this decision, though.

Physical health and mental hygiene can affect a person's tolerance of undesirable situations. Make time for healthful activities and relationships that replenish your energy. Proper sleep, nutrition, physical activity, and spending time with loved ones can facilitate emotional resilience.

Working productively with a challenging coworker is difficult. Seeking God first, setting limits, and responding with kindness can help protect your mental health and reflect Christ's character peacefully. Your husband, friends, and spiritual mentors can offer perspectives that might help you handle stress better while assessing if you're overreacting. If the situation becomes unsustainable, trust that God will guide you to the right decision—whether to stay or go. "Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone" (Rom. 12:18, NLT).[2] Shalom!

[1] EAP: a confidential employer-provided benefit offering professional support for personal and worksite issues to enhance employee mental health, emotional well-being, and job performance.

[2] Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

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

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JOURNEYS WITH JESUS

JILL MORIKONE



The room was alive. Women crowded into the ballroom, eager to connect with each other and open the Word of God. After a time of praise and worship, it was my turn to speak. It was our final session for this particular women's ministries convention. The women had shared some of their heartache and pain: marriages on the rocks, struggles with childhood abuse, children wandering from God as they each grappled with the reality of living out the gospel. I love how the gospel gets into the nitty-gritty of our lives—how we treat others, how we love, whether we can forgive. It's when it costs us something, when it hurts to follow Him, that radical obedience to Jesus becomes apparent. And these women revealed the power of the gospel!

All too soon our time together ended, and I was back on the front row, my mind already on our flight that afternoon. Suddenly I realized the woman who had closing prayer hadn't started. Instead she was talking about me. "Jill, I feel God has a special message I'm supposed to give you."

I looked around at the other women. Surely she could have saved this for a more private moment. *This could be awkward*. But she just continued speaking, while I sought to keep my face blank.

"God said to tell you this." She paused dramatically while I cringed inside, uncertain of what was coming. "You might be infertile, but you are pregnant: pregnant with the Word of God and His Spirit. His Word flowed out of you this weekend, and the baby you delivered has ministered to all of us. He fills you daily with the Word, so that Word can travel out to others."

We closed our eyes for prayer, and I was grateful that nobody could see my tears. Greg and I had somehow understood that God had said no because we were supposed to be involved in ministry. But I'd never heard it expressed that way. So it's fitting somehow that my last column for the *Review* should come full circle. My first article in the *Review,* for Mother's Day in 2009, was called "The Pain of a Rose," and it focused on the pain of our infertility and that devastating loss. Now, 16 years later, I'm reminded that our God specializes in taking broken things and using them for His service. And He can do that for you, too.

GOD SPECIALIZES IN TAKING BROKEN THINGS AND USING THEM FOR HIS SERVICE.

Give Him your pain, your loss, your brokenness. Be honest with Him. And then watch as He begins to fill your life with His joy and hope, the eager expectation of what He's done and what He will do. All because of the hope we have since that long-ago mother delivered hope and healing in the form of a Child.

It's been wonderful to spend these years with you as we journeyed toward Jesus. Thank you for what you've taught me of Him.

Jill Morikone is vice president and chief operations officer for Three Angels Broadcasting Network (3ABN), a supporting Adventist television network. She and her husband, Greg, live in southern Illinois and enjoy ministering together for Jesus.



LAURA SHERWIN

FAITH AND FILLING CAVITIES

A journey of medical service and trust in God's timing

I grew up hearing many exciting stories of my family's mission time in Africa and Asia, but I never dreamed I would one day move to Africa as a missionary myself. But God works in wonderful and interesting ways, and here I am serving as a dental missionary at Malamulo Adventist Hospital in southern Malawi with my husband and two children.

I spent a year as a student missionary in Peru, and this experience changed my life in three major ways. First, I met my future husband, Brent. Second, I chose dentistry as my career goal. Third, I became very interested in international missions. Brent and I spent a lot of time together, along with several other student missionaries, providing basic medical and dental care in the jungle villages. It was eye-opening to experience these rural villagers' needs firsthand. Oral pain was a very common issue, and I could see having dental skills would be a tangible way to help others. Not only that, but dentistry would provide opportunities to share the love of Christ with patients.

GOD PAVED THE WAY FOR MY FAMILY AND ME TO BE HERE.

I returned to Southern Adventist University, and Brent and I started dating long-distance. I took several science classes, along with my business administration courses I had already been taking. I found the science classes challenging, and at times I doubted God's prompting to go to dental school. But through each course and at critical times throughout the remainder of my college experience, God continued to open the doors for me, making it clear that dentistry was the career path for me.

By God's grace, we were both accepted into Loma Linda University. We got married and started seriously discussing long-term medical missions.

Brent and I survived and even thrived in medical school and dental school, respectively. We applied to be part of the Deferred Mission Appointee (DMA) program that gives physicians/dentists from Loma Linda University the opportunity to serve at certain Seventh-day Adventist hospital sites around the world, with some financial assistance for loan repayment. It was the only way to make our long-term medical missions goal a reality after residency.

Brent finished his general surgery residency, and when we didn't leave right away for overseas mission service because of work permit issues, it was a spiritually and mentally challenging time. But God carried us through, allowing us time to practice patience and flexibility. It was a surreal moment when we finally flew out to Malawi on our tenth wedding anniversary with our 18-month-old son.

My journey to becoming a dental missionary was not straightforward. There were moments of self-doubt and discouragement along the way. But I am very blessed and honored to serve here in Malawi, knowing God paved the way for my family and me to be here.

Laura Sherwin, D.D.S., serves as a dentist at Malamulo Adventist Hospital. You can follow the Sherwin's missionary adventures on their blog: thesherwinpost.wordpress.com.

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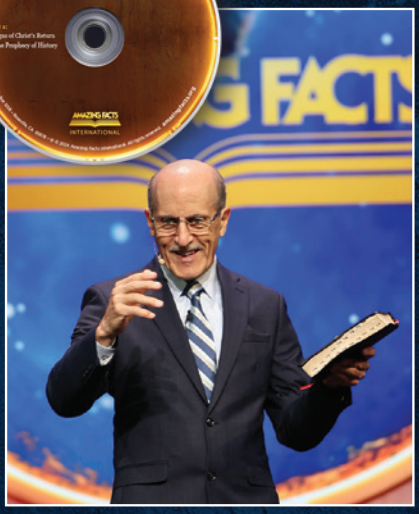


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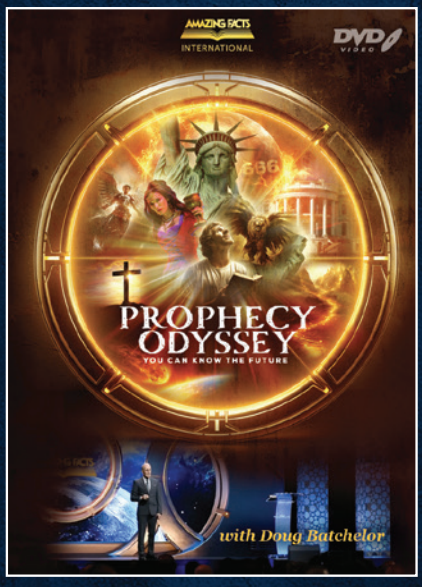
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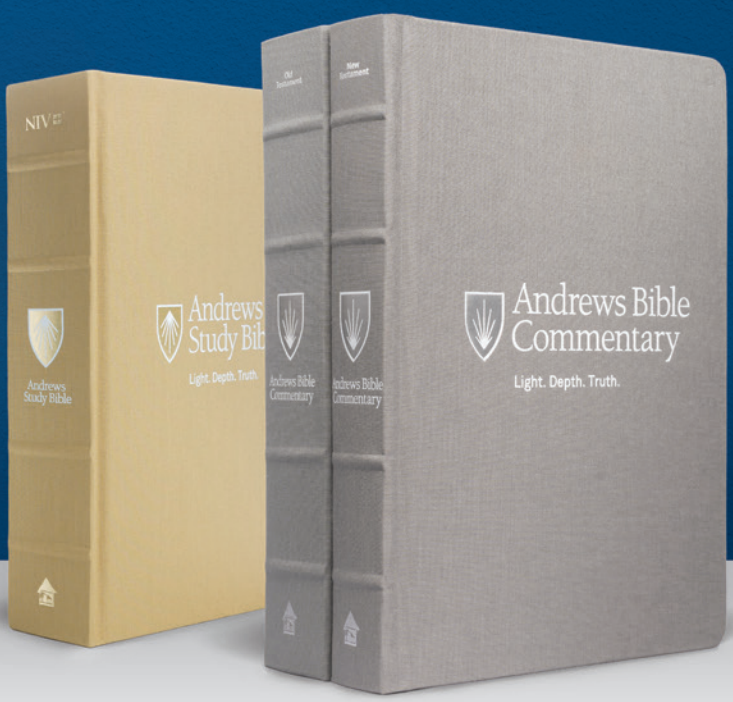
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