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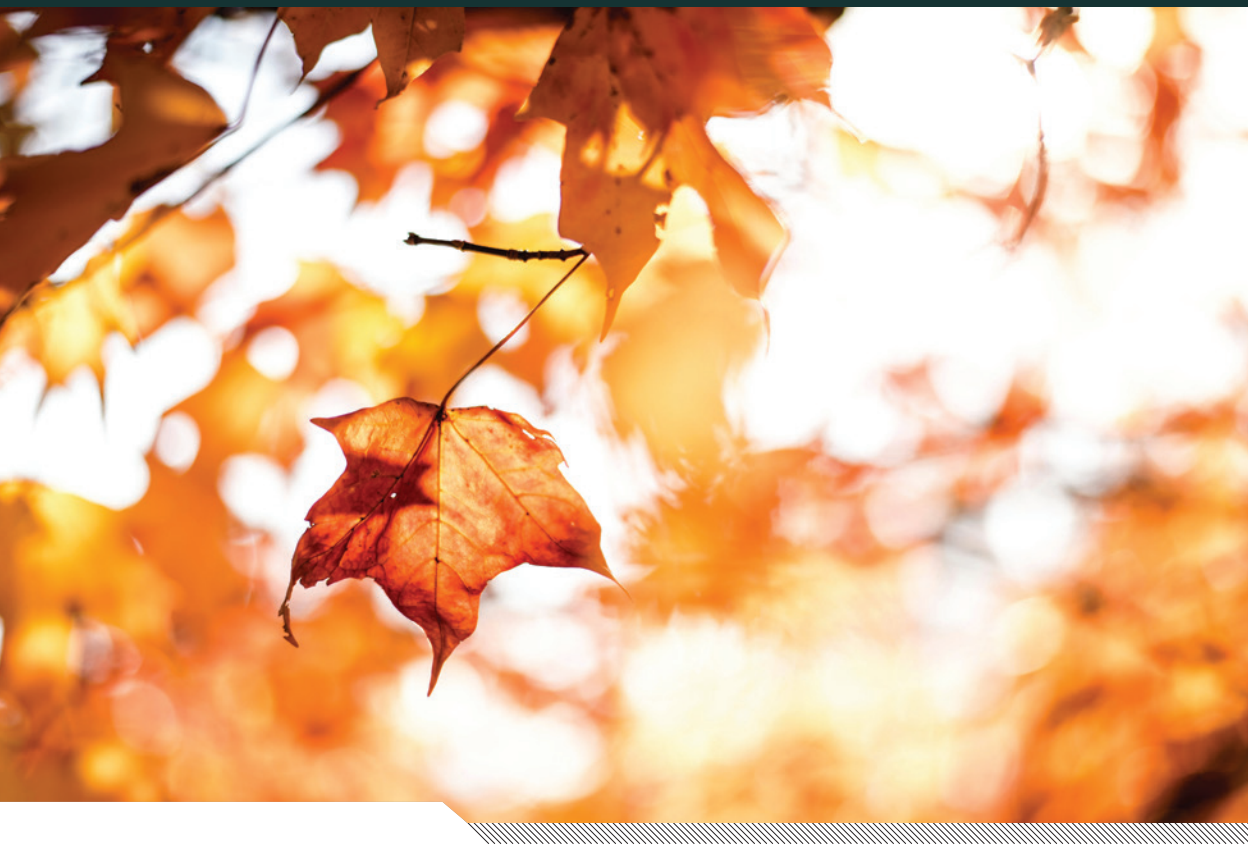
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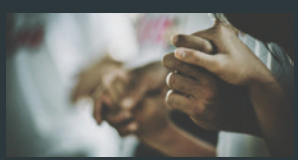
THE MOST SHARED STORIES ON ADVENTISTREVIEW.ORG LAST MONTH:

1



Oldest Continous Adventist Church Congregation Marks 175 Years, by Stanton Witherspoon, *Lake Union Herald*

2



Special Global Prayer Request to Seventh-day Adventists Worldwide, by General Conference executive officers

3



Singapore Adventist Church Thrives Through Faith Fellowship and Belonging, by Faith Toh, Singapore Conference

4



How to Become an Extremist, by Torben Bergland

5



Great Is His Faithfulness, by Nestor Soriano



Birds, Bees, and the Bible

Those involved in children's ministry will tell you that teaching the Bible to young people is challenging. It's not the teaching part—it's choosing what not to teach. Start with Adam and Eve. Every children's Bible finds creative (and humorous) ways to illustrate their nakedness. Noah's ark is always taught, but surely not the part about his nakedness and Ham. The narratives of Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph are always included, but not the Hagar episode, Leah and Rachel fighting over their husband, and the Mrs. Potiphar's garment incident. Many Bible passages have adult scenarios: the laws, the judges, the kings, prophets, epistles, and Revelation. There's one book usually not found in children's stories: Song of Songs. Even the story of Jesus' parents and His birth require an explanation of the subtext.

Whether it's convenient or not, the Bible paints a realistic picture of what most children's resources avoid. Indeed, sexuality is a common motif throughout Scripture. For something so awkward and uncomfortable, why does the Holy Book mention it so much?

First, sexuality is so much a part of the human experience that any serious believer will want to understand what the Bible has to say about it. Adventists who believe in a literal six-day creation should believe that God is the author of all things involved in the human experience, including sexuality. Our belief in the soul does not separate the body from the spirit, but entails a wholistic perspective on health, which includes a positive look at creation's sexuality.

Second, sexuality is used as a biblical motif to explain the depravity of humanity. It provides a backdrop of the evils that unfortunately exist, and from which God must save. It is clearly used by God as a motif in His prophetic illustrations and denunciations of the sinful heart. Intimacy and pleasure connote an intense close relationship, which, when betrayed, broken, or fragmented, results in the shattering of God's heart because of human selfishness.

On the other side of the same coin, divine intimacy is also shown through sexual illustrations. The most romantic of relationships in Scripture is between Yahweh and Israel, the classic husband-and-wife couple found in both the Old and New Testaments. The female protagonist (that would be His people), however, struggles to remain physically, emotionally, and spiritually faithful to the relationship. These dynamics are portrayed in the most vivid and graphic of narratives, especially in many chapters of the major and minor prophets. They are not gratuitous, but shockingly reveal the inner intimacy of God's heart.

Last, God intended sexuality to be good and holy. And followers of God must see the goodness and holiness intended for all things sexual in the human experience. When a biblical understanding of sexuality is attacked, distorted, maligned, misunderstood, or misconstrued, we are in danger of entering ground that is no longer good or holy.

This past year both publications of *Adventist Review* and *Adventist World* have sought to spotlight different topics that were directly or indirectly related to sexuality, its understanding, and its misunderstanding in the church. We hope to share more light than heat to provide clarity and hope.

May 2024 addressed the problem of sin and its solution: Jesus. Sexual sins are not the worst, but do unfortunately have great consequences on those

For something so awkward and uncomfortable, why does the Holy Book mention it so much?

involved. Nevertheless, our common conundrum is solved by Christ. November 2023 looked at the true identity of the Christian. While society points to gender, race, sexuality, and other categories for identity, the Adventist looks to Jesus and His Word. March 2024 sought to provide clarity and balance to the pragmatic issues of church discipline. The real purpose and a grace-oriented manner of church discipline should be understood.

This brings us to this issue in *Adventist Review* and her sister, *Adventist World*. When comparing the Bible with the predominant popular culture, we need clarity on the biblical understanding of sexuality, especially in the arena of same-sex attraction. Our goal, in these pages, is to offer support and grace-filled counsel, especially to the Adventist community that is wrestling with issues surrounding relatives and family members engaged in alternative sexual lifestyles. We pray that our hope of His return also extends to hope on this earth as well.

READ MORE

ISSUES ADDRESSING OUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST

AR11.23 adventistreview.org/review-magazine/november-2023/
AW11.23 adventistreview.org/world-magazine/november-2023/

ISSUES ADDRESSING CHURCH DISCIPLINE

AR03.24 adventistreview.org/review-magazine/march-2024/
AW03.24 adventistreview.org/world-magazine/march-2024/

ISSUES ADDRESSING VICTORY OVER SIN

AR05.24 adventistreview.org/review-magazine/may-2024/
AW05.24 adventistreview.org/orld-magazine/may-2024/

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has voted several statements that relate to the topic of human sexuality. Of particular relevance to this issue of *Adventist Review* magazine is the one found when you follow this QR code: https://gc.adventist.org/guidelines/responding-to-changing-cultural-attitudes-regarding-homosexual-and-other-alternative-sexual-practices/

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INBOX

I think my brain slows down enough to help me think more deeply when I hold a book in my hand.

SUZI GILMORE

SAGE COUNSEL

I appreciated the wise principles outlined in Shane Anderson's September 2024 article, "Politics, Liberty, and the Christian Vote." In the midst of too many strident messages lacking in critical thinking, Anderson's voice provides Adventists a framework to use that can guide us to better voting decisions.

Duane C. McBride



A TIMELY MESSAGE

It is so easy to fall into extremism, as addressed in Torben Bergland's article "How to Become an Extremist" (September 2024), especially if you belong to a people group who believe they have been called and given a special mission and message for the world. May God grant that we continue to walk with Him in true humility, remembering, at all times, that nothing we are, have, do, or say makes us superior to other humans. We are all God's children created in His image.

Oluwaseun Oladini

USE IT RIGHT

Eric Louw is right. There definitely is a battle today to be studious Bible students, especially with what technology is doing to our brains. But as he points out in his article "Can the Bible Compete?" (September 2024), we can also use technology to our advantage.

Brian Omari Mogaka (via Facebook)

A RELATABLE PIECE

Jonathan Walter's "People of the Book No More?" (September 2024) really resonated. I used to tell my economics students that if they wanted to really learn and understand the subject, any subject, they should carry their textbook and read it aloud while walking slowly in their study space. That involves as many of the senses as possible. Then they should try to explain what they learned to someone else.

Fred Davis (via Facebook)

I can relate to what Jonathan Walter describes in "People of the Book No More?" (September 2024). I'm very grateful to people who gave us apps to read and listen to the Bible more conveniently and on the go. I use these apps a lot! But when I really want to concentrate and focus deeply, to go deeper, I have found I have to use a physical Bible. This is true of my other reading too.

Lynette Allcock Yoon

I use both a digital and a print book. But I infinitely prefer my physical Bible. I am able to meditate more with the printed Bible. I think my brain slows down enough to help me think more deeply when I hold a book in my hand. Perhaps because the nature of technology is to be fast and faster still. I really appreciated Jonathan Walter's article ("People of the Book No More?" [September 2024]).

Suzi Gilmore

I'm back in college, and what Jonathan Walter talks about in "People of the Book No More?" (September 2024) is why I always try to get the physical textbook even though the ebooks are either cheaper or even included with my tuition. I just learn better! The same with Scripture.

Heather Lee (via Instagram)

Mariah

travels the world

for her work and loves it. But she's feeling the urge to do something more tangible to impact the world around her. Like her investments, she wants to spread her donation to multiple entities to see which can do the most with her funds. She wants to learn how to navigate the tax benefits and connect with the right organizations to make the most of this opportunity.

To learn more about Mariah's story—
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"We firmly believe that taking care of the environment is a way of honoring God's creation."

Carlos Rangel, p. 15

NEWS



Group photo of several participants from the Pacific Press Publishing Association's 150-year anniversary celebration. PHOTO: DANIEL WEBER

PACIFIC PRESS CELEBRATES PROCLAIMING GOD'S LOVE FOR 150 YEARS

PUBLISHING HOUSE HIGHLIGHTS ITS LEGACY OF FAITH, RESILIENCE, AND MISSION.

CHRISTELLE AGBOKA, NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION, AND *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

On August 17 the Pacific Press Publishing Association celebrated its 150th anniversary. The program, held in Nampa, Idaho, was themed "Proclaiming God's Love for 150 Years." It drew 300 past and present workers and supporters to celebrate the press's enduring mission of uplifting Christ through literature, media, and music.

Presenters highlighted Pacific Press's resilience through trials, including, in 1906, damage from a 7.9-magnitude earthquake and destruction from a fire two months later. The dedicated staff quickly rebuilt and never missed a weekly issue of *Signs of the Times*, their flagship publication, even producing three special editions linking the earthquake to Jesus' imminent return.

Keynote speakers G. Alexander Bryant, North American Division (NAD) president, and Ted N. C. Wilson, General Conference (GC) president, encouraged a similar boldness among believers today. Nampa mayor Debbie Kling expressed appreciation for the press, which made Nampa its home in 1984. "We are grateful for you," she said.

Local church member Thelma Stubbs, who first encountered Pacific Press publications in her native Jamaica, was among the receptive crowd. "Pacific Press has been part of our history forever. When I saw the announcement, I said, 'I will not miss this,'" Stubbs said.

HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS AND TESTIMONIES

A video spanning 150 years, along with in-person reflections, took at-



Charles White, great-grandson of James and Ellen White, shares family memories at the press's 150-year anniversary celebration. DANIEL WEBER

tendees on a historical journey. Thomas Gott, Jr., who built the Nampa facility, lauded the "four heroes"—George Gott (his father), Lowell Bock, Eugene Stiles, and Martin Ytreberg—who championed the move to Nampa to counter rising costs in its former home of Mountain View, California.

Adventist historian and educator George Knight recounted Ellen White's 1848 vision of a regular paper, depicted as "streams of light that went clear round the world." The Review and Herald Publishing Association arose in 1849, 14 years before the movement of less than 100 people was officially organized as a church. "It was an impossible prediction, but it moved a people who believed in a God who could do the impossible," Knight said.

Charles White, Ellen and James White's great-grandson, shared his family's close connection to the press, where his grandfather, father, and a young Charles worked. He fondly remembered worship services, Christmas parties, and camping trips, stating, "[The Pacific Press] wasn't just a place to work. It was the hub of our community, the heart of what went on, the center of activity."

Ellen G. White Estate director Merlin Burt shared Ellen White's 1874 vision of establishing a new paper on the Pacific Coast to complement the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*. It would be the catalyst for "the message [going] in power to all parts of the world, to Oregon, to Europe, Australia, to the islands of the sea, to all nations, tongues, and peoples."*

GLOBAL IMPACT

The anniversary event also recognized Pacific Press's global impact, which, together with the Review and Herald Publishing Association, laid the foundation for the church's 62 publishing houses around the world.

Stephen Apola, GC associate Publishing Ministries director, presented Pacific Press president Dale Galusha with a plaque honoring Pacific Press for 150 years of producing "inspiring, educational, and uplifting truth-filled literature." In a video, GC Publishing Ministries director Almir Marroni added, "Each publication is more than just ink on paper. It is a vessel of God's Word and a source of spiritual nourishment."

INSPIRATION FOR TODAY

Bryant and Wilson explored how the faithfulness of Pacific Press pioneers can inform the church's mission in 2024. Bryant's message, "What if We Were Them?" drew parallels between the Adventist pioneers, Christ's 12 disciples, and the present-day church. He emphasized that despite lacking finances, organizational structure, a strategic plan, or physical facilities, "[the pioneers and disciples] turned the world upside down."

Bryant also revealed how the publishing ministry transformed his life and ministry—from reading *The Desire of Ages* daily as a new convert and Oakwood University freshman to selling Adventist books as a young pastor receiving a small stipend, which led to multiple baptisms.

"What if we were them? How would we meet [today's] challenges? What sacrificial measures would we make to reach the world with the present truth?" Bryant asked. He then charged attendees to use all available tools and technologies, as the pioneers did, "to carry this message to the end of the world [so] Jesus will come."

In his message, "After 150 Years . . . The Greatest Anniversary Is Yet to Come," Wilson stressed the significance of Pacific Press's role in these last days. "Pacific Press, get ready, because your most important days are not in the past 150; they are just ahead."

Wilson encouraged participants to share God's messages through Pacific Press materials, live a sanctified life, uphold core Seventh-day Adventist beliefs, and prepare for "the greatest anniversary reunion," with the second coming of Jesus Christ.

* Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1915), p. 209.



Participants visited paleontological sites where researchers could see fossil footprints. PHOTO: MICHELSON BORGES

SCIENTISTS CONDUCT RESEARCH ON DINOSAURS IN BOLIVIA

THE GOAL IS TO EXPAND STUDIES ON THE FAITH-SCIENCE RELATIONSHIP.

MICHELSON BORGES, SOUTH AMERICAN DIVISION, AND *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

In the mountains of Bolivia, scientists and researchers from around the world gathered for an event that united science and faith in a unique way. From September 4 to 7 the city of Cochabamba and Torotoro National Park hosted the fifth South American Meeting of Faith and Science.

Organized by the Seventh-day Adventist Church's South American Division (SAD) and Bolivia Adventist University, the event brought together more than 70 experts from eight countries. Speakers delivered lectures, offered workshops, and led an expedition to study the largest record of dinosaur fossil footprints on the planet. More than a scientific event, it was an opportunity to reflect on the harmony between biblical faith and scientific research, organizers said.

Francislê Neri de Souza, director of the SAD branch of the Geoscience Research Institute (GRI), said the event underpins the dialogue between faith and science within a creationist perspective. "Meetings like this are essential to strengthen the participants' convictions and provide scientific tools to explain the biblical view on origins," Souza said.

GRI in South America promotes geological expeditions to such important sites as the Galápagos Islands, in Ecuador; Chapada do Araripe, in Brazil; and Ocucaje, in Peru, reinforcing the integration between science and faith in the study of origins.

PRACTICAL RESULTS

A visit to Torotoro National Park was the main activity at the meeting. More than 20,000 dinosaur footprints from the Triassic, Jurassic, and Cretaceous periods have been documented. Led by Raúl Esperante from the GRI world headquarters in Loma Linda, California, researchers analyzed fossil footprints that suggest dinosaur interaction with flooded environments. Esperante's research projects carried out since 2019 have already resulted in several peer-reviewed scientific papers and have triggered the interest of Bolivia's federal government to promote tourism in the area.

The meeting also marked the launch of the book *Contributions to the Teaching of Creationism*, with 20 chapters written by 28 authors. The volume, especially targeted at Adventist teachers, offers strategies to integrate creationist teaching with scientific knowledge.

GRI world director Ronald Nalin highlighted the importance of expanding the dialogue between science and faith in Adventist institutions. For SAD education director Antônio Marcos Alves, creationism is the "cornerstone" of the denomination and should be an essential part of the teaching across Adventist schools.

FOCUS ON NEW GENERATIONS

Adolfo Suárez, president of the Latin-American Adventist Theological Seminary and director of the SAD's Spirit of Prophecy department, pointed out that events like this allow an alignment of research with Adventist identity. "We should support the production of more multimedia content, such as documentaries, to make creationism more accessible to new generations," Suárez said.

"Participating in the fifth Faith and Science Meeting was an unparalleled experience," Maura Brandão, one of the event speakers, said. "Without a doubt, the highlight of the event . . . was the field activity in Torotoro National Park," Brandão added. "Learning in practice how dinosaur footprint investigations are carried out was very enriching and edifying, and further reinforced important principles of the creationist worldview."

The next South American Meeting of Faith and Science will be held in Chile in 2026, focusing on astronomy and its implications for the study of origins.



Women from the Women's Rehabilitation Complex take part in the women's ministries congress in Puerto Rico. PHOTO: PUERTO RICAN UNION

PRISON MINISTRIES RESULTS IN SCORES OF TRANSFORMED LIVES IN PUERTO RICO

INITIATIVES ARE BRINGING INMATES, RELATIVES TO GOD'S KINGDOM.

PUERTO RICAN UNION CONFERENCE, INTER-AMERICAN DIVISION, AND *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

Eileen Lozada is a selfless wife, homeschooling mother of her three children, and an elder at the San Antonio Seventh-day Adventist Church in Caguas, Puerto Rico. She is also director of chaplaincy and prison ministries for the Adventist Church in eastern Puerto Rico.

Some years ago, around Christmastime, Lozada felt the call to join a church-sponsored visit to a group of inmates in a nearby prison. Since then, Lozada has dedicated much of her time to her passion—caring for "the girls," as she calls them. Lozada and others regularly offer spiritual support and study the Bible with the inmates, driven by deep love and compassion.

As a result of the efforts of the group of women led by Lozada in the east, 37 people have been baptized in the Women's Rehabilitation Complex in Bayamón. Some of these women were able to participate in the Rise and Shine Women's Congress of the Adventist Church's East Puerto Rico Conference on August 31. There Yachira Mangual showed her love for Jesus as she was baptized in front of more than 800 people, who welcomed her into the Adventist family.

Lozada also shared that there are more inmates getting ready for baptism. "We should hold another baptism soon, because several inmates have already requested it, and we don't want to delay it," she said. "We want to uplift Christ, because this is not about us, but about what God can do in their lives."

RISE AND SHINE

At the Rise and Shine convention the keynote speaker was Edith Ruiz Espinoza, Women's Ministries director of the church's Inter-American Division. Espinoza congratulated the Adventist women serving in prison ministries, encouraging them to keep up their good work.

"Don't stop before finishing your task," Espinoza told them. "Keep working with those women inmates until, through the work of the Holy Spirit, they may embrace God as their God and request baptism."

Espinoza also shared that when she made an altar call to women serving in prison ministries and also to inmates, the inmates began to cry. With their guards' permission, many of them walked to the front. "They cried together; it was very meaningful," Espinoza said.

She also emphasized the importance of women in this ministry. "These women can reach inmates in a way men sometimes can't," Espinoza explained. "Men are more practical, but women naturally focus on emotions. They hug the inmates and cry with them. These women serving in prison ministries are very committed and faithful, always ready to go the extra mile," she said.

FREE IN CHRIST

In Rincón, in the West Puerto Rico Conference, the prison chapel was remodeled and equipped thanks to a partnership between various church entities. Now the worship experience is a pleasant one, even though those attending are locked in a prison.

"After meeting Jesus, many of the inmates have told me, 'I am already free even though I am locked up in this place,'" Luis A. Rivera, president of the Puerto Rican Union, said. "God has given me the privilege of baptizing women and men who have a genuine faith in the restorative power of Jesus." According to Puerto Rican Union leaders, during the past three years more than 100 inmates have been baptized across the island.

Rivera explained that the baptized inmates were taught by members who gave of their time, energy, and resources to share hope. "God has blessed every effort made by His brave servants and opened doors where none existed," he said.



Pathfinders and leaders of the Rapa Nui Pathfinder Club. PHOTO: SOUTH AMERICAN DIVISION

PATHFINDER CLUBS STRENGTHEN THE ADVENTIST CHURCH ON CHILE'S EASTER ISLAND

THEY ARE SUPPORTING EFFORTS TO REACH MORE PEOPLE IN AN ISOLATED PLACE.

SOUTH AMERICAN DIVISION AND *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

Approximately 1,000 years ago fearless and courageous Polynesians sailed the seas for thousands of miles until they discovered a volcanic island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. There they started a civilization known today as Rapa Nui. In the 1860s they gave this name to the island, which is also the name of the language spoken in that place. Rapa Nui means "Big Rapa" and comes from the island's similarity to the island of Rapa in the Austral Islands.

The island is one of the most isolated on the planet. It is 2,300 miles west of the Chilean coast and 2,500 miles southeast of Tahiti, in French Polynesia. Rapa Nui is also known as "The Navel of the World."

On Easter Sunday, April 5, 1722, explorer Jacob Roggeveen docked on the island with three large European ships. That's the reason he called this most isolated place in the world Easter Island.

Today 9,000 people live on the island and receive more than 100,000 tourists a year.

PREACHING THE GOSPEL

Centuries before the first Polynesians inhabited Rapa Nui, some disciples in Jerusalem heard the last words of Jesus before He ascended to heaven, as recorded in Acts 1:8. He said, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Easter Island is certainly part of "the ends of the earth." How would the gospel reach Easter Island, which nowadays is part of Chile? What method could be used to break a natural prejudice against the church?

In 2007 more than 100 Pathfinder leaders from all parts of Chile went to Rapa Nui and built a Seventh-day Adventist church.

AN IMPORTANT MINISTRY

The ministry of Pathfinders has been a powerful instrument to share the love of Jesus with adolescents and their families in this region and in many others. It breaks down prejudices and saves families. There is an increasingly strong movement of planting churches in new places, new territories, starting with the Pathfinder club.

Throughout the territory of the Adventist Church's South American Division (SAD, serving eight South American countries), Pathfinders seek to open a club in each church.

"We currently have Pathfinder clubs in the Galápagos Islands [Ecuador], Fernando de Noronha Island [Brazil], a project starting in the Falkland Islands [U.K.], and many others," SAD Pathfinder director Udolcy Zukowski said.

And it is very gratifying to see that a new boost has been given to the Pathfinder and Adventurer clubs on Easter Island in 2024, Zukowski pointed out. They have grown in number and achievements, and they received a donation of a full marching band for the club. "Now Pathfinders will have the only band on Easter Island!" Zukowski said.

Zukowski also shared that at a celebration on September 11 he brought together a group of Adventurers, Pathfinders, and their parents for a photo with more than 60 Rapa Nui natives, only five of whom are Adventists.

"Through Pathfinder clubs our fearless and courageous leaders are doing their best to reach Rapa Nui with the everlasting gospel," Zukowski said, "and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, fulfill the promise of Acts 1:8."



PHOTO: MARCOS PASEGGI

HUNDREDS CELEBRATE STANBOROUGH PRESS'S 140 YEARS OF PUBLISHING MINISTRY

LEADERS AND MEMBERS RECOMMIT TO THE MISSION OF LITERATURE MINISTRIES.

MARCOS PASEGGI, *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

The thick early-morning fog and persistent drizzle gave way to a splendidly warm autumn day on September 8 as church leaders, members, and guests gathered at Stanborough Press in Grantham, Lincolnshire, England, to celebrate 140 years of service of the publishing house. The event, which coincided with the annual Stanborough Press Open House, called the attendees' attention to God's steady providence through the decades as leaders and staff renewed their commitment to the publishing ministries of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United Kingdom and beyond.

"We were set up 140 years ago by the General Conference with a mission," current Stanborough Press general manager Elisabeth Sanguesa said. "That mission was to spread the Word of God outside of the U.S., in the English territories. And that's been our mandate since 1884."

Scores of members, traveling from other regions of the U.K., arrived early to celebrate "140 years of impact, of lives changed, of community transformation, of people coming to Jesus through the printed page," as Philip Baptiste, secretary-treasurer of Adventist-laymen's Services and Industries (ASi), said in a prayer to open the anniversary celebration ceremony.

Regional and world church leaders attended, including General Conference (GC) Publishing Ministries associate director Stephen Apola and British Union Conference president Eglan Brooks.

"Literature reaches where we cannot go," Brooks reminded those attending the ceremony. "God has opened marvelous doors through the use of literature to do evangelism. . . . We must continue to utilize the resource of the printed page."

Other Adventist leaders from all over the world who were not able to attend in person sent their greetings via video messages.

"Now, more than ever, the world needs messages of hope and faith," GC Publishing Ministries director Almir Marroni said through video. "Looking ahead, I am confident that Stanborough Press will continue to play a vital role in our mission."

GC Ellen G. White Estate associate director Dwain Esmond agreed. "You have been an example of faithfulness to God down through the years," he said. "Stanborough, your future is better than your past," he told Stanborough Press leaders and staff.

"The Lord still has wonderful things for you to do," added Audrey Andersson, a GC vice president, in a celebration that she called "an Ebenezer moment," explaining its biblical meaning as "thus far the Lord has helped us."

GC president Ted N. C. Wilson highlighted the mission-driven nature of the enterprise. For him the anniversary is "an opportunity to see that God's mission continues through the printed page in hard copy and electronically," he said. "God will use all of you celebrating and using materials produced by Stanborough to further the coming of Jesus."

Sanguesa reminded those attending the ceremony that every person involved with the publishing house has been a key link in its development and survival. "Many people have come before us; we are just building up on their hard work for many years," she said.

Sanguesa had special words of appreciation for those who have led and served at Stanborough Press before her. They included Paul Hammond (general manager, 1984-2015), who highlighted what, according to him, made working at Stanborough Press so special. "The most valuable asset we have is the staff," Hammond said.

At the same time, Hammond acknowledged God's blessings through its 140-year-old history. "I praise Him for it," he said, "and I am thankful that Stanborough Press has continued the work throughout the world of producing books that bring people to the knowledge of Christ."



Young people help clean up the Costa Del Este beach in Panama City, Panama, on September 1.
PHOTO: PANAMA UNION

VOLUNTEERS IN PANAMA RECOGNIZED FOR CLEANING UP POPULAR BEACH

JOHANA GONZÁLEZ, HENRY GONZÁLEZ, INTER-AMERICAN DIVISION, AND *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

About 400 Seventh-day Adventist young people joined the Office of the Mayor of Panama City for a cleanup day on popular Costa del Este beach on September 1. The effort sought not only to restore the natural beauty of the coastal space but also to reaffirm the commitment of young people to caring for the environment, organizers said.

For more than 20 years Panama has dedicated every September to creating awareness about the importance of marine ecosystems. During this month educational and cleanup initiatives take place in collaboration with public, private, and nonprofit organizations. In 2024 the event focused specifically on the challenge of plastic pollution in oceans.

From early morning, Adventist volunteers showed up on the beach equipped with gloves and garbage bags, ready to collect as much waste as possible. Volunteers managed to collect mostly plastics that had been swept away and brought by rivers and ocean tides, said Carlos Rangel, coordinator of volunteers for the Adventist Church's Metropolitan Panama Conference. By the end of the day the beach had recovered some of its original state, something that made young people proud of their contribution, he added.

GOOD STEWARDS OF THE PLANET

The Office of the Mayor of Panama City, which helped to coordinate the initiative, thanked Adventist volunteers for their commitment. "We are deeply grateful to these young people for their dedication and effort," Jarelys Gómez, representative of the Environmental Management Office, said. "They have not only helped clean up one of our most important beaches but also inspired others to join the cause."

"It is an honor for us to participate in this activity," Rangel said. "We firmly believe that taking care of the environment is a way of honoring God's creation."

SERVING GOD AND THE COMMUNITY

For many of the participants the experience allowed them to reflect on the importance of small but significant actions to protect the environment.

Rolando Lyne, a 14-year-old from San Miguelito Adventist Church who was part of the group, shared his experience. "At first I wasn't sure how much we would accomplish in just one morning. But when we saw the amount of trash we collected, I realized that every little effort counts. It's amazing how something as simple as picking up trash can be a way to serve God and our community," Lyne said.

Another volunteer, 17-year-old Yorlenis Villarreal from Belén Adventist Church, also highlighted the feeling of community and purpose after participating in the initiative. "What I found most surprising was to see how we were all united by a common cause. We didn't just clean the beach; we also strengthened our mutual bonds. I feel more connected to my church and my community."

LIVING THEIR FAITH

For Adventist young people the act of cleaning beaches goes beyond the simple task of volunteering. It is an extension of their faith, leaders said. "The Bible teaches us that we are stewards of God's creation," Misael González, youth ministries director of the Panama Union Mission, explained. "By cleaning up this beach, we are being good stewards of the world that God has entrusted to our care."

The September 1 event concluded with a thank-you ceremony in which volunteers were honored for their dedication.

Beyond the immediate results of the cleanup, the efforts of young volunteers have sown a seed of awareness in the community, Adventist leaders said. "Change is possible when the community comes together for a common cause," Gómez said.



Andrews Professional Day took place at the Lake Union Conference headquarters on September 19. PHOTO: KATIE FELLOWS

FUTURE EDUCATORS RECEIVE TRAINING IN THE LAKE UNION

ANDREWS PROFESSIONAL DAY HELPS TO ENHANCE TEACHERS' OUTPUT, LEADERS SAY.

MICHELLE BACCHIOCCHI, FOR LAKE UNION HERALD, AND *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

On September 19 a group of senior education majors from Andrews University met at the Adventist Church's Lake Union Conference headquarters in Berrien Springs, Michigan, for a full day of professional development, where they practiced interview skills and met educational administrators throughout the union territory.

The experience was a win-win for both students and leaders, as it afforded administrators, both public and parochial, an opportunity to see the upcoming teacher candidates and potential teachers for their own school systems.

WHAT HAPPENS

The day began with a continental breakfast, followed by worship facilitated by the Andrews students.

After worship, members of the Lake Union and public school administrators shared short presentations. Topics were chosen to meet the interest of both superintendent and students, such as "Soft Skills Matter," "The Value of Building Relationships," and "It's More About Who You Are Than What You Do." Following the Ed Talks, the groups separated into respective areas to have targeted presentations.

The groups came back for lunch and more fellowship. After the noon meal there were mock interviews in which the administrators were matched with a student. For 15 minutes the student shared their résumé, and the administrator interviewed the student. The students rotated to a new administrator every 15 minutes. The mock interviews were followed with a panel discussion during which the administrators answered relevant questions regarding what future teachers should expect in procuring a job in education. The day ended with refreshments and social time and a final presentation by a master teacher giving them tips on thriving in the first year of teaching.

Presenters included D'Andria Jackson, clinical psychologist; Clem Sheppard, retired St. Joseph Public School educator; Bradley Sheppard, retired superintendent of instruction at Elkhart Community School; and Steve Baughman, Bainum Foundation, Advancing Christian Education (ACE) Academy manager.

Since his days as Indiana Academy principal and now in his role at Bainum, Baughman sees his mission as supporting leaders for and within the Seventh-day Adventist education system.

He explained that teaching is a uniquely skilled craft that must be honed to be effective and that there are simple things that can be applied early in a teaching career, even as a first-year teacher, that can set up an individual for success as they begin the process of honing that craft. Additionally, some of those simple things can also help prevent the burnout that may otherwise be experienced. "I'm blessed to be a part of this program, as it allows me to play a part of contributing to the critical pipeline of leadership within the Adventist system," Baughman said.

He added, "Teachers have the amazing opportunity to be a source of stability and strength for their students, who may be coming from backgrounds that lack those components. It should not be taken lightly that the teacher has a responsibility to take care of themselves so that they can give their best selves to their students every day."

HISTORY OF PROFESSIONAL DAY

Professional Day began more than 25 years ago. Then Andrews University Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum Department, now the School of Education, created an opportunity for senior education students to engage with local public school, Adventist schools, and Lake Union administrators. Currently the School of Education collaborates with the Lake Union for this one-day event in an initiative that started with director of education Linda Fuchs and now continues with Ruth Horton.



ADVENTIST SIGN LANGUAGE TRAINERS HELP INTERNS BRIDGE GAPS WITH THE DEAF. The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Zamboanga, Philippines, alongside deaf trainers spearheaded the initiative to equip social work interns with the tools needed to build relationships and communicate effectively with the deaf community. The training, which took place at Aurelio Mendoza Memorial College on September 11, emphasized the importance of breaking down communication barriers and providing better services to the deaf, who are a vital part of the persons with disabilities (PWD) sector, event organizers said.



OLDEST CONTINUOUS ADVENTIST CHURCH CONGREGATION MARKS 175 YEARS. Jackson Adventist Church in Jackson, Michigan, is the oldest continuous Seventh-day Adventist congregation. Recently, it celebrated its 175th anniversary, marking nearly two centuries of remarkable contributions to the Adventist movement. The event highlighted the church's role as a spiritual and historical landmark within the denomination, with a rich legacy of firsts. As part of its celebration, the church launched a five-year mission plan focused on community outreach, Bible study, and evangelism.



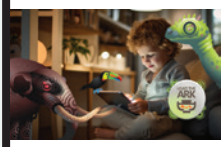
ADRA MONGOLIA CELEBRATES 30 YEARS. The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) in Mongolia celebrated its anniversary in the country's capital, Ulaanbaatar. ADRA opened its doors in Mongolia in 1994 and has worked for 30 years in partnership with people, organizations, and businesses to improve the quality of life for Mongolians through various projects. Over the years the agency has also focused on such areas as education, disaster and emergency management, economic development and livelihoods, health, and food security.



ANDREWS UNIVERSITY HOSTS STEM DAY FOR REGIONAL EDUCATORS. In early September Andrews University welcomed K-12 educators from across the Lake Union Conference for an immersive, hands-on professional development experience focused on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). The event provided an opportunity for teachers to engage in collaborative lab experiences and to equip themselves with new teaching tools. Teachers participated in such activities as chemistry, math, and physics labs, learning new techniques to make STEM education more interactive and accessible.



LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH CELEBRATES ITS SIXTIETH ANNIVERSARY. For 60 years LLU School of Public Health has worked to protect and improve the health of communities locally and globally. Its rich history dates to September 1, 1964, when it became California's third public health school. In 1967 the school became fully accredited by the executive board of the American Public Health Association. The school offered four majors: Tropical Health, Public Health Education, Public Health Nutrition, and Public Health Administration.



"LOAD THE ARK" GAME CONNECTS FAITH THROUGH PLAY. One Pacific Northwest group of professionals has embarked on a mission to infuse faith into the digital world. The game answers the call for more wholesome, Bible-based digital offerings. The tile-matching puzzle game is inspired by the story of Noah's ark, and is a digital gateway to faith, turning a biblical narrative into an engaging activity that reflects the teachings of the Bible (visit loadtheark.com).

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EMBRACING GOD'S BEAUTIFUL DESIGN

CLINTON WAHLEN



Love is love" has become a popular saying in the past few years, and yet it does not offer a true definition of love. The Bible tells us that "God is love" (1 John 4:8), and we find the truth about His love revealed in His Word. Human sexuality is just one aspect of love. God's love is broader than we can imagine, based on unselfishness and seeking others' good. Some say that the Bible surely would not condemn loving, exclusive same-sex relationships, and that gender identity is fluid rather than being based on the creation of human beings in the image of God as male and female. Since the Bible is our guide, let's look at some of the key passages that address these and other important issues.

A BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE

The Genesis account of humans being created in the image of God as male and female (Gen. 1:26-29) is foundational for human identity and relationships. Genesis 2 elaborates on this brief description, highlighting the complementary nature of the male-female relationship. The woman is depicted as a suitable partner for the man, one "who corresponds to" (Heb. *kenegdo*) him (Gen. 2:18, 20, NET).[1] The word combines two ideas: the woman is like (*ke*) the man and opposite (*neged*) to him. Adam mentions the same principle: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh [like him in being human]; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man [opposite in sex/gender]" (Gen. 2:23). Immediately following we find a prescription for marriage: a man leaves "his father and mother" (a heterosexual,

monogamous marriage) and is "joined to his wife" (forming another heterosexual, monogamous marriage). This verse looks ahead, way beyond Eden, "applying the principles of the first marriage to every marriage."[2]

Jesus, in reply to a question about divorce, directs our attention to the beginning, before the entrance of sin, to underscore God's perfect design for marriage:

"Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female' [see Gen. 1:27], and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh' [see Gen. 2:24]?" (Matt. 19:4, 5).

Jesus here indicates that marriage is between only "two," thus excluding polygamy, and that it was God Himself who defined marriage with the words of Genesis 2:24, which explains why Jesus went on to say, "Therefore what *God* has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt. 19:6).[3] Christian weddings entreat God's blessing on the marriage. But how can God bless a marriage that goes directly against His divine directions for marriage in Scripture? From the beginning, marriage was designed by God to be monogamous, heterosexual, and permanent, because He joins man and woman together in marriage.

THE BIBLE AND SAME-SEX RELATIONS

LGBTQ proponents argue for a more inclusive understanding of marriage to accommodate diverse expressions of love and commitment. But the Bible outlines three main purposes for marriage:

1. Procreation (Gen. 1:28; 9:1; Ps. 127:3; Mal. 2:15).

The Genesis account of humans being created in the image of God as male and female is foundational for human identity and relationships.

2. To symbolize God's relationship with His people (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27, 32).

3. To foster companionship (Gen. 2:18; S. of Sol. 2:16; Eph. 5:33).

These three purposes underscore the theological significance of heterosexual marriage as envisioned in Scripture. At best, a same-sex marriage can fulfill only the need for companionship. Not only are the other two purposes not met—same-gender relationships subvert them.

Both the Old and New Testaments consistently and categorically condemn same-sex relations. Leviticus places them on the same level as other practices detestable to God, including incest, bestiality, and child sacrifice (Lev. 18:21-23). Why should we exclude same-sex relations from this Mosaic list of prohibitions? They are condemned in the strongest possible terms as an "abomination," and the severest possible penalty is applied—being "cut off" from the people of God (Lev. 18:22, 29; see also Lev. 20:13). In Christian terms it amounts to exclusion from God's kingdom. How can a kingdom based on God's law of love accept practices that subvert its foundational principles by redefining "love" based on unbiblical values that are ultimately destructive?

In discussing these verses in Leviticus, some appeal to the idea of restoration, that polygamy, slavery, and the legal dependence of women have nothing to do with Creation. It is true that Scripture records instances of polygamy, divorce, and slavery, which were never God's plan and far from the Creation ideal. But the Edenic, pre-Fall roles of marriage between husband and wife are categorically different. Paul confirms the laws against incest and same-sex relations are still valid because he relies on them in condemning a man who had sexual relations with his father's wife (1 Cor. 5:1; cf. Lev. 18:8) and in his condemnation of homosexual practices (Rom. 1:26, 27; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10).[4] In view of the consistent, unequivocal condemnation of same-sex relations in both the Old

PHOTO: LIGHTSTOCK / IMAGE 1:27

Genesis 2:24 defines marriage as a covenantal commitment between one man and one woman that is monogamous, exclusive, and lifelong.



and New Testaments, there should be no doubt about the universal nature of this biblical prohibition.

The most extensive Pauline critique of same-sex relations appears in Romans 1:18-32. It is often argued that same-sex practice is here connected with idolatry and, therefore, irrelevant to contemporary attitudes toward same-sex relations. But Paul's argument in this passage is based on Gentile rejection of the facts of Creation that have been plainly revealed (verses 18-23), which ultimately leads to the moral breakdown of society and of healthy human relations (verses 24-32). Because they have rejected the truth, God gives them up to impurity (*akatharsia*) and lust (*pathos*), terms frequently used by Paul of sexual sin (2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:5, 7). Gentile rejection of the facts of Creation results in distorted views of sexuality (Rom. 1:26, 27). Women "exchanged" or substituted "natural relations for those that are contrary to nature" (verse 26, ESV), and men did "likewise," by abandoning "natural relations with women" (verse 28, ESV). With many Greco-Roman writers, Paul argues that same-sex sexual relationships are "against nature" (Greek *para physin*), because the complementary design and sexual function of the male and the female sex have fitted them biologically for each other. No hint of domination or coercion appears in Romans 1; rather the relationships appear to be mutual, consensual, and pleasurable. Such cultural rereadings of this passage result only in distorted interpretations and conclusions.[5]

TRANSGENDERISM

The issue of transgenderism complicates further the discussion of gender and sexuality.[6] An important biblical principle against blurring gender distinctions that undermines the created order of male and female is found in the prohibition against cross-dressing (Deut. 22:5). Recent medical interventions for gender dysphoria may challenge traditional understandings of gender roles, but the Bible's emphasis on preserving gender distinctions remains central to the Christian life and witness to cultures in desperate need of its moral compass.

The recent claim that one's gender identity may differ from their biological sex contradicts the biblical understanding of human nature as wholistic, that mind and body are an inseparable unity. This view precludes a dualistic interpretation that separates gender identity from biological sex. The Bible should shape our understanding of gender roles and relationships.

THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL AND LGBTQ PEOPLE

The Jerusalem decree (Acts 15:29) is based on the prohibitions in Leviticus 17 and 18 for the uncircumcised resident alien (Heb. *gēr*) and are even given in the same order.[7] Some interpret the decree as dividing the early church into two groups: Jewish Christians could continue to circumcise their children and live as Jews, while Gentiles needed only to observe the four requirements the council set forth.

PHOTO: LIGHTSTOCK / IMAGE 1:27

Similarly today, some say, cisgender people can continue to live a heterosexual lifestyle, while LGBTQ people within the church can be allowed to live and enjoy committed marriage relationships in accordance with their orientation. There are, however, several problems with this argument. First, closer scrutiny of the Jerusalem Council decree suggests it set the same standards for everyone, eliminating the requirement of circumcision for all believers, whether Jew or Gentile (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). But even if there were separate standards for believers, one of the four requirements of the council was to "abstain from . . . sexual immorality" (Acts 15:20, 29), which would include the laws against same-sex relations (Lev. 18:22; 20:13). This standard of sexual propriety is upheld throughout the New Testament, beginning with Jesus (Matt. 15:19). In fact, the evidence is overwhelming (1 Cor. 5:11; 6:9, 18; 7:2; 10:8; 2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3, 5; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3; 1 Tim. 1:9, 10; Heb. 13:4; Rev. 21:8; 22:15). It is important to remember that God never promised marriage and sexual fulfillment to all believers. The modern idea of sex as a need is misguided.

Those who argue for LGBTQ inclusion in the church consider the implied expectation of celibacy to be unfair, that it is not a universal expectation for all believers but only for those to whom "it has been given" (Matt. 19:11)—and that is true. But this line of reasoning ignores that celibacy is not exclusively an LGBTQ issue. What about the many celibate heterosexual people, who for various reasons do not or cannot marry? And what of the many singles in the church to whom the gift of marriage has not yet "been given"? Paul says that the one who does not marry "does better" (1 Cor. 7:38) and that widows will be "happier" if they do not remarry (verse 40). One reason for this is that the church is a spiritual family with God as our heavenly Father and Jesus as our Elder Brother (Matt. 12:50). In fact, one person who formerly identified as homosexual bore this testimony: "I can assure you I have never been happier than in the last six years since becoming a Christian and leaving homosexuality behind. God is all I need, and my future is in His hands. He has given me many wonderful Christian friends and church family. I look forward to spending eternity with them."[8]

CONCLUSION

The argument in favor of complete LGBTQ inclusion within the Christian community is based on a cultural reinterpretation of biblical passages that values personal experience and scientific claims over what Scripture actually says. Genesis 2:24 defines marriage as a covenantal commitment between one man and one woman that is monogamous, exclusive, and lifelong. Jesus Himself reiterated this interpretation in Matthew 19:4, 6. Same-sex unions not only fail to fulfill the divine intention for marriage, but undermine them.

Same-sex relations are "unnatural" because God designed biological compatibility between husband and wife to include the physical, emotional, and spiritual. Paul's condemnation of same-sex sexual relations simply reaffirms what the Bible everywhere condemns. All sexual relationships outside of a biblically defined marriage, whether heterosexual or homosexual, are regarded by God as sin and should be avoided by all who desire the more abundant life promised by Jesus.

The Bible offers hope for all who repent and turn from their sins, sexual or otherwise. In fact, just after condemning homosexual practices and other sins, Paul adds, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11).

[1] Scripture quotations credited to NET are from the *New English Translation Bible*, copyright © 1996-2024 by Biblical Studies Press. L.L.C. All rights reserved.

[2] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1987), vol. 1, p. 70.

[3] For a more detailed explanation of this passage, see Clinton Wahlen, "Lessons From Matthew 19," *Reflections* 78 (April-June 2022): 8, 9.

[4] Cf. Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), pp. 327-330.

[5] Further on cultural rereadings of the Bible, see Clinton Wahlen and Wagner Kuhn, "Culture, Hermeneutics, and Scripture: Discerning What Is Universal," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Adventist Approach*, ed. Frank M. Hasel (Silver Spring, Md.: Biblical Research Institute, 2020), pp. 148-153.

[6] See the Seventh-day Adventist "Statement on Transgenderism," https://gc.adventist.org/official-statements/statement-on-transgenderism/.

[7] See Clinton Wahlen, "Peter's Vision and Conflicting Definitions of Purity," *New Testament Studies* 51 (2004): 517, 518.

[8] Gina Wahlen, "When the Son Sets You Free: Finding Freedom From Homosexuality," *General Conference Executive Committee Newsletter,* July-September 2023, p. 15, sidebar.

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THREE ARGUMENTS

Scrutinizing our eschatology

A recent article challenged our eschatology on three points. First, we are wrong on our identity of papal Rome's role in the last days. Second, there are many good people in the Catholic Church. Third, our eschatology has failed.

First, in Daniel 2, four kingdoms—Babylon (gold), Medo-Persia (silver), Greece (bronze), Rome (iron, later iron and clay), come and go until the Lord sets up "a kingdom which shall never be destroyed" (Dan. 2:44).

In Daniel 7 four kingdoms—Babylon (lion), Medo-Persia (bear), Greece (leopard), Rome (dragon, later little horn in its head)—come and go until God's "everlasting kingdom" (Dan. 7:27) is established.

In Daniel 8 three kingdoms—Medo-Persia (ram), Greece (goat), Rome (little horn)—come and go until the time of the end (see Dan. 8:17, 19), when the little horn "shall be broken without human means" (Dan. 8:25).

In all three chapters, what power arises after ancient Greece and remains until the end? Solely, totally, and only Rome (pagan, then papal).

This same power, Rome, reappears in Revelation 13 as the chapter draws imagery from Daniel 2 and 7, specifically imagery of the little horn in Daniel 7, papal Rome. Though papal Rome gets "mortally wounded" (Rev. 13:3), it is not only healed but becomes central to the end-time persecution around "the image of the beast" (verse 15). In fact, Rome *is* the beast, which, according to Daniel 2, 7, and 8, exists until the end.

Second, imagine if the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists claimed that it, and it alone, possessed all the merits of Christ, and that through only it, the Adventist Church, could you receive salvation. That's, very broadly, the Roman system: what we, by faith, receive directly from Christ Himself is, instead, according to their theology, dispensed solely through the institution of the Roman Church. Anti-Christ does not mean only "against Christ" but also "in place of Christ," a fitting depiction of papal Rome, and one reason the Protestant Reformers adamantly named it as Anti-Christ. Rome's blasphemous system of "salvation," among other errors, is what we oppose. That there are good people in the Roman Church is, really, irrelevant to prophecy.

Finally, has our eschatology failed? If Jesus returned, and no Sunday persecution had preceded that return, then they would have a point. Otherwise—what failure? That no Sunday persecution has yet come? The children of Israel were in Egypt 430 years. The "time, times, and half a time" (Dan. 7:25) of past papal hegemony was 1,260 years. Daniel's prediction for the coming of the Messiah was for 490 years. Daniel 8:14 projected ahead 2,300 years. Our waiting, for what, about 170 years so far, hardly proves failure, especially when we have put no time element on the end anyway. That Adventists expected Jesus to be back earlier—so? Paul wrote the book of Hebrews to people who were already discouraged because Christ hadn't yet returned. And that was 1,900 years ago.

Whatever questions remain (and many remain), we have no reason to doubt our eschatology. The end will come, perhaps even sooner than we're prepared for.

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CLIFF'S EDGE
CLIFFORD GOLDSTEIN



WHATEVER QUESTIONS REMAIN, WE HAVE NO REASON TO DOUBT.

LOVE AND FAITH

Guidance for Seventh-day Adventist parents of LGBTQ children

In an era of evolving societal norms and personal identities, Seventh-day Adventist parents often find themselves navigating uncharted waters when their children come out as LGBTQ. This article aims to provide a compassionate, biblically grounded perspective on how to maintain loving relationships with LGBTQ children while adhering to Adventist beliefs and values.

THE FOUNDATION OF PARENTAL LOVE

The cornerstone of the parent-child relationship is unconditional love. This love reflects God's own love for humanity, as exemplified in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." This verse accentuates that God's love is not contingent on how humans behave. Rather, God's love for humans is based on His character, which is love.

Richard Davidson, in his comprehensive work *Flame of Yahweh*, emphasizes that the biblical concept of love is rooted in covenant commitment rather than mere emotion or attraction.[1] This covenant love, exemplified by God's relationship with Israel and Christ's with the church, provides a model for parents. It is a love that persists despite challenges, disappointments, or divergent paths.



WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

UNDERSTANDING BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SEXUALITY

It's crucial for Adventist parents, while maintaining loving relationships, to ground their understanding of sexuality in Scripture. Ekkehardt Mueller, in *Homosexuality, Scripture, and the Church,* provides a thorough examination of biblical texts relating to same-sex relationships.[2] Mueller argues that while the Bible consistently presents heterosexual marriage as the divine ideal, it also calls for compassion and understanding toward all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation, in their process of redemption.

It's important to note that the Adventist Church's position on homosexuality[3] is not one of condemnation of individuals, but rather an affirmation of biblical sexual ethics. As Mueller states: "Seventh-day Adventists see themselves as a redemptive community reaching out to those who are battling sin . . . whether heterosexuals or homosexuals."[4]

THE CONCEPT OF HOLY SEXUALITY

Christopher Yuan's work *Holy Sexuality* offers a nuanced approach to understanding sexuality from a Christian perspective. Yuan argues that the focus should not be on heterosexuality or homosexuality, but on holy sexuality, which he defines as "chastity in singleness and faithfulness in marriage."[5] This concept can provide a helpful framework for parents and children to discuss sexuality in a way that aligns with biblical principles while acknowledging the complexities of human experience.

Yuan's approach emphasizes that all individuals, regardless of sexual orientation, are called to live according to God's design for sexuality. This perspective can help parents move beyond a simple binary of acceptance or rejection of their child's sexual orientation, toward a more nuanced understanding of Christian sexual ethics.

MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS WHILE UPHOLDING BELIEFS

For Adventist parents the challenge lies in maintaining loving relationships with their LGBTQ children while staying true to their biblical convictions. This balance is not about choosing between love and faith, but about embodying Christlike love while holding on to biblical truth.

Davidson's work provides insight into how God relates to His people even when they stray from His ideal. He notes that throughout Scripture God continues to pursue relationships with His people, even in their disobedience.[6] This divine example suggests that parents should prioritize maintaining relationships with their children, regardless of differences in beliefs or lifestyles.

Davidson also emphasizes the importance of the church's becoming "a community of believers who welcome them into our midst and who minister God's grace and healing in their lives, while allowing that same grace to heal our own brokenness and insensitivity."[7] Parents can integrate this concept into their homes, ensuring that their

PRACTICAL STEPS FOR PARENTS WITH LGBTQ CHILDREN

1. Continued Communication: Maintain open lines of communication with your child. Listen without judgment and express your love consistently.

2. Education: Seek to understand LGBTQ experiences and challenges without changing your beliefs. This can foster empathy and informed dialogue.

3. Support: Offer emotional support to your child as they struggle with reconciling their identity and faith.

4. Prayer: Engage in earnest prayer for wisdom, guidance, and the well-being of your child.

5. Community: Connect with other Adventist parents facing similar situations for mutual support.

6. Professional Help: Consider seeking guidance from an Adventist counselor or pastor trained in addressing LGBTQ issues from a biblical perspective.

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Parents should prioritize maintaining relationships with their children, regardless of differences in beliefs or lifestyles.

children feel loved, accepted, and safe, even amid disagreements about sexual ethics.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

The Adventist Church has a crucial role of encouraging both LGBTQ individuals and their families to keep their eyes on Jesus, the "author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). As Christ's disciples, parents have the opportunity and responsibility to love their children as Christ loves them. Adventist parents must see their children through the eyes of Jesus. As they would with anyone else struggling with sin, parents need to walk side by side with their children; listen to them, empathize with them, and let them know they see and hear them. While parents cannot condone unbiblical choices, they will continue to love and pray for their children.

Understandably, some children will not accept their parents' love unless their parents totally accept their choices. Still, that should not change parents' unconditional love for their children. As Adventist parents we must challenge ourselves—regardless of our children's choices—and treat them with dignity, respect, and compassion. We must remember "that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

ELLEN WHITE'S PERSPECTIVE ON STRUGGLING SINNERS

Ellen White did not directly address LGBTQ issues. Still, her writings offer valuable insights on how to approach those struggling with sin or facing spiritual challenges. White consistently emphasized God's love for sinners and the importance of showing compassion to those grappling with temptation.

White cautioned against harsh judgment, stating, "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'"[8] The approach of Jesus described in this quotation provides a model for parents to maintain close, caring relationships with their children while gently guiding them toward God's ideal.

CONCLUSION

For Seventh-day Adventist parents of LGBTQ children, the path forward is one of continued love and faith. By grounding their approach in biblical principles of covenant love, maintaining open communication, and seeking to understand their children's experiences, parents can nurture relationships that reflect God's unconditional love.

While upholding Adventist beliefs about sexuality, parents can still provide unwavering support and acceptance of their children as individuals created in God's image. This approach aligns with Christ's example of loving individuals while calling them to a life of holiness. As parents continue to love and support their children, they bear witness to the transformative power of God's love and the enduring strength of family bonds rooted in faith.

[1] Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), p. 113.

[2] Ekkehardt Mueller, *Homosexuality, Scripture, and the Church* (Silver Spring, Md.: Biblical Research Institute, 2010), p. 23.

[3] https://gc.adventist.org/official-statements/homosexuality/

[4] Mueller, p. 30.

[5] Christopher Yuan, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel: Sex, Desire, and Relationships Shaped by God's Grand Story* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Multnomah, 2018), p. 47.

[6] Davidson, p. 211.

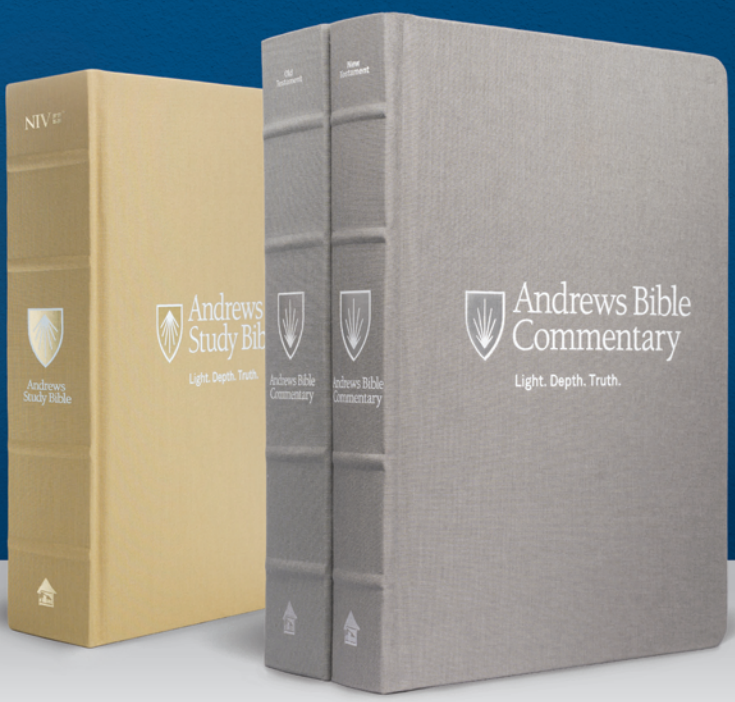
[7] Richard M. Davidson, "Homosexuality and the Bible: What Is at Stake in the Current Debate," in *Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church: Biblical, Counseling, and Religious Liberty Issues* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2012), p. 205.

[8] Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), p. 143.

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FRIEND OR FOE?



Hopeful friendships in adversity

SEBASTIEN J. BRAXTON

In the tapestry of human experience few threads are as intricate and emotionally charged as those woven by conversations surrounding LGBTQ+ relationships. For Bible-believing Christians the challenge is compounded by the delicate balance between upholding biblical convictions and extending Christlike love to those wrestling with these realities. It's a path fraught with potential pitfalls, yet one where grace, understanding, and steadfast friendship can light the way.

WHEN FRIENDS STRUGGLE IN SECRET

If you're like me, then you may, dear reader, have or have had friends who have confided in you their struggle with the LGBTQ+ lifestyle. When that happens, our first and paramount responsibility is confidentiality. As Proverbs 25:9 advises: "Debate your case with your neighbor, and do not disclose the secret to another." A breach of trust can irrevocably damage the relationship and hinder any future opportunity for support.

Next, it's imperative to affirm God's unwavering love. As Ellen G. White reminds us: "When Adam's sin plunged the race into hopeless misery, God might have cut Himself loose from fallen beings. He might have treated them as sinners deserved to be treated. He might have commanded the angels of heaven to pour out upon our world the vials of His wrath. He might have removed this dark blot from His universe. But He did not do this. Instead of banishing them from His presence, He came still nearer to the fallen race. He gave His Son to become bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. . . . Christ by His

human relationship to men drew them close to God. He . . . demonstrated before the heavenly universe, before the unfallen worlds, how much God loves the children of men."[1] Follow Jesus' example; do not banish your friend from your presence. Come nearer to them. Remind your friend that their worth is contingent, not on their feelings or actions, but on their identity as a beloved child of God.

Gently encourage your friend to clarify their own convictions. As Romans 14:5 states: "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (ESV). While your convictions may be clear to you, it is important that you put this aside and help them navigate the complex maze of their emotions and questions, offering a listening ear and a safe space for exploration. Ensure to bring your friend back to Christ's Word as the only safe basis for conviction. The Spirit of Prophecy reminds us, "The Bible contains all the principles that men need to understand in order to be fitted either for this life or for the life to come."[2]

Resist the urge to offer simplistic solutions or condemnatory judgments. Instead, emulate Christ's example of empathy and compassion. As Hebrews 4:15 assures us: "We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin" (NIV).

Remember, every sin, regardless of its nature, separates us from God and requires the same grace, the same blood shed on Calvary's cross, to be forgiven and cleansed. Many of us get into trouble carrying a culturally charged belief that homosexual sin is worse than others. Your friend is not the only one who struggles with sin, and we should not treat them as such. Extend the same grace and understanding to your friend that you would to anyone battling a different temptation or sin, emphasizing that no single sin or temptation defines a person.

WHEN FRIENDS EMBRACE THE LIFESTYLE

Loving a friend who actively participates in a LGBTQ+ lifestyle can be particularly challenging. Christ's command, however, to love one another remains essential (John 13:34). Love the person, not the lifestyle. Jesus loved us "while we were still sinners" (Rom. 5:8).

Avoid reducing your friend to their LGBTQ+ lifestyle. Remember, they are a multifaceted individual with dreams, aspirations, and struggles beyond their lifestyle. Even if your friend, by God's grace, overcomes this particular struggle, "sanctification is the work of a lifetime."[3] Jesus' refinement of their character will not stop there.

Be authentic in your convictions, but express them only when asked and with the utmost sensitivity. As 1 Peter 3:15 advises: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (NIV).

Treat your friend's LGBTQ+ lifestyle as you would any heterosexual relationship that conflicts with your beliefs. Extend the same respect, kindness, and boundaries. Don't forget, it is never healthy or safe to want something for someone more than they want it for themselves. The beauty of friendship is not that we always agree, but that we love each other when we don't.

A CALL TO EMPATHY AND PRAYER

Navigating these complexities demands emotional intelligence, prayer, and unwavering commitment to friendship. Remember, your role is not to condemn or condone, but to love, support, and point your friend toward Christ.

As Ellen White wisely observes concerning Satan's hope in tempting individuals: "Through tempting man to sin, Satan hoped to counteract the tide of divine love flowing to the human race; but, instead of this, his work resulted in calling forth new and deeper manifestations of God's mercy and goodness."[4] Don't fulfill Satan's hope by stemming the tide of divine love flowing through you to your friend.

Be *that* friend. Keep showing up. Keep praying. And keep trusting in the transformative power of God's love and Word. In the crucible of these challenges, your friendship can become a beacon of hope, illuminating the path toward healing, wholeness, and a deeper relationship with Christ.

[1] Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1955), p. 11.

[2] Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1903), p. 123.

[3] Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1900, 1941), p. 65.

[4] Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 7, p. 87.

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A HIGH CALLING

How to navigate sexual diversity in the Adventist classroom

JUDY NAMM-RAMOS

Educators carry the profound responsibility of teaching our children in today's complex cultural climate. As conversations concerning sexual diversity become increasingly prominent, Adventist schools are faced with the challenge of responding thoughtfully and biblically. A 2020 U.S. study estimated that approximately 9.5 percent of youth ages 13-17 identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgendered.[1] Similarly, a survey by the Association of American Universities found that nearly 17 percent of university students identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, queer, or questioning.[2] In light of this, how can Seventh-day Adventist schools respond in a way that upholds their biblical principles while reflecting the love of Christ?

A BRIEF HISTORY

Throughout history the LGBTQ+ community has often experienced rejection and discrimination, much of it rooted in societal and religious beliefs. To date, there are several countries that enforce the death penalty for same-sex relations.[3] As recently as 1969, 49 U.S. states criminalized most forms of same-sex intimacy.[4] Since then, the country has sought to make significant cultural shifts toward equity and inclusion, including the Supreme Court's legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015, as well as amendments to civil rights laws in 2020 prohibiting employment discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST FRAMEWORK

Adventist school leaders and teachers believe that they have the sacred calling of guiding our children through a biblical worldview shaped by the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The official statement by the General Conference (GC) affirms that intimate relationships and sexual practices are reserved for monogamous, heterosexual marriages.[5] In 2017 the GC released a statement regarding transgender individuals, asserting that those who are committed to the biblical teachings on marriage and sexuality can be members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.[6] These guidelines focus on sexual purity based on the individual's convictions, practices, and behavior, rather than sexual orientation.

Addressing these matters within the school context, however, especially with children and teenagers, presents unique challenges. As educators, this becomes especially significant when ministering to our youth. Sexual orientation can manifest at varying ages, but often occurs at the time of puberty, when children are already enrolled in our schools.[7] These are the same children in our beginner classes, summer camps, and Adventurer and Pathfinder clubs. In other words, they are part of our spiritual family. How do we respond when they manifest and express these differences? Here are three recommendations.

BE CLEAR

Language is important. A vital aspect to any school's success is setting and clearly communicating goals and expectations. Unlike public schools, where student admission is based on residency, private schools can use their discretion to determine the process of enrollment. Adventist school leaders should dedicate the time for prayerful study to develop a comprehensive LGBTQ+ policy. Using explicit, informed language in the school handbook is one way to do this.

Students, families, and staff should clearly know and understand what is considered for admission, discipline, and termination.[8] Handbooks should be revisited annually, not only for accountability but also to remain relevant and foster trust within the wider community. School leaders should be proactive and engage in research findings and best practices within education and the church.

BE FAIR

Every student who is admitted to our Adventist schools deserves to be treated with fairness and respect—regardless of their differences—and has the right to receive the support needed to be successful. With our world's recent history of homophobia, it is essential that teachers regularly examine their own biases. Everyone struggles with stereotypes based on upbringing, belief systems, and experience, but teachers must do the work of self-reflection to ensure equity in their classrooms. The Bible reflects how Jesus consistently prioritized reaching people based on their individual needs, including those who were marginalized or misunderstood.

We must also recognize that showing kindness and support to someone who is living contrary to our belief system is not enabling or condoning their choices. It is sobering to know that 41 percent of LGBTQ youth considered suicide this past year.[9] Our schools should be places of safety, where students are valued and supported as they navigate the challenging chapters of adolescence and young adulthood. Adventist teachers are called to inspire hope and trust, as well as to discern infinite possibilities in every student.[10]

BE HUMAN

The philosophy of Adventist education is centered on being redemptive, with the purpose of restoring the whole being to the image of God.[11] The need to be restored is a shared experience for every person who has lived—an infinite process that continues into eternity. It is essential to remember that beyond the policies and discussions, we are talking about people. We must not forget the humanity behind every student we encounter.

A 2022 survey found that one in five LGBTQ youth consider religion or spirituality as being "important" or "very important" to them.[12] This should serve as a reminder that the work of education is the work of redemption. There is a need to cultivate empathy and prevent the dehumanization of any groups of people. Only as meaningful connections are made with students can teachers more effectively point them to our Savior and His Word. This is the critical work Adventist educators should be engaging in every day.

A CALL TO REFLECT CHRIST

The sacred duty of reflecting Christ's character in words, actions, and decisions rests on our teachers. At this time of earth's history, this is a clarion call to lead our schools with courage to remain faithful to God's Word, wisdom to make sound decisions, and love that seeks to save. May the Lord continue to guide Adventist educators to navigate the challenges of sexual diversity in the classroom.

[1] K. J. Conron, "LGBT Youth Population in the United States" (Los Angeles: Williams Institute, University of California at Los Angeles, September 2020).

[2] Association of American Universities, 2020.

[3] "LGBTQI+ Persecution: The Global Genocide of Gay People," *Genocide Watch* (blog), Mar. 24, 2023, https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/lgbtqi-persecution-the-global-genocide-of-gay-people.

[4] J. W. Davidson, "A Brief History of the Path to Securing LGBTQ Rights," July 5, 2022, https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/intersection-of-lgbtq-rights-and-religious-freedom/a-brief-history-of-the-path-to-securing-lgbtq-rights/

[5] This statement was voted during the Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee on October 3, 1999, in Silver Spring, Maryland, and revised by the General Conference Executive Committee, October 17, 2012, https://gc.adventist.org/official-statements/homosexuality/.

[6] Official Statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Apr. 12, 2017, https://gc.adventist.org/official-statements/statement-on-transgenderism/.

[7] Pew Research Center, "Chapter 3: The Coming Out Experience," Apr. 14, 2024, https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2013/06/13/chapter-3-the-coming-out-experience/#:~:text=The%20median%20age%20at%20which%20gay%20men%20and%20lesbians%20younger,the%20median%20age%20is%2021.

[8] Policies from institutions such as Andrews University that offer guidance on navigating sexual orientation differences may serve as useful models. See "Appendix 1: A Seventh-day Adventist Framework for Relating to Sexual Orientation Differences on the Campus of Andrews University," https://bulletin.andrews.edu/content.php?catoid=14&navoid=2578.

[9] The Trevor Project, "2023 U.S. National survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ Young People," https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2023/.

[10] Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1903), p. 80.

[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 16.

[12] The Trevor Project, "Religion and Spirituality Among LGBTQ Youth," Dec. 21, 2022, https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/religion-and-spirituality-among-lgbtq-youth-dec-2022/.

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LOVE IN PRACTICE

LGBTQ and the church

LUISE SCHNEEWEISS

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a clear biblical position on human sexuality, as well as same-sex marriage.[1] When we meet a person struggling with same-sex attraction, however, we quickly realize that it is not just about a doctrine, but about people and their lives. The personal encounter, the empathetic insight into the lives of friends, makes a big difference.

While we have no reason to abandon our biblically based sexual ethics, there is a great need for us to consider the way we relate to and provide pastoral care for affected individuals. This article suggests approaches for ministry toward individuals struggling with their sexuality.

INFORM YOURSELF

To love means to be willing to learn (see book recommendations on page 34). When it comes to LGBTQ issues, there are a few misconceptions that need to be cleared up.

First, a person's *sexual orientation* (which gender someone feels attracted to) is recognized during one's life. The realization that they do not *feel* heterosexual is a shock for many Christians. Just as difficult is the experience of *feeling trapped* in the wrong body and struggling with one's *sexual identity*.

Many Adventists are not sufficiently aware of the differentiation between sexual orientation and sexual behavior. The Bible does

Whether we can continue credibly to defend our teaching on marriage and sexuality will be decided, not by more theological lectures only, but in the lived practice of the church.

not speak about the phenomenon of sexual orientation.[2] It talks about same-sex behavior.

In pastoral care it is problematic to declare someone's orientation itself a sin, even if it is a consequence of our fallen nature. Christians with same-sex feelings often suffer from feelings of shame and guilt. But temptation in itself is not sin.

Biblically, there is nothing to prevent a person tempted with homosexual *feelings* from being baptized, working in the church, or even holding a leadership position if they reject the temptation.

The early church included people who used to have same-sex intercourse (1 Cor. 6:9-11). The text clarifies that this was a past thing, although the inclination may have still existed in some of them. They were not seen as second-class Christians because of their inclinations.

Our primary identity lies in Christ, not in gender or sexual orientation, as existentially close as these may be to us. Therefore, there is no reason to reduce people to their sexuality. Everyone has a place in our church regardless of their sexual orientation.

HOW DO I REACT WHEN SOMEONE COMES OUT?

If someone considers you *safe* to reveal their sexual orientation to and comes out to you, prove yourself worthy of their trust! Be discreet. Maintain the relationship and pray for them, even if they make decisions you don't support. Continuously show love and acceptance of the person (not the sin).

Don't withdraw from the person as if their orientation is contagious. If you feel disgust, hatred, or discomfort, be sure to deal with it prayerfully until you come to a different attitude (see Mark 2:16, 17).

Refrain from moralizing. This does not mean that you must hide your biblical position. It will come up anyway. But bear witness to the truth in the greatest possible love, and leave room for the work of the Holy Spirit. Remember, we can encourage and support people on their journey of faith regardless of church membership or their behavior. God can work with them and guide them in how they should shape their lives. This is a *lifelong process*, so be patient.

NO FALSE PROMISES

Some Christians think that enough prayer and faith will set you free from your homosexual orientation. (This is often accompanied by the idea that the orientation itself is considered sinful and must therefore be overcome.) Now we know that all things are possible with God, and there certainly are testimonies of people who have had such a transformation take place. Nevertheless, this simplified understanding is problematic, especially when the reverse conclusion is drawn: If your feelings don't change, you obviously have too little faith! People have suffered emotional and spiritual damage as a result, for example, in so-called conversion therapies.

The causes of homosexual orientation are controversial. Some consider it to be genetically determined, and rule out any change. Others attribute it mainly to developmental problems (trauma, family ties), and make speculations that are overreaching. Current research assumes a complex interplay of several factors.[3] There is no simple universal explanation for everyone.

As biographical and personality-related influences can play a role, some people find therapeutic support helpful. This, however, should not be associated with the goal or promise that you will *feel* heterosexual afterward, even if some have experienced minor or major changes during their lives.

OPENING UP LIFE PROSPECTS

The solution for people with homosexual feelings is not to "pray them back to health," but to give them an attractive perspective even in case their

IMAGE: LIGHTSTOCK / PRIXEL CREATIVE

sexual orientation persists, and to accompany them in living faithfully to God and His Word.

We need to create a church culture that makes it possible to live a meaningful, happy life without marriage.

Unfortunately, our natural emphasis on marriage and family often results in marriage becoming *the* status symbol of being a "good Christian" or a reward for spiritual maturity or prayer. This marginalizes the unmarried people and harms LGBTQ people by seemingly depriving them of an attractive life perspective.

Our society views a life without romance and sex as unhealthy and unrealistic. However, Scripture begs to differ. The Bible presents two possible models of life: marriage (a metaphor for Christ and the church) and singleness (modeled by Jesus, who was fully human but not sexually active). Both are equally valuable!

It is often claimed that a life as a single person is realistic for only a few people and that most would fail at it. There exists a common misconception that celibacy requires a special *calling* or gift, and that this is recognized by feeling drawn to it. Thousands of Christians, however, are living celibate lives (single, widowed, separated, or divorced) who did not plan or choose to do so. Yet they are called because God's call is not necessarily *into* marriage or singleness, but *within* it! Those who are married are *called* to live a Christian marriage; those who are currently unmarried are *called* to live a Christian single life. Our task is to support each person in their walk with God, embrace a new perspective on friendship, and be a church that is not divided by marital status. Let's not allow marriage to be the only place people can connect deeply!

AN EMOTIONAL HOME

Honest, deep conversations; hugs; fun; joint activities; vacations—we should become much more creative in giving the ever-growing group of unmarried people an emotional home. Ultimately people go where they are loved and feel they belong! Do we have something to offer? Whether we can continue credibly to defend our teaching on marriage and sexuality will be decided, not by more theological lectures only, but in the lived practice of the church.

No matter how lovingly and thoughtfully you present your biblical point of view, however, it can always be read as homophobic and inhumane from the perspective of a secular culture. It is simply not "politically correct." Nevertheless, our sexual ethics has missionary potential. It can show the world a love that is greater than sex, and a family whose cohesion cannot be explained without the God of love. "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples" (John 13:35, NIV).

[1] See statements of the General Conference ("Homosexuality" and "Same-Sex Unions"): https://www.adventist.org/official-statements/homosexuality/ and https://www.adventist.org/documents/same-sex-unions/.

[2] Although it was apparently already known in antiquity, see, e.g., Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love Between Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Thomas Hubbard, *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California, 2003).

[3] See, e.g., Andrea Ganna, "Large-Scale GWAS Reveals Insights Into the Genetic Architecture of Same-Sex Sexual Behavior," *Science* 365 (2019), eaat7693, DOI: 10.1126/science.aat7693; Dean Hamer, "Comment on 'Large-Scale GWAS Reveals Insights Into the Genetic Architecture of Same-Sex Sexual Behavior,' " *Science* 371 (2021), aba2941, DOI: 10.1126/science.aba2941.

Luise Schneeweiss, M.A., theologian and musician at Bogenhofen Seminary, works for the Seventh-day Adventist Single Women Ministries of the Austrian Union of Churches.

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

These authors are Bible-oriented Christians from other denominations. Regarding the topic of LGBTQ, they have valuable insights and experiences from which we can benefit (1 Thess. 5:21).*

Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay? and Other Questions About Homosexuality, the Bible, and Same-Sex Attraction* (Epsom, U.K.: The Good Book Company, 2013)

Sam Allberry, *Seven Myths About Singleness* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2019)

Ed Shaw, *The Plausibility Problem: The Church and Same-Sex Attraction* (Lisle, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 2015)

Preston Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not an Issue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015).

Preston Sprinkle, *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: David C. Cook, 2021)

Preston Sprinkle, *Does the Bible Support Same-Sex Marriage? 21 Conversations From a Historically Christian View* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: David C. Cook, 2023)

*This list suggested by the author does not constitute endorsement by the editorial staff of *Adventist Review*.

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What More Could God Do?

The suffering God of the cross can be trusted.

JOHN PECKHAM

It was quite scary. We rushed our infant son, less than 2 at the time, to the hospital. He needed a blood draw to determine if his condition was life-threatening.

Because my son was very upset, the nurse asked my wife and I to hold him down as she stuck him with a needle. He was too young to speak, but the look in his eyes said it all: "Why are you doing this, Daddy? It hurts!"

There was nothing I could say at that moment that would make him understand why I was doing what I was doing, but I was only acting for his best good. What more could I do? I was doing everything I could to help him, only out of love.

PHOTO: PEARL / LIGHTSTOCK



GOD AND HIS VINEYARD

The prophet Isaiah wrote a song about his "Beloved regarding His vineyard" (Isa. 5:1). Isaiah's "Beloved" is God, and the vineyard refers primarily to God's people.

The vineyard was "on a very fruitful hill," and the owner "dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it" (verses 1, 2). In other words, He did *everything* that He could for this vineyard to flourish.

Given this, the owner waited for "it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes" or, translated literally, "stink-fruit" (verse 2). Literally, the term translated "wild grapes" can be rendered stink-fruit.

Have you ever bitten into a cluster of fresh grapes only to find they are rotten in your mouth? That is a bit like God's experience of His vineyard producing rotten fruit.

Then God Himself declares: "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge,

please, between Me and My vineyard. What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth [rotten] grapes?" (verses 3, 4).

First of all, no tyrant, no king who wants absolute power, says, "Go ahead and judge me." But the God of the Bible opens up His records for the inspection of the universe. Of course, such review is possible only if God allows it. He possesses the power to simply crush anyone who questions Him. But He does just the opposite, with Christ taking on humanity and willingly being crushed for us.

Notice especially the question God asks, "What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it?" There was nothing more He could do.

WHAT MORE COULD HE DO?

But that is not the end of the story. The story continues in Jesus' parable about a vineyard in Matthew 21. "Hear another parable," Jesus said. "There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower" (verse 33).

Where is He quoting from? The song of the vineyard of Isaiah 5. And He expects the audience to be familiar with that song. What question should they, then, have in mind? This question: What more could He do?

Jesus goes on: "And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them" (verses 33-36). What is this about? This refers to God sending prophet after prophet to His people, whom they persecuted and often killed.

"Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?" (verses 37-40).

What more could He do? God sent His Son, Jesus, who gave His life for us. What more could He do?

If there had been any other way, would He not have chosen it, even if only to spare Himself the cross? If one is tempted to think that God might be selfish or might not have our best interests at heart, why would He go through all this?

Who suffers most in the cosmic conflict? God suffers whenever anyone suffers. Not only did Christ undergo the suffering of the cross for us. The God of the Bible takes *all* our suffering on His shoulders, similar to how I suffer when my son suffers. Exponentially more so, however, God suffers whenever we suffer.

God willingly took all of this on Himself—for us. He willingly created this world, even though He knew the unfathomable cost to Himself. This God of the cross revealed in Christ. What more could He do that He has not done? If there had been any preferable way (given the bad decisions of creatures and all the other factors), wouldn't He have chosen it?

TWO PARALLEL METAPHORS

The song about God and His vineyard in Isaiah 5 actually employs *two* parallel metaphors. Alongside the metaphor of the vineyard owner and His vineyard there is a second metaphor in the background, that of God as the groom and His people as His bride. In this context Isaiah refers to God as His "Beloved," and Isaiah himself functions as the "friend of the groom" (see John 3:29), something like the "best man" today, but with very different responsibilities in an ancient Near Eastern context—functioning as a kind of intermediary between the bridegroom and bride leading up to the wedding. In this role Isaiah speaks on behalf of the bridegroom to defend His character.

When things go wrong in our world, who is typically blamed? God. But God is not culpable for the evil in our world. God hates evil even more than we do, and one day soon God will put an end to all evil—to all sin, pain, suffering, and death—forevermore. As Revelation 21:4 puts it: "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

In the meantime, those of us who know the true God and His character—the character of perfect righteousness and love displayed supremely by Christ via the cross and otherwise (see Rom. 3:25,

If one is tempted to think that God might be selfish or might not have our best interests at heart, why would He go through all this?

26; 5:8)—are called to also serve as kinds of "friends of the bridegroom." That is, we are called to help people in this world come to know the truth about God and His love, to see the truth about His character—to share the good news of God's love with everyone we can.

THE SWORD OF DENIS ANWYCK

I fondly remember a story I read as a child in a book named *The Sword of Denis Anwyck,* by Maylan Schurch. It is about a young boy named Denis, set in medieval times.

Denis is an orphan. And he absolutely hates the king of his land.

Why? Because when Denis was very young, his parents were very sick, on the verge of death.

But then the king's knights came and dragged him away from his parents, and he never saw his parents again.

For that, he absolutely hated the king.

But through a series of events, Denis found answers and came to realize that there was more to the story. Among other things, he found the king's book, "The Chronicles of Pestilence, Being an Account of the Dread Black Death and Times Following." And the king's own words in that book change Denis' entire view of the king. "It fills me with great bitterness," the king wrote, "and my people hate me for it, but the dreadful truth about this plague is that it can be transferred from the dead to the living. By separating the living from the dead, I save the living."[1] As he read, it dawned on Denis that what the king had done was only for his people's good.

We also have good reason to believe that our King, the Creator of the universe, has done and is doing everything that can be done, even if we are not in a position now to understand precisely why God acts or refrains from acting as He does. "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known" (1 Cor. 13:12).

CONCLUSION

The blood draw revealed that our son's condition was not life-threatening. He was fine. We were grateful. But I'll never forget the look in my son's eyes. Nothing I could say to him at that time would have made him understand that what I was doing was only and always what was best for him.

Similarly, we are typically not in a position to know why God acts or refrains from acting as He does. There is a much larger story in the background—the cosmic conflict—and many factors that God is dealing with in this conflict are invisible to us. As such, we do not have all the answers now.

In the end, though, we will see the truth that Paul proclaimed, that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

For now, we can look to the cross and have confidence that the God of the cross suffers with us and that He can be trusted unreservedly. What more could *He* do? There was nothing more He could do that He has not done.[2]

But perhaps we should ask another question. What more can *I* do? What more can *you* do? If you know the living God, I encourage you to accept God's call to be "friends of the bridegroom," to proclaim—in word and in deed—the character and love of God and do all you can to help others come to know the God of the cross—the God of perfect, unselfish love.

[1] Maylan Schurch, *The Sword of Denis Anwyck* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2009), pp. 125, 126.

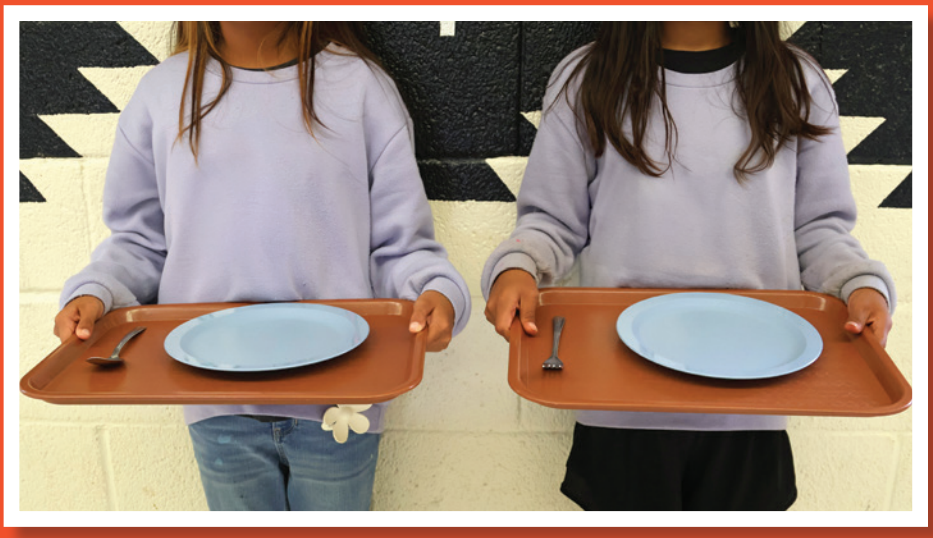
[2] For much more on how the Bible addresses the problem of evil, see John C. Peckham, *Theodicy of Love: Cosmic Conflict and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018).

John Peckham is associate editor of *Adventist Review* and research professor of theology and Christian philosophy at Andrews University.

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IDEOLOGICAL FOOL'S GOLD

A surprising test to obviate both heresy and truth

All that glitters is not gold."[1] Though not the first to say it, William Shakespeare is credited with popularizing this expression,[2] and its message still rings true: Not all that looks like gold is. That which glitters is, instead, often just another shiny but insignificant lump of rock.

This, of course, is not to say that *genuine* gold has no glitter. On the contrary, its luster has made it the desire of rulers and the rich throughout the ages. That, in part, is why Shakespeare's point endures: That which is of genuine value genuinely matters, and the ability to tell the difference between true and false can make or break one's fortunes.

This is perhaps nowhere more true than in Christian ideology. I say "ideology" rather than "theology" because while few Christians would consider themselves theologians, all Christians are governed by their ideas—their concepts of God, their understanding of biblical truth, etc. Christians are thus unavoidably "ideologists," constantly tasked with discerning which ideas are genuinely of God and which are not.

And therein lies our challenge. Anyone with even a passing acquaintance with Adventist history knows that we have a turbulent past when it comes to ideas, whether regarding salvation, the nature of Christ, worship, or a host of other facets key to Christian living. And the merely glittering ideas—particularly considering the ability of even the most ill-qualified miscreant to digitally publish errata on a global scale—have become increasingly difficult to distinguish from the genuinely good ideas.

The most fruitful way for the Christian to make this distinction has been, and firmly remains, Bible study. But during the past few years I've noticed an additional method that may help discern dross from truth. It turns out there is a remarkable level of correlation between a certain practice and ideas that are genuinely of God. That practice . . . is evangelism.

This test is not foolproof. Bible study remains essential to reaching correct conclusions. But in my experience it remains remarkable how many well-dressed heresies are exposed as fool's gold by whether their adherents engage in evangelism—not mere recruitment (all heresies do that), but actual, Christ-centered evangelism. Why? Perhaps because genuine evangelistic effort tends to reflect a personal, transforming experience with Christ and Scripture, while heresy's inherent imbalance tends to see conversion in general as of low priority, regressive, or even unnecessary. So consider afresh those advocating the latest/greatest theological trend. Is establishing people in a saving relationship with Jesus a top priority in their lives? Do they invite their secular friends to evangelistic opportunities in their area? Or would the notion of witnessing for Christ be tellingly out of place among their well-ordered but conversion-hostile opinions?

Next time a glittering new idea comes our way, let's study our Bibles—and check for evangelistic fervor, as well. Recognizing its absence may help us grow richer rather than foolish.

[1] William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Act II, scene 7.

[2] Shakespeare used the Middle English word "glisters," which was synonymous with "glistens."

Shane Anderson is the lead pastor of Pioneer Memorial church on the campus of Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

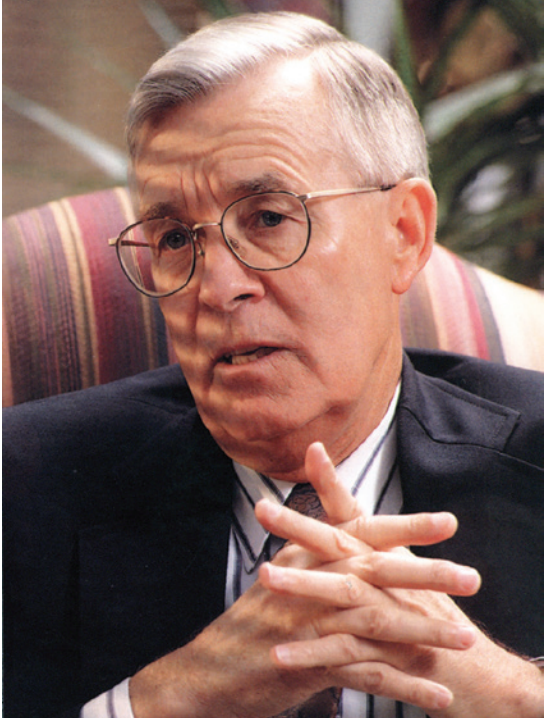
THE PIONEERING PASTOR SHANE ANDERSON



NOT ALL THAT LOOKS LIKE GOLD IS.

CHASING NUMBERS

Circulation encourages creative and fresh ideas.



ADVENTIST REVIEW

MERLE POIRIER

The turbulent years that engulfed editors Kenneth Wood and Bill Johnsson eventually ended.[1] "The anger slowly subsided," wrote Johnsson. "Many ministers and members, weary of argument, tuned out theological discussion. And, of course, many no longer were with us—they had dropped out. Then as the nineties drew near, I began to sense that the halcyon days were gone. We had entered a new era. . . . The church would never return to the relative calm, ordered patterns of the 1960s and 1970s."[2]

Johnsson was often focused on circulation. "My biggest headache—one that was with me from the first day until the last—was the decline in circulation."[3] This wasn't unique to him, as former editors were similarly afflicted. But one challenge previous editors didn't have to deal with was that while Johnsson and the editors that preceded him had offices located within the Review and Herald Publishing Association (RHPA), a vote had moved the *Review* to the General Conference (GC) during Johnsson's editorship. The consequences of this action were significant.

In this historical split, the GC became the owner/publisher of the *Review*, but the financial portion was left with the RHPA. This meant that all the revenues from subscriptions and advertising sales went to the publishing house while they, in turn, reimbursed the GC for the editor salaries and office operating expenses.[4] With this change, Johnsson no longer knew the finances of the magazine. When the RHPA decided to raise subscription prices, it impacted circulation. "For the house, the bottom line was profit," said Johnsson. "For the editors, the bottom line was circulation. We knew that every time the price went up, we lost readers, and that bothered us. No doubt it bothered the house some, but not as much as it bothered us, because [for them] the *Review* remained profitable."[5]

COMPETITION FOR SUBSCRIPTIONS

Johnsson battled more than subscription prices. Many advances occurred within communications that affected readers' choices. People watched more television and read less. They found church news in independent Adventist publications. Union papers increased pages, with local church news causing some members to become more interested in what was close by than in the regional or world church. Maintaining circulation was a constant struggle, with competition on every side. Johnsson's personal goal was to have 100,000 subscribers. This meant finding 30,000 more. Not only were finances under the RHPA, so was marketing, yet another thing over which Johnsson had no control. But it didn't stop the editor from thinking like a salesman, a role he never expected.

This began a never-ending cycle of revamping the *Review*. Johnsson admitted to freshening the magazine about every three years, meaning something was dif-

ferent either in content or appearance.[6] Research demonstrated a complete overhaul of the publication twice in his 24 years as editor—in 1986 and 10 years later, in 1996. Again, all with an eye on circulation. The optimism always remained that if one simply changed this, that, or something else, readers would flock to subscribe. Unfortunately, not only did this not happen, a few decisions were made that, while smart, creative, and original, ended up not helping but hurting circulation.

In the mid-eighties an idea began to circulate about the need for a paper specifically for the North American Division (NAD). Johnsson, already competing for readers' attention, believed that introducing yet another paper would affect *Review* circulation. He approached NAD president Charles Bradford with a creative solution. The *Review* was a weekly producing four issues a month. What if one week was "given" to the NAD?[7] Thus the idea of the NAD edition was born—an issue intentionally created for North American readership. A surprising development was that it would be financially supported by entities within the NAD so that each member in the division received it for free. Johnsson was ecstatic. This was much more than he had anticipated, thus leading to yet another decision—redesigning the *Review* to make an impact.

It didn't stop the editor from thinking like a salesman, a role he never expected.

A NEW *REVIEW*

Johnsson jumped in with both feet. An extensive survey of subscribers as well as nonsubscribers was conducted by the Institute of Church Ministry at Andrews University. Until this time, feedback for the *Review* typically came from the letters received, but this time there was an attempt to quantify what readers liked and found inspiring. The buildup to the 1986 new *Review* was intentional and transparent. The results of the survey were released in a two-part article by the editor.[8] These findings prompted the choice of articles as well as the overall design. The survey provided a defense against the discontinuation of favorite sections, as well as the inclusion of new ideas.

"Beginning in 1986, the *Adventist Review* will have a bright new look. The cover will be dynamic, fresh; the entire inside of the magazine will be redesigned. Ours is a dynamic church; the church paper should show it by appearance and content. . . . We do not intend to become sensational or blatant to attract new readers. We seek a blend of vigor and dignity, of freshness and good taste."[9] Later in his first editorial in the new *Review* Johnsson explained four convictions: It will project the character of the church; it must be a paper for the whole church; people have a right to know; and it comes with a slant.[10]

Overall, the launch was a success. Most readers were enthusiastic, but as always, there were a few naysayers. Years later Johnsson, in looking back



New Designs (left to right)**:** The first issue of the "new" *Review* in 1986; first issue of redesign in 1996; and the second issue of *KidsView* in 2002.

(as is frequently the case), felt the 1986 new *Review* looked "anything but attractive."[11] But he admitted the experience was exciting and "heady." It was a time of analysis and creativity and a coming together of the *Review* team to develop a new and refreshing product. Subscriptions began to pour in, just as hoped. The idea of the free edition seemed to work: if members could *see* the *Review,* they would subscribe to it. For a while this proved to be correct . . . until it wasn't. Soon subscriptions began to falter, eventually falling below where they were in 1985. Many felt there was no reason to subscribe when receiving an issue for free. Now it wasn't simply an issue of competition, but of money and time. While Johnsson had no regrets, it was a disappointing realization to reaching his 100,000 goal.

Later Johnsson reflected on the new *Review* using some of the same descriptive phrases of previous editors: "The *Review*'s basic role has been the same since 1850—to bind Adventists together. . . . The *Review* has a pastoral role. . . . But it also has a prophetic role . . . in calling God's people to justice, righteousness, and revival."[12] Disappointed in circulation, he still felt the *Review* had widened its reach. Letters from younger readers arrived; Blacks and Hispanics felt more included. Ever and always optimistic, he wrote, "I think the *Review* will be used by the Lord to do what it does best—to help keep the church on course."[13]

THE NINETIES BRING CHANGE

A hot topic was women's ordination, an item on the agenda of the 1985, 1990, and 1995 General Conference sessions. "It became the hottest topic the *Review* handled," Johnsson remembered. It was divisive, with proponents on each side, including within the *Review* office. "I tried to be evenhanded in dealing with the controversial topic, letting editors express themselves but ensuring that the *Review* did not become a partisan voice."[14] Johnsson's staff heard this often—the *Review* was independent and apart from all entities, including the General Conference. The publication was always to be neutral, because the *Review* may be required to be an impartial reporter. What Johnsson did not know then was how true that would become.

The nineties brought more changes. Experimenting with video content allowed for the launch of Online Edition, a 60-minute video format of the *Review* produced quarterly and sent to churches. It lasted two years, reaching about 4,000 churches.

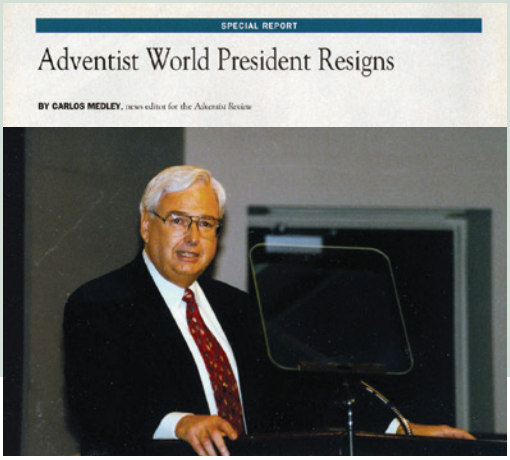
Membership growth had skyrocketed, primarily overseas. In order to place a larger percentage of funds overseas, the GC created applied cost centers, placing the *Review* on a line-item budget. This cramped the style of the editor and his team. Any new initiatives related to marketing would now require fundraising. The editor, already not keen on marketing, added fundraising to his responsibilities.

Another change was the establishment of an *Adventist Review* Publishing Board. Robert Folkenberg, elected GC president in 1990, was a forward-looking, technically savvy individual who encouraged the *Review* to venture into other media platforms. The board came as a result of the unclear relationship between the GC and RHPA. As the GC exerted ownership, it felt a board could give overall guidance and management. The president was the chair, while the editor served as secretary. One of the first actions was to vote Johnsson as executive



Four examples of the weekly *Review*, separate editions, in 2004 (left to right)**:** *NAD Edition*, *World Mission*, *Cutting Edge*, and *AnchorPoints*

ADVENTIST REVIEW



SPECIAL REPORT

Adventist World President Resigns

BY CARLOS MEDLEY, news editor for the Adventist Review

ADVENTIST REVIEW



Carlos Medley, left, news editor and webmaster, speaks with Bill Johnsson.

publisher. This was done under great protest by Johnsson, as he saw it as a conflict of interest. As executive publisher, he was to represent the interest of the GC in all aspects of the operation. But as editor, he firmly and consistently held to the belief that the paper should remain independent. The action carried; yet another decision that strongly impacted the course of the *Review*.[15]

Still worried about circulation, Johnsson awoke one morning with an idea. To work with Bill was to recognize this as a frequent occurrence. He woke early and took long walks or runs. It was then he seemed most creative, and it was not at all unusual later that morning for the staff to hear his latest idea. This one he thought so amazing he didn't ask for counsel, but wrote directly to Folkenberg. "Let's give readers choices, making each weekly a stand-alone," he suggested. The members could subscribe to one, two, or three issues, while still receiving the NAD for free. Folkenberg gave his approval, but the staff needed major convincing. Eventually it led to the next complete redesign in 1996, resulting in four editions with unique faces: NAD, World, Cutting Edge, and AnchorPoints.

Perhaps the largest challenge came with the events surrounding the resignation of GC president Robert Folkenberg. It was sudden, and caused the *Review* staff to scrap planned layouts and replace them with breaking news.[16] Here is where Johnsson's two hats—editor and executive publisher—collided. "While the *Review* works closely with church leaders, it is not a public relations journal," wrote Johnsson.[17] The planned copy was shared with leadership, including Elder Folkenberg, but only for input. The March 11, 1999, issue carried the portrait of the new president, Jan Paulsen.

Carlos Medley launched the first *Adventist Review* website on September 30, 1999, completely funded by donors. Three years later, in August 2002, *KidsView* was launched as an *Adventist Review* product for children in grades 3 to 6 and sent to subscribers as well as students enrolled in an NAD elementary school.

As Johnsson looked toward retirement, he remained in the hunt for ways to increase circulation, although he recognized the *Review* was reaching members through other means. "Much had changed in structures—not in mission, but in ways to accomplish the mission," he wrote.[18] Soon he was to learn of a project that went beyond his wildest dreams.

[1] Please note that I'm aware that this series is lagging behind the flag at the top. The history, at first, was nicely divided into about 15-year increments. It appeared to be a good plan, but research dictated much more to share. Part 11 should begin in 2007, but instead covers the years under William G. (Bill) Johnsson (1982-2006). Part 12 will catch up and conclude the history.

[2] William G. Johnsson, *The Fragmenting of Adventism* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1995), p. 8.

[3] William G. Johnsson, *Embrace the Impossible* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2008), p. 199.

[4] *Ibid*., p. 198.

[5] *Ibid*., p. 199.

[6] *Ibid*., p. 196.

[7] *Ibid*., pp. 200, 201.

[8] *Adventist Review*, Oct. 17, 1985, p. 5; Oct. 31, 1985, p. 5.

[9] *Adventist Review*, Oct. 31, 1985, p. 6.

[10] *Adventist Review*, Jan. 2, 1986, p. 4.

[11] Johnsson, *Embrace the Impossible*, p. 202.

[12] *Adventist Review*, "The Review—Your Church Paper," Sept. 19, 1991, p. 4.

[13] *Ibid*.

[14] Johnsson, *Embrace the Impossible*, p. 158.

[15] *Ibid*., pp. 207, 208.

[16] *Adventist Review*, Feb. 11, 1999; Feb. 18, 1999; Mar. 11, 1999.

[17] Johnsson, *Embrace the Impossible*, pp. 174, 175.

[18] *Ibid*., p. 195.

Merle Poirier is operations manager of *Adventist Review*.



HOW BIG IS YOUR GOD?

If we're bold enough to ask, God is big enough to answer.

BONITA JOYNER SHIELDS

This month features excerpts from an article in the June 19, 2003, issue of the Adventist Review, *in which Bonita Joyner Shields emphasizes how we are to have faith in God, who is far bigger than our limited understanding and can handle our questions, doubts, frustrations, and fears.*

The story is told of a young woman who was at the hospital with her elementary-school-age daughter.[1] She had just been told that her daughter was dying. The mother left her daughter in the hospital, walked to her car, rolled the windows up, and began to yell and scream at God. "Why?" she screamed. "Why my little girl?"

On and on this continued, until the mother was totally exhausted. As she fell off to sleep, however, she heard a voice say, "Thank you for talking to Me. It's been a long time!"

How often we think that all God wants to hear from us is "sanctimonious" language—"You're so wonderful, Lord; bless So-and-so in the mission field; heal Aunt Miranda"—and confidence that we have all the answers and have no questions for Him. Or when we feel angry, how often we ignore Him because somehow we think that God can't handle our true emotions.

Yes, God wants to hear praise and worship and adoration. He also wants us to care enough about others to intercede in prayer for them. But He also wants to hear our doubts, our fears, our questions—even our anger.

PHOTO: NEOM



If we can't question God, who has all the answers to life's questions, whom *can* we question? That He is God is the very reason we can question Him. God is big enough to handle our doubts, our fears, our questions—even our anger. And this, I believe, is the message of Habakkuk.

THE QUESTIONING HEART

Habakkuk was a prophet who lived in Judah sometime before the invasion of Jerusalem in 597 B.C. . . . His people were in a period of spiritual crisis—giving their respect and affection to the gods of other nations. They even burned their children in sacrifice to these gods—throwing their babies into the Valley of Hinnom in the same manner that they threw trash into a dump. His people not only sacrificed their children; they sacrificed their morals. Justice was bought by the highest bidder.

The book of Habakkuk reveals a dialogue between the prophet and God. Habakkuk had questions, one of which was Why do the wicked prosper? So he asked God.

Some have said that Habakkuk had little faith because he questioned God. . . . But it wasn't out of rebellion. . . . Habakkuk just needed assurance that God had not abandoned His people. Just as you and I need assurance that God is there when the world around us would like to convince us otherwise.

WHY DO THE WICKED PROSPER?

"Our Lord, how long must I beg for your help before you listen? How long before you save us from this violence? . . . Why do you allow violence, lawlessness, crime . . . to spread everywhere? Laws cannot be enforced; justice is always the loser" (Hab. 1:2-4, CEV).[2] . . .

What do you do when so much unfairness and injustice in this world seem to go unchecked? Whom do you talk to when strife and conflict abound?

The Lord answered the question Habakkuk posed to Him, but I'm not quite sure Habakkuk liked the answer!

YOU MAY NOT BELIEVE THIS . . .

God told Habakkuk that the Babylonians would be His instrument to send punishment on his nation (verses 5, 6). The Babylonians, a ruthless and impetuous people, were also the most arrogant and proud people on the face of the earth. All they knew was violence. . . . Habakkuk was indignant. . . . This response from God was too incomprehensible for Habakkuk. He had to ask Him another question.

YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING, LORD!

"You are using those Babylonians to judge and punish others. . . . Don't sit by in silence while they gobble down people who are better than they are" (verses 12, 13, CEV). . . .

Habakkuk had no idea how God was going to answer his question. How could it be answered? What was God thinking, sending the *Babylonians* to punish them—His chosen people? Yet even with his questioning heart, Habakkuk was a man of deep faith. He knew the Lord would answer him. He didn't always like the answers, but he knew God would take him seriously.

THIS IS MY FINAL ANSWER

Then the Lord gave Habakkuk a message in the form of a vision, and told him to write it down. He said that it might take a long time to be fulfilled,

I don't know why God answers some prayers and not others. But I know that God knew my heart, and He knew what I needed.

but keep waiting. It would happen (Hab. 2:2-4).

Then God said something to Habakkuk. You know how some words penetrate deep into your soul so that nothing will erase them. I'm sure that's how it was with this statement. God said He knew that the Babylonians were arrogant and proud. But, He reminded Habakkuk, *His people, the righteous, will live by their faith*. Faith in a God who, in spite of what our eyes see in this world that would like to convince us otherwise, is still in control. Faith in a God who, acting in judgment as well as redemption, always acts from the motivation of love. Faith in a God who is bigger than the small box of understanding we place Him in; who can handle our questions, our doubts, our frustrations, our fears—even our anger.

Money was tight around our house when I was 12 years old. Dad and Mom both worked hard, but had four kids and were striving to recover financially from the effects of earlier alcoholism.

I remember the day I overheard my mom and dad talking. Dad needed a coat, but we couldn't afford one. I got angry. I was going to have a talk with the Man upstairs.

"OK, Lord. My mom and dad have rededicated their lives to You, come back to church, and work hard. Why can't my dad have a coat? What kind of God are You?"

I then proceeded to challenge God. "OK, You say You're real. If You're real, I want You to give my daddy a coat—*and I'll give You a week!*" That was on Saturday.

I was lounging on the couch in the living room when my aunt arrived at our house the following Wednesday. She told my mom that a church member's husband had died, leaving a brand-new coat he never wore that she wanted to give to someone. So my aunt brought it over to see if it would fit my dad.

This exchange was not lost on me. But I sat there for a moment, and then smugly thought to myself, *It won't fit.*

My dad came into the room about that time. My aunt helped him try on the coat. It fit *perfectly*.

I pulled the blanket over my face so no one would see the tears burning my cheeks. *So You are real!* And You're big enough to answer the defiant prayer of a 12-year-old.

I don't know why God answers some prayers and not others. But I know that God knew my heart, and He knew what I needed.

HABAKKUK'S PRAYER/OUR PRAYER

In the final chapter of Habakkuk, the prophet breaks out into praise. "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior" (Hab. 3:17, 18, NIV).

Why is Habakkuk praising God? God hadn't even judged Judah yet, much less judged the Babylonians. Habakkuk probably lived to see the initial fulfillment of his prophecy when Jerusalem was attacked by the Babylonians in 597 B.C., but he wasn't alive to see the Babylonians conquered. Without even seeing the results of his prophecy, he expressed one of the most beautiful statements of faith in all of Scripture. Why?

Because God is big enough to handle our questions, doubts, fears, frustrations, and anger. "The just shall live by their faith" kept Habakkuk and his people from discouragement and despair and, hopefully, will keep us from discouragement and despair too in the midst of injustice, doubts, questions, and anger.

A sage rabbi once remarked, "You can be angry with God, and you can even yell at God. But just don't ignore Him."

In our time of questioning, we must not *turn away* from but *turn toward* God.

[1] Bonita Joyner Shields, "How Big Is Your God? If We're Bold Enough to Ask, God Is Big Enough to Answer," *Adventist Review*, June 19, 2003, pp. 14-17.

[2] Scripture quotations identified CEV are from the Contemporary English Version. Copyright © American Bible Society 1991, 1995. Used by permission.

Bonita Joyner Shields is an associate secretary of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists. At the time she wrote this article, she was an assistant editor of the *Adventist Review*.

FAITH, FAMILY, AND THE UNREACHED

Our journey to serve

BEYOND BOARDERS

SKY BRIDGER



I was just old enough to understand my mom reading the classic Adventist mission stories, eyes wide, imagination buzzing. I was sure there could be no greater calling than to share Jesus where He wasn't known. I would be a nurse among the headhunters of Papua New Guinea! Later I imagined a huge globe covered with pinpoints of light representing believers. I would find the darkest place on that planet and strike a new light!

After nursing school I met Jacob, a ministerial student. In 2006 we married, planning to serve overseas as soon as possible. By now I had tasted frontline work in Eastern Europe and Asia, and I was as sure as ever—if the gospel was to go to every nation before the coming of Christ, and there were places it hadn't gone—I was meant to be in the trenches of reaching the unreached.

I was in a hurry, but God wasn't. My husband took a small church district, and later we moved to Michigan to attend the seminary. Just before graduation we had a long, inspiring visit with a frontline visionary and recruiter, and suddenly we were on track to find our dark place to shine.

Three more years passed as we raised support, counseled, trained, and prayed for direction. A friend who had served in the Middle East visited with us. "I think your talents would fit in well in Hijabistan,"* he encouraged, so we added that to our prayer list. And as we prayed, this country with its millions of people, 99 percent Muslim and less than 1 percent Christian, filled our vision and our hearts.

In 2017, with our three rambunctious little boys and 10 bulging suitcases, we finally boarded our flight for our epic journey. We were told that as parents of three boys, we would be highly esteemed by our new Muslim friends. Our oldest was 7, and our youngest had just turned 2.

Fourteen hours later, deliriously tired, we joined our teammates who had been in the country learning the language for 18 months already. The wife had nuts and raisins and local fruits, but it was all we could do to keep our eyes open as the rented van swayed through the deep darkness to our city of nearly 3 million precious souls.

I WAS SURE THERE COULD BE NO GREATER CALLING THAN TO SHARE JESUS WHERE HE WASN'T KNOWN.

Our friends provided generous hospitality for the first month as we navigated jet lag, repeated illnesses, and our first forays into this new world. Jacob began the bewildering process of applying for residency permits. When we found an apartment, the owner said we had to have a bank account before we could rent—unfortunately, the bank wouldn't allow us to open an account without our own address! Thus we faced the first of many apparently impossible obstacles the Lord would solve before we finally became legal residents of our new country.

*Not a real name.

Sky Bridger is a pseudonym. All names have been changed to protect privacy. Sky and her family are church planters in the Middle East.

RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL PASTOR

All I ever wanted was to be a pastor.

DENNIS SELLERS

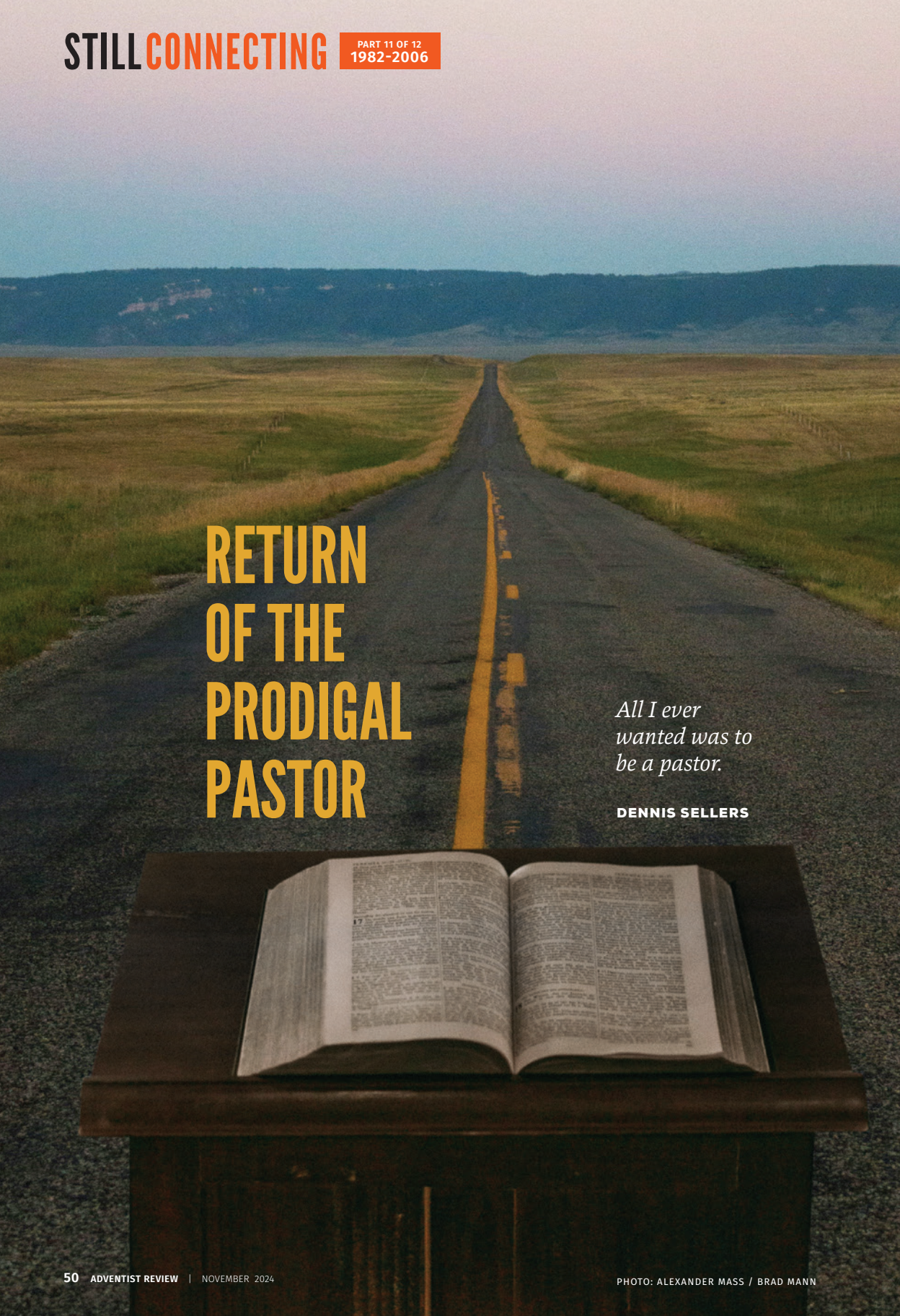


PHOTO: ALEXANDER MASS / BRAD MANN



I'm an Adventist minister who left the church 23 years ago. This is my story: Why I left, and why I'm back.

Raised in an Adventist home in Boise, Idaho, I felt called to the ministry quite young. As a child, sitting in the pews and watching the preacher, I knew in my heart that this was what I wanted to do.

I graduated from Gem State Academy in 1966, and then went to Walla Walla College, where I finished four years later with a Bachelor of Arts in Theology. Though utterly sure of my calling, I was caught by my Greek teacher playing tennis during the Week of Prayer the year I graduated. She told me, right there on the court, and in no uncertain terms, that God had not called me to the ministry. But I knew better. I got calls that year from about a half dozen conferences.

I pastored in New England for about three years. I enjoyed every minute. I especially loved working with people, going to their homes, praying with them, pointing them to the hope we have in Jesus. Then I got into evangelism, where I worked for six years in the Colorado and Upper Columbia conferences. All my life I had wanted to be a Seventh-day Adventist minister, preaching the three angels' messages; and now I was doing it. They were, for the most part, happy years.

SOMETHING BREWING

But storm clouds were brewing. The 1970s was a time of theological ferment in the church. I had been exposed to the teachings of Robert Brinsmead and his so-called awakening message, which centered on the concept of perfectionism and the "final generation." We focused on the idea that God would have a sinless generation of people who would stand in the time of trouble without a mediator. Perfectionism and sinless living became the focal point for a lot of members, including me.

Eventually, though, I discovered, as did others, the great truth of justification by faith alone, through the substitutionary death of Jesus. There is no better news to fallen, sinful humanity than the news of God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ; that we are saved by a righteousness outside ourselves. To know that Christians are saved and entitled to heaven by Christ's becoming their substitute and living a perfect life of obedience on their behalf was the greatest news I'd ever heard. The church needed to rediscover this truth, I reasoned.

Unfortunately, many of my colleagues didn't stop there. We twisted the meaning of the gospel until it became one of the reasons for throwing out the Sabbath, the pre-Advent judgment, and Ellen White's ministry. Anything that didn't fit within our view of what the new covenant gospel meant was swept away. Eventually, that meant Adventism too.

I'll never forget the day in 1982 when, after a long and tense meeting with the local conference officials, I left not only the ministry I had been called to but also the church I had loved since childhood.

MY WANDERING

After I left the church and renounced my calling, I ended up doing something I never dreamed of doing: selling insurance. I hated it. This wasn't my calling; being an Adventist minister was.

Five years after leaving the ministry, I developed deep anger toward the church. After I left, not one individual—pastor, administrator, or lay member—ever approached me about returning. No one from the church showed any interest in me as a person. Was I not a soul to be nurtured for the kingdom of heaven? Was I so lacking in spiritual value that no one saw in me one who was worth saving for God's kingdom? Apparently not, for in 22 years of wandering, no one called or knocked on my door.

The frustration of not having fulfilled my calling was overwhelming. I remember listening to radio

sermons by Charles Stanley, Bob Moorehead, Ron Mehl, Alistair Begg, John MacArthur, and others about spiritual healing, God's love to sinners, and His willingness to forgive and accept. Many times while listening to sermons in the car, I pulled to the side of the road and wept uncontrollably. The burning desire to serve God and His people never left me. And yet, as the years passed, I felt I could not return to Adventism. After all, no one there cared. I believe now that if someone had come to work with me, I could have been won back much earlier.

In 1990 my wife, Leslie, and I decided to visit an Adventist church in Washington. As we were about to go into the service, we met Natasha* on the church steps. I didn't know her, but she knew me. She called me an apostate, told me that I was going to hell, that I had the mark of the beast, and that God was going to destroy me. This was my first contact with Adventism in nine years.

Leslie and I then moved to Montana in 1991. We lived less than a mile from an Adventist church, and one Sabbath we visited. During the service someone recognized my name in the guest registry as a former Seventh-day Adventist minister. It was one potluck Sabbath I'll never forget. As the guests, we were the first to go through the line. When we sat down to our table, no one joined us. Leslie and I ate our meal by ourselves. Never did we feel so unwanted or unwelcome; never did we get a call or visit, not even from the pastor.

Needless to say, we were deeply hurt. People want to be loved and accepted in spite of what they believe doctrinally. One only need look at Jesus Christ and His infinite love for a model of how He accepted the ungodly.

TIME OF TROUBLE

In 1998, after years of frustration in the insurance industry, I found a niche in sales, which I loved. I began a seminar-lecture-workshop business doing estate planning. This proved to be extremely successful. I worked the seminars six months a year, made a nice salary, and spent the rest of the year in semiretirement. I was going to do this until I retired; I had it all worked out.

But then disaster struck. Having become comfortable, having achieved goals I could live with, having positioned myself and my business where it could basically take care of me for the remainder of my life, I lost it all. Through a series of unfortunate events and false charges, I lost my license to do business, and my career came to a screeching halt. When my license was revoked in 2002, this ordeal became one of the most heart-wrenching experiences I'd ever encountered. For the second time my life fell apart before me.

You've heard the story of the man who sold his prize mule, guaranteeing that it was an obedient and cooperative animal. The buyer returned the mule, stating, "You said this was a cooperative mule, but I can't get it to do anything."

The seller said, "No problem." He picked up a two-by-four and hit the mule over the head. "First," he said, "you have to get its attention."

Sometimes God has to allow something to happen to get our attention. In my case He used a lot of pain to bring my thoughts back to Him. The loss of a successful business was devastating. I had never faced so difficult a challenge.

DAMASCUS ROAD

It was then, at my life's lowest valley, that I walked into the Adventist Book Center in Spokane, Washington, in April 2004. My intent was to browse and leave, something I did once every few years. Just browse and leave.

I hadn't been in an Adventist bookstore for about five years, and the first thing I noticed was a book called *Graffiti in the Holy of Holies*. The author, Clifford Goldstein, was unknown to me. For some reason I purchased the book and drove 120 miles back home to Lewiston, Idaho.

That night my life was changed. That book became my own Damascus road experience. In Goldstein's book were answers to the questions that—had I been given years ago—would have kept me from leaving both the ministry and the church. For the first time ever I could see how the gospel, far from contradicting Adventism, was given its fullest expression through the teachings of the church. I had to go up to my home office to read and reread the book because I didn't want my wife to see me sobbing like a baby.

Graffiti in the Holy of Holies was the most commonsense approach to the pre-Advent judgment I had ever seen. I couldn't believe it. *For more than 20 years I had wandered in the wilderness. And here, in this book, were all the answers I was seeking!* I read the whole book that night and reread it on Friday. I'll never forget feeling the warmth of God's Spirit

upon me and the change of attitude that accompanied the reading of that book. That night I gave my heart to Christ and determined to return to the Adventist Church.

On Monday I drove back to the Adventist Book Center and bought every book this Goldstein guy had written. The one I badly needed, *The Remnant*, is a book every member and former member needs to read; it should be required reading for every new Adventist believer. The book had a message that I, the hard-hearted, angry, backslidden preacher, needed to hear.

When I went to the counter with Goldstein's books, the clerk said, "By the way, Mr. Goldstein is going to be in Spokane this coming Sabbath, and he's going to be holding four meetings."

The next Sabbath Leslie and I went to that church in Spokane. There were no Natashas to greet us at the door, and we did not sit by ourselves at the fellowship meal. Goldstein's four sermons were just what I needed, too. If someone had told Goldstein that a backslidden minister on his way back to the church would be at his meetings, I don't think he could have picked four sermons better suited for me.

When I spoke personally with Cliff, he told me that his trip had been planned more than a year and a half in advance—and yet a little more than a week earlier I had walked into the Adventist Book Center and bought his books.

"The Lord is talking to you, Dennis," Cliff said to me that weekend. "You better listen."

THE PRODIGAL RETURNS

I did listen, and I'm back. At my request, on May 8, 2004, Clifford Goldstein rebaptized me into Jesus Christ, and it is my decision to live out my life of salvation in Jesus in the context of the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

It was a long and painful road home. As I look over the past, I'm convinced that as a church, however correct our doctrines, we need to live out the compassion and mercy that Jesus embodied. So many who leave us, I believe, would not leave, or would be so much more apt to return, were we to better represent the love of Christ. I know, because I have experienced for myself firsthand what happens when that love is missing. Though I'm not judging those who treated me poorly, and I forgive everyone, even Natasha, I wish we could all learn to love as Christ loved.

I don't know yet what the Lord has planned for me. I know, though, that the same God who didn't abandon me—even after all those years—and who providentially brought Clifford Goldstein into my life isn't through with me yet.

"O give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy endureth forever" (see Ps. 136:26).

*Not her real name.

This story first appeared in the April 2005 *Adventist Review*. At the time of writing, **Dennis Sellers** lived in Lewiston, Idaho.



PHOTO: BRAD MANN



THANKSGIVING

It's more than a holiday.

BETH THOMAS

I sat on the edge of my parents' bed, nervously twisting the telephone cord between my childish fingers. I had been on hold with the local Christian radio station for what seemed like hours, waiting for my turn to share. It was the annual holiday "gratitude" marathon, and I was excited to hear myself on the radio!

Just as I began to daydream, a friendly voice broke into my thoughts and asked my name. I told her, then blurted out: "I'm thankful for a nice, warm house, my family, and plenty of food!" There was a smile in the radio personality's voice as she thanked me, and we hung up. My feet hardly touched the ground the rest of the evening. I had been on the radio! But more important, I had shared what I was most thankful for.

The Bible, that timeless source of wisdom, speaks extensively about the importance of gratitude and thanksgiving. It reminds us that being thankful is not just a seasonal act but a lifestyle that can bring peace, joy, and a deeper connection with God.

THE POWER OF GRATITUDE

Gratitude acknowledges the blessings in our lives. It recognizes that, despite challenges, there is always something to be thankful for. Scripture emphasizes this in 1 Thessalonians 5:18: "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (NIV).

In other words, gratitude is not conditional. It doesn't depend on whether things are going well or whether we feel particularly blessed at the moment. Instead, it is a practice that we are called to maintain in all circumstances. When we cultivate gratitude, we align ourselves with God's will and open our hearts to His presence.

Gratitude can shift our focus from what is lacking to what is already abundant. It transforms our perspective, allowing us to see God's hand in every aspect of our lives. When we give thanks, even in difficult times, we acknowledge God's sovereignty and trust that He works all things for our good (Rom. 8:28).

THANKSGIVING AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Thanksgiving is more than a holiday; it is a spiritual practice that deepens our relationship with God. In Psalm 100:4 we are instructed to "enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name" (NIV). This verse vividly describes how thanksgiving is a gateway into God's presence. When we approach God with a thankful heart, we draw nearer to Him; in that closeness we experience His love and grace.

The act of giving thanks is also a form of worship. It acknowledges God's goodness and reflects our dependence on Him. When we express gratitude, we are not just listing the things we are thankful for but also worshipping the One who provides for us. This practice reminds us of our identity as His children and reinforces our trust in His provision.

Moreover, thanksgiving helps us develop humility. In a world that often promotes self-suffi-

PHOTO: BODI RAW

ciency, giving thanks reminds us that we are not the source of our blessings. Every good gift comes from above (James 1:17), and recognizing this keeps us grounded in the truth that we rely on God's grace.

GRATITUDE IN CHALLENGING TIMES

It's easy to be grateful when life is smooth sailing, but what about during the storms? The Bible encourages us to give thanks even in difficult times. Philippians 4:6, 7 offers a powerful reminder: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

This passage teaches us that thanksgiving is a key element in overcoming anxiety. When we bring our concerns to God with a thankful heart, we are not ignoring our problems but choosing to trust that God is bigger than any challenge we face. The peace that follows is not dependent on our circumstances but on our relationship with God. This peace transcends all understanding and is a gift that shields our hearts and minds from the weight of our worries.

Consider the story of Job, a man who faced unimaginable loss and suffering. Despite his pain, Job maintained his faith and declared, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). Job's story reminds us that gratitude in adversity is an expression of faith. It is an acknowledgment that our circumstances do not limit God's goodness.

CULTIVATING A GRATEFUL HEART

Gratitude is a muscle that can be strengthened with practice. Here are a few practical ways to cultivate a heart of gratitude in your daily life:

1. **Start Your Day With Thanksgiving:** Begin each day by listing three things you are thankful for. This simple practice sets a positive tone for the day and helps you focus on your blessings rather than your worries.

2. **Keep a Gratitude Journal:** Writing down what you are thankful for each day can be a powerful reminder of God's faithfulness. Over time you'll have a record of blessings to reflect on, especially during tough times.

Gratitude is a way of life that reflects our trust in God's goodness.

3. **Pray With Gratitude:** In your prayers, focus on thanking God before asking for anything. This shift in perspective can deepen your prayer life and draw you closer to God.

4. **Express Gratitude to Others:** Thank the people who have blessed you. A simple thank-you can strengthen relationships.

5. **Meditate on Scripture:** Reflect on Bible verses about gratitude and thanksgiving. Let these scriptures shape your mindset and remind you of God's goodness.

THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF GRATITUDE

When we cultivate a heart of gratitude, it transforms our lives and impacts those around us. When we recognize our blessings, we are more inclined to share them with others, creating a ripple effect of thanksgiving that extends beyond ourselves.

A grateful heart is also a powerful testimony of God's goodness. When we live with an "attitude of gratitude," especially in challenging times, we bear witness to the hope and peace that comes from knowing Christ. Our gratitude becomes a light that points others to God, showing them that true contentment and joy are found in Him.

Gratitude is more than a fleeting feeling; it is a way of life that reflects our trust in God's goodness. The Bible calls us to give thanks in all circumstances, approach God with a thankful heart, and cultivate gratitude even amid trials. As we embrace this practice, we draw closer to God, experience His peace, and inspire others with the power of a thankful heart.

In this season of Thanksgiving and beyond, let us remember the words of Psalm 107:1: "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever" (NIV). May our lives be continuous expressions of thanksgiving, and may we always find reasons to give thanks, knowing that God is with us every step of the way.

Beth Thomas is an assistant editor of *Adventist Review*.



THE SPIRIT OF GRATITUDE

The healthy benefits we gain as we understand the importance of expressing gratitude and praise

ELLEN G. WHITE

Nothing tends more to promote health of body and of soul than does a spirit of gratitude and praise. It is a positive duty to resist melancholy, discontented thoughts and feelings—as much a duty as it is to pray. If we are heaven-bound, how can we go as a band of mourners, groaning and complaining all along the way to our Father's house?

CHOOSING TO BE THANKFUL

Those professed Christians who are constantly complaining, and who seem to think cheerfulness and happiness a sin, have no genuine religion. Those who take a mournful pleasure in all that is melancholy in the natural world; who choose to look upon dead leaves rather than to gather the beautiful living flowers; who see no beauty in grand mountain heights and in valleys clothed with living green; who close their senses to the joyful voice which speaks to them in nature, and which is sweet and musical to the listening ear—these are not in Christ. They are gathering to themselves gloom and dark-

PHOTO: VINCE FLEMING

ness, when they might have brightness, even the Sun of Righteousness arising in their hearts with healing in His beams.

Often your mind may be clouded because of pain. Then do not try to think. You know that Jesus loves you. He understands your weakness. You may do His will by simply resting in His arms.

It is a law of nature that our thoughts and feelings are encouraged and strengthened as we give them utterance. While words express thoughts, it is also true that thoughts follow words. If we would give more expression to our faith, rejoice more in the blessings that we know we have—the great mercy and love of God—we should have more faith and greater joy. No tongue can express, no finite mind can conceive, the blessing that results from appreciating the goodness and love of God. Even on earth we may have joy as a well-spring, never failing, because fed by the streams that flow from the throne of God.

A DAILY RENEWAL OF GRATITUDE AND PRAISE

Then let us educate our hearts and lips to speak the praise of God for His matchless love. Let us educate our souls to be hopeful, and to abide in the light shining from the cross of Calvary. Never should we forget that we are children of the heavenly King, sons and daughters of the Lord of hosts. It is our privilege to maintain a calm repose in God.

"Let the peace of God rule in your hearts; . . . and be ye thankful." Colossians 3:15. Forgetting our own difficulties and troubles, let us praise God for an opportunity to live for the glory of His name. Let the fresh blessings of each new day awaken praise in our hearts for these tokens of His loving care. When you open your eyes in the morning, thank God that He has kept you through the night. Thank Him for His peace in your heart. Morning, noon, and night, let gratitude as a sweet perfume ascend to heaven.

When someone asks how you are feeling, do not try to think of something mournful to tell, in order to gain sympathy. Do not talk of your lack of faith, or of your sorrows and sufferings. The tempter delights to hear such words. When talking on gloomy subjects, you are glorifying him. We are not to dwell on the great power of Satan to overcome us. Often we give ourselves into his hands by talking of his power. Let us talk instead of the great power of God to bind up all our interests with His own. Tell of the matchless power of Christ, and speak of His glory. All heaven is interested in our salvation. The angels of God, thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand, are commissioned to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation. They guard us against evil, and press back the powers of darkness that are seeking our destruction. Have we not reason to be thankful every moment, thankful even when there are apparent difficulties in our pathway?

Song is a weapon that we can always use against discouragement.

SING PRAISES

Let praise and thanksgiving be expressed in song. When tempted, instead of giving utterance to our feelings, let us by faith lift up a song of thanksgiving to God.

Song is a weapon that we can always use against discouragement. As we thus open the heart to the sunlight of the Saviour's presence, we shall have health and His blessing.

"Give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy."

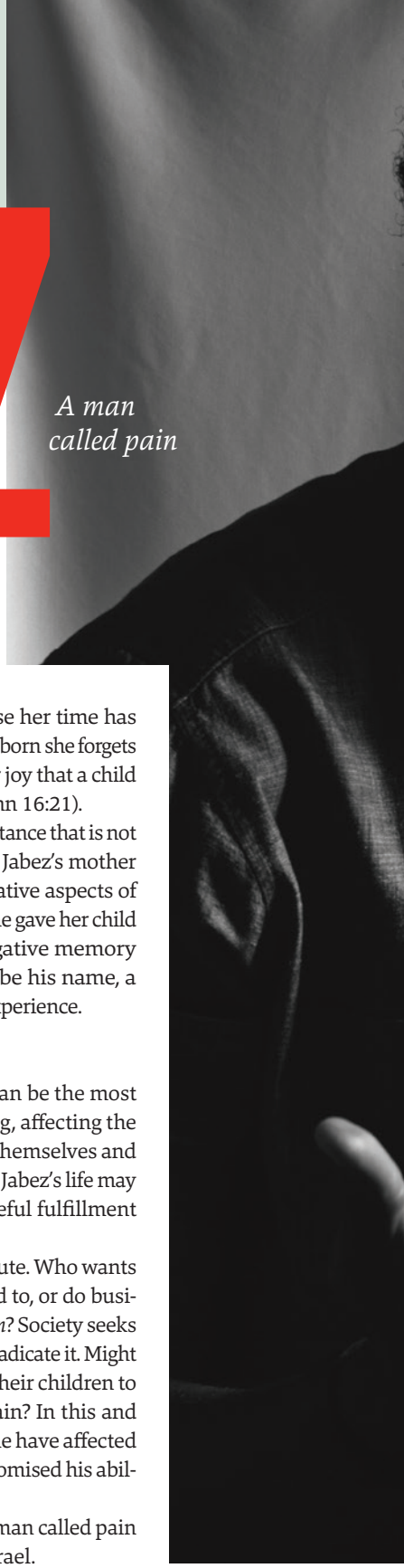
"Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him: talk ye of all his wondrous works. Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord."

"In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." 1 Thessalonians 5:18. This command is an assurance that even the things which appear to be against us will work for our good. God would not bid us be thankful for that which would do us harm.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that **Ellen G. White** (1827-1915) exercised the biblical gift of prophecy during more than 70 years of public ministry. This excerpt was taken from the *Review and Herald*, June 2, 1910.

JABEZ

A man called pain



CHARMIAN LEWIS-WATKINS

The story of Jabez is contained in just two verses of Scripture, 1 Chronicles 4:9, 10, which appear in the middle of a chronology. An interruption? An interjection? Why? The truth about these two verses is worthy of a closer look.

CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION DENIED

The birth of a male child was cause for celebration. Instead, his mother seems to have spoken negativity into his life on arrival. She named him Jabez, a name that meant "pain," a label of sorts given to him by the most significant of family members, his mother. She then appears to rationalize, to justify the unflattering label by pointing to her own experience: "I gave birth to him in pain" (1 Chron. 4:9).*

Did she not get the memo? Did she not get the "thus saith the Lord"? God had said in Genesis 3:16, "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children." Why would she think that she was the exception, that she would somehow be exempt?

Usually, and I have lived it, when that beautiful bundle of joy is placed in our arms as mothers, it is the ultimate distraction. The travail, the labor, is soon forgotten.

The Bible concurs: "A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world" (John 16:21).

Unfortunately, in this instance that is not the case. Instead, it seems Jabez's mother was so fixated on the negative aspects of the birthing process that she gave her child a name that kept the negative memory going. "Pain" will always be his name, a name predicated on her experience.

A MAN CALLED PAIN

Truth be told, a name can be the most powerful of labels, limiting, affecting the way a person feels about themselves and how others perceive them. Jabez's life may have seemed to him a fateful fulfillment of his name.

Think about it for a minute. Who wants to be friends with, married to, or do business with a man called *pain*? Society seeks cures for pain, striving to eradicate it. Might parents not have wanted their children to play with a boy named pain? In this and other ways, might his name have affected his self-esteem and compromised his ability to build relationships?

Whatever the case, the man called pain cried out to the God of Israel.

PHOTO: ROMARIO ROGES



THE CRY

His cry to God is his search for deliverance from a seemingly inescapable fate: "Keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain." But his plea is more than mere escapism: "Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain" (1 Chron. 4:10). "And God granted his request" (verse 10).

Jabez asked for a blessing that would free him from a curse. He prayed for more territory because he felt boxed in from opportunities and growth. He requested the Lord's hand of protection because he at times felt lost and vulnerable. He sought the Lord's hand in guidance so he could find his way in life. His prayer was honest, specific, and to a God acquainted with griefs, who carries our sorrows (see Isa. 53:4).

And God answered his prayer.

Notice the intensity of Jabez's passion. This was no simple prayer. The text says that he "cried out."

We cry out in pain. We cry out when we are in agony. We cry out when we're crushed, afraid, and alone, whether our pain is emotional, physical, or situational.

Israel, under Pharaoh's tyranny, "cried out" to the Lord (Ex. 14:10). Christ's

disciples "cried out in fear" when they saw what they thought was a ghost coming toward them on the water (Matt. 14:26). Peter cried out when he thought he was about to be swallowed up by an angry sea (Matt. 14:30). Blind Bartimaeus, who had sat in darkness for years, cried out to God for sight (Mark 10:46-48). Jonah cried unto the Lord from the belly of a great fish (Jonah 2:2-9).

Most, if not all, of us have been caught in the storms of life or trapped in its low places, unable to see a way up and out. And if you haven't been, your turn may not be far distant. Still, we all may be assured that things change when we cry out to God.

JABEZ AND US, THE REBRAND

When God rewrote Jabez's story, his latter days followed paths of inspiration unknown in his former days. He became a man "more honorable than his brothers" (1 Chron. 4:9). His mother had named him for the pain and suffering she endured, but God, the Omnipotent One who is able to speak light to darkness, order to chaos, and fill void with plenty, renamed him for honor without even tampering with his birth certificate. Oh, what a blessing! Jabez, who believed by faith and God answered, stepped into an improved spiritual and social status, a better brand, a fresh and fantastic future.

Forget the labels and dare to run against the world that has said you do not and will not amount to anything.

Jabez's God made a striking statement regarding His people. "I know the plans I have for you," He declares, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jer. 29:11). God's declaration is no simple say-so. His word never returns empty. It will certainly accomplish exactly what He says (Isa. 55:11). With Jabez's prayer and Jabez's Lord we may wait in faith for heaven to grant us as well an answer of blessing, prosperity, and protection from harm such as came to Jabez in response to his requests—whether or not such blessings from God come in this life, they are assured to all believers in the life to come.

Voices of negativity and debilitating criticism may at times speak under the label of "constructive criticism." Nevertheless, even when they rise from ostensibly friendly sources (as with Jabez's own mother), they may strike their victim as barbs delivered from the weaponry of one whose name and job description involves accusing God's children (see Rev. 12:10).

But inspired by the Jabez story, we may celebrate with the loud voice from heaven that cries out, not in desperate pain, but with fervent joy, "The accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down" (Rev. 12:10).

So forget the labels and dare to run against the world that has said you do not and will not amount to anything. Maybe they say you're the family's sore thumb, the community's embarrassment, the society's misfit. But whether the barbs come at you from outside or simply churn inside your own head, the story of Jabez offers an alternative for your story.

Jabez reached beyond the painful legacy of his own mother's inability to rise above the pain, to reach the ear of a God who listens, hears, and answers because He cares. Words from the psalmist correspond to Jabez's final contentment: "I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live" (Ps. 116:1, 2).

Dear God, we all need You without exception. We really need You. We need You to move in our situations and transform our lives. Many of us have been labeled. We feel unloved and unwanted. In short, we have been led to believe that we are not good enough. Sometimes these feelings of inadequacy prevent us from coming before You to ask for help. May we believe that You truly love us and that we are what You say we are, fearfully and wonderfully made. May we accept and believe the declaration You have made on our lives and that all will be well in the end.

Jabez, two verses, in the middle of a chronology, but what a lesson they teach about the transformative power of the God who cares for us.

* All biblical quotations are from the New International Version.

Charmian Lewis-Watkins is a registered nurse living in Brooklyn, New York.

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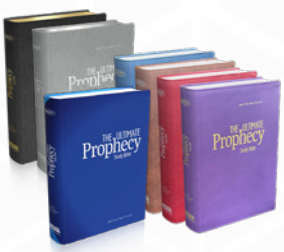
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PANIC IN SANTO DOMINGO

Things don't always go the way we think they should.

NELSON SILVA

Wait! Where is *my* passport?" Just seconds before, I had asked the 12 young adult missionaries with me to do a passport check. My passport was not where I thought it would be. I frantically looked all through my backpack, but to no avail. The 13 of us were about to board the bus that would take us to the Las Américas International Airport after a week of evangelism in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

"I can't find my passport!" I announced to the group. Pastor Rondon prayed. "What can I do to help?" a team member asked. "Shall we go to the apartment and search?" someone else suggested. "Where is your luggage?" yet another missionary inquired. Soon everyone was busy searching for my passport.

Minutes later the group reconvened. The reports came in: "It's not in the apartment," Pastor Rondon texted. "Delta Airlines is not answering," another missionary blurted. "You have to go to the American embassy," one more suggestion came in.

"I know someone who works at the American embassy," Ms. Rebecca unexpectedly interjected. "He is on the phone with me." She paused as she listened to the person on the other end of the line. "He said that today is Juneteenth, so the American embassy is closed."

TO THE AIRPORT

"When was the last time you saw the passport?" That was a good question! When *was* the last time I saw my passport? I typically kept it in the inner pocket of my traveling sweater, which I hadn't needed in 90-degree humid Santo Domingo. So where was my sweater?

There was no time to waste. Perhaps my sweater was at the airport. Our best shot was to get to the airport early to look for it. Off we went in separate vehicles; Ms. Rebecca was still lost in a phone conversation, while her husband, Pastor Rondon, engaged the bus driver in a loud and enthusiastic brainstorming discussion. Everyone had an opinion on what to do next!

Ms. Rebecca handed me the phone to speak with the American embassy representative. The polite and helpful agent took my information and scheduled an embassy appointment

PHOTO: CHUTTERSNAP

for the following day. Then Ms. Rebecca remembered that she knew someone who worked at the airport. She called him and had him search for the missing sweater. He called back a few minutes later: "I am so sorry," he said. "No one has found the sweater."

As the chances of finding the sweater grew slim, my family at home was praying, my conference family was praying, and everyone in Santo Domingo who knew about the situation was praying.

Pastor Rondon, hoping to encourage my faith, told me a story. "Years ago," he said, "a woman from New York visited Santo Domingo. She lost her passport and, like you, realized it minutes before heading to the airport. Armed with faith, she went to the airport. Before approaching the ticket counter, she gathered all the strangers around her and prayed. When she finished praying, someone approached her with her passport! A miracle indeed!"

Well, that miracle didn't happen for me. Neither the sweater nor the passport was found. I hugged the group goodbye and then headed back to the conference office with the Rondons.

That miracle didn't happen for me.

MY STORY

Sister White says that "our heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us, of which we know nothing."* During the week of evangelism, I had shared that knowing God is everything (see John 17:3). I had also shared that God is indescribable, powerful, present, and loving. Therefore, we can trust Him. He knows the end from the beginning and has our best interest in mind, always. It was time to practice what I had preached.

I wish I could tell you that things got resolved quickly and drama-free, but that would be far from the truth. The next day the American embassy was closed for an administrative day; I almost lost $300 to a telephone scammer who promised to help; and I missed attending a very important meeting at work. Worse yet, the following day was my twentieth wedding anniversary. I had to make it back home!

On the day of my embassy appointment, I was up and ready to head out before 6:00 a.m., but Pastor Rondon was running late. "Leave the luggage behind," he texted me, and showed up in an Uber. *This is not a good sign,* I thought.

The traffic was unusually intense. Making my 7:00 a.m. appointment wasn't looking too promising. When I arrived at the American embassy, the guard asked me for a printed copy of my appointment. "Sir," I answered hesitantly, "I was told that my name would be written on the paper. Can you check?" Finally he let me inside the building—he had found my name! But there were at least 20 people ahead of me.

When my name was finally called, the friendly consul, after asking me several questions, noticed the Seventh-day Adventist Church logo on my shirt. "Are you a missionary?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir. I am."

"We usually issue the emergency passports at 2:00 p.m.," he continued. "When are you flying back home?" I told him I was hoping to catch the 3:00 p.m. flight to Atlanta that afternoon. "I'll see what we can do," he responded as he left the window in a hurry. I prayed hard! *Lord, please, help!* "Mr. Silva," the consul exclaimed when he returned, "I was able to speed up your emergency passport! Just wait 20 minutes or so, and you'll be on your way."

I was thrilled to receive the good news after three days of disappointments! The Rondon family had been exceptionally helpful and incredibly hospitable, but I didn't want to impose on them one more day. Besides, my wife was waiting at home! Would I get a boarding pass barely three hours before the flight?

Thankfully, the Delta clerk was particularly helpful. After many failed attempts to find a flight, she finally concluded, "I can get you to Atlanta at no additional cost, but I can't guarantee you'll make it to Nashville tonight. All the flights are full."

"No problem," I cheerfully declared. "Get me to Atlanta, and I'll figure out the rest."

God got me home in time for my twentieth wedding anniversary. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (Isa. 55:8, NIV). I experienced God, on that trip, in ways that I did not anticipate.

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

Nelson Silva, D.Min., is associate youth director for the Kentucky-Tennessee Conference.

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FISH, MELONS, AND GARLIC

No looking back

Two men looked out from prison bars,
One saw the mud, the other saw stars.
Dale Carnegie

You would think we would be experts by now. We have managed several transcontinental moves. We have changed cultures many times. And every single time we have met with the nasty phenomenon of culture shock. For us it sets in between three to six months after we arrive in a new culture. In the beginning there's so much new to explore and do. It's easy to generally be positive and excited about all the novelty. But when everyday drudgery sets in, so does the homesickness. And no matter how prepared we are for it—it can still kick like a mule.

It's really a grief process where even some of the less-positive aspects of the life left behind take on a rosy sheen in the memory. One can understand a little better how the Israelites, after the dramatic rescue from Egypt and slavery, a few months later began to mourn, among other things, the fish, melons, and garlic (Num. 11:5) of Egypt and quite forgot about slavery. Fortunately for us, our moves were never fleeing from slavery or even danger, but it seems that there is something that makes change, even positive change, difficult.

While a certain amount of culture shock is normal and natural, we have found that in its shadow lurks a fundamentally dangerous issue. The issue is the mental moving back and hanging on to the past while subtly forgetting to be thankful for the present. Left unchecked and unprocessed, it has the power to suck all the life, joy, enthusiasm, and usefulness into a black hole of depression. This is fertile ground for setbacks on all fronts: emotionally, physically, and spiritually. And it is not a new phenomenon.

Throughout the book of Numbers we see how our spiritual forebears became ripe for discontent, which spread like a virus and led to many setbacks on the journey. It was a shift away from the wonder, the miracle, of being fed daily with heaven's food, having clothes and shoes that didn't wear out, a cloud to protect them from the sun, and a column of fire to protect and keep them warm at night. Somehow, they forgot that God's visible form in the pillar was leading them into the future: a future full of opportunities for joy and for new beginnings in the land flowing with milk and honey that God was leading them to.

Their legacy hasn't left us. Left unattended, our hearts can become breeding grounds for warped memories, doubts, and even open rebellion. While one can try destructive forms of self-medication, such as endless scrolling on social media and looking back at what friends and colleagues in our old world are doing without us, there is no better cure than doing what the old hymn says—counting our blessings and naming them one by one.

It's a lot more than an artificial attempt at positive thinking. It's all about an attitude change. A recalibration toward the future and God. It's saying a positive yes to life, to joy, to peace, and to usefulness based on trust in God. It's all about developing an attitude of gratitude. The month of November is a good time to take stock and leave the fish, melons, and garlic in the past where they belong and renew the practice of looking up from the mud to see the stars.

TRANSITIONS

CHANTAL & GERALD KLINGBEIL



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PETER N. LANDLESS ZENO L. CHARLES-MARCEL

ACCEPTANCE WITHOUT COMPROMISE

A loving response to an adult LGBTQ+ son

To our surprise and dismay, a few months ago our youngest son, 26, announced that he identifies as a bisexual female. Our traditional Christian Thanksgiving weekend and dinner celebration with all our children and their families, our surviving parents, and our Thanksgiving "adoptees" is going to be awkward. Help!

As parents, we face a significant challenge when our children's life choices conflict with our values and beliefs, especially for Christians regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. It's natural to feel torn between love for your son and commitment to your faith.

While we can't speculate on what led to his decision, most likely it wasn't sudden. Your relationship with him and your family is at a critical juncture, and your approach can affect everyone. [From your nonprinted comments] you love your son but believe he's made a morally incorrect choice. You want him to change without offending him or causing a nasty confrontation. Well, there's hope: you can show love without compromising your values, disrespecting his choices, or disregarding his perception of reality. Remember, his decision probably stems from long-standing issues. How you handle this situation can impact your entire family dynamic.

There is far more to be said than this column can accommodate, but here is a place to start:

Pray. Prayer is your strongest tool as a Christian. Pray for your son's safety, well-being, and spiritual journey. Examine your hearts, listen to the Holy Spirit, and let HIM make the changes in you that He deems necessary. Then express your biblical convictions gently but confidently.

Separate identity from behavior. Separate your son's identity from his behavior. Remember, he's defined not just by his sexual orientation or gender identity, but by who he is as a person—your son, and a child of God.

Be respectful. Respect his autonomy as an adult responsible for his own choices before God. You can't control or change him, so focus on your relationship and entrust him to God's care.

Lead with unconditional love. Most Christians believe that the typical LGBTQIA+ lifestyle is sinful. Jesus' example? He spent time with sinners of all stripes, loving them without endorsing their behavior. Loving your son does not mean agreeing with his life choices or perceived reality. Remember, God's love for us isn't dependent on our behavior, and as parents your love should reflect that grace and compassion.

Keep open communication. Listening without condemning helps maintain trust and fosters understanding. Let your son (and the entire family) know that while you may have differences in beliefs, your relationship with him (them) is always open for honest conversation and connection.

Set boundaries with grace. Setting boundaries may be necessary in some situations, particularly if your child's behavior openly contradicts your values within your home. However, these boundaries can be set with grace and respect without pushing your child away. Explain your expectations kindly, making sure they understand the reasons behind them, and offer alternatives for maintaining a healthy relationship.

Thanksgiving is not the time for shouting matches and family discord. Consider the return of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). Count your blessings and trust God to help you sort this out.

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

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Never miss a chance to share Jesus.

KAREN TRACY

I thought we could certainly be friends. When he showed some interest in me, I felt happy someone who looked like him, carried himself as he did, would want to reach out to me.

"Excuse me, miss? Can I ask you which blouse you think is prettier?"

I had been shopping at a nearby department store, distracted by the hope of a new, pretty dress that was cheaper than it looked, when he appeared before me.

Standing six feet one, with a big smile and kind eyes, the man about my age stared at me with genuine interest and inquiry. His gaze was flattering.

"I like the blue one," I said, after briefly examining both styles of choice. He stared at me for a moment longer, then gave a quick look at the blouse.

"OK, thank you," he said, nodding his head. "Um, by the way, would you, by chance, like to go on a date sometime?"

I wasn't attracted to him in the romantic sense. Though I wanted him as a friend, appearances alone didn't generally draw me in as it did others.



PHOTO: MARCUS LOKE

"Are you a Christian?" I asked, smiling.

"No," he answered, his eyes deep. "But you can convert me."

I laughed at his response. I knew that wasn't how it worked. *Missionary dating* isn't always as successful as some hope it would be. I talked to him for a moment longer, sharing my faith, and delicately explaining how I consider dating only Christians (though in truth I barely had ever gone on a date in my life).

I left the store soon after that, not knowing how, just months later, that one interaction would change his and my life in so many ways.

THREE MONTHS LATER

I didn't speak to Adam until months after our interaction that day. But when I did, it wasn't the same.

We ran into each other at another nearby store, where, surprised to see him, I greeted him with a warm and friendly smile. I could tell he was more surprised than I was to see him again. He looked different, stressed, and I asked him why.

Though cautious at first, he ended up telling me about some scary things that had happened in his life. Apparently someone he knew had been accused of doing some terrible things that had the potential of escalating into a sad outcome for him and his family.

I told him that I would pray. And that my friends would too.

He thanked me, but I could tell he didn't take it that seriously. After all, from the brief moments I had shared with him, I could tell that he knew next to nothing about Christianity or God, and that he was a self-labeled agnostic. But still he seemed somewhat touched by my offer.

I pushed a bit more. I shared about the miracles I had seen in my life, about how God answers prayers even when it looks like an impossibility, speaking from an assurance that grew in my heart the more I shared. He listened—curious; interested.

Weeks later he would see, for himself, God answer.

"Karen, I can't believe this! This is amazing! Things turned around so rapidly! If God is real and answers prayers like this, everyone should know!"

I had given Adam my number at our last meeting, something that was rare for me to do. It simply never felt safe to give random strangers my digits. But I sensed something was different about Adam. And that day, when I received his call, I was glad I had.

"I could tell that he knew next to nothing about Christianity or God, and that he was a self-labeled agnostic."

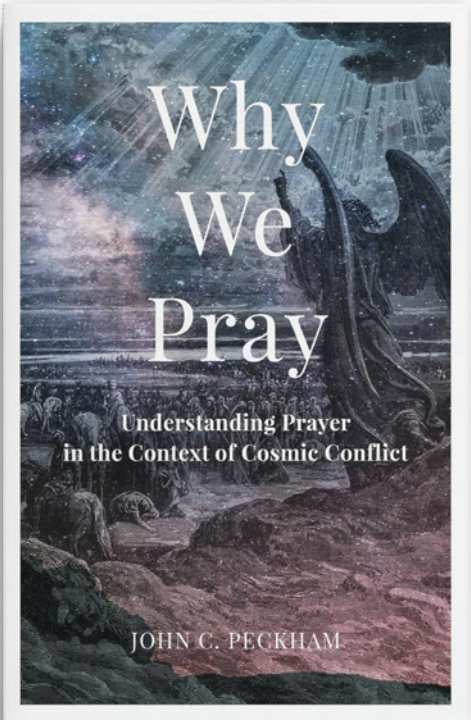
Adam had seen the answer to his prayer. He had seen things that seemed immovable turn around for his family. And right then he started to believe, to ask questions. I could tell God was drawing him to Himself, and it was an amazing thing to see.

I could write a book about the miraculous events that occurred in Adam's life, one after another, that eventually led to his becoming a baptized Christian, turning from his old self and embracing a brand-new life in Jesus. But space limits me.

Only allow me to share that I had little to do with this story, while God had everything. All Adam needed was to hear about Him, to see and believe, and it was a done deal from there. This shows so clearly, to me at least, that you shouldn't dismiss someone based on what you see on the surface, or because of how unlikely you think it would be for them to be converted. Rather, share your story, if they'll listen. Share the good news. Maybe one day, as you share, you will see, as I did with Adam, how one small seed of faith takes root and changes a whole life more than you ever imagined it could.

Karen Tracy is a pseudonym.

EDITORS' PICK



Why We Pray: Understanding Prayer in the Context of Cosmic Conflict

(Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2024), ISBN 978-1-5409-6628-5 (paperback), 192 pages, US$24.99. Reviewed by Justin Kim, editor, *Adventist Review*.

John Peckham continues what he started in his *Theodicy of Love:* theodicy, or the theological problem of reconciling God's goodness and power with evil and suffering, is played out in the cosmic conflict. Adventists would be familiar with the phrase the great controversy between good and evil—not the book by Ellen White, but the metanarrative theme found throughout Scripture as well as in many of her books. You can expect more of these issues and answers in next year's first quarter of the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide,* also written by Peckham.

Why We Pray addresses fundamental questions about the main characteristics of divine Being, such as omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, omnibenevolence, and others, and how they work with the human activity of prayer. The book is refreshingly practical while not skimping on theological depth. I found my mind stimulated with multiple biblical principles coalescing into a systematized and profound narrative, while my heart wanted to reach out to its main protagonist, God, through prayer.

Whether they know it or not, many have implicitly asked, in their experience, the theologically nuanced question of whether prayer makes any difference to the mind of a good, all-knowing, and all-powerful God. Chapter one seeks to answer this question by comparing various theological conclusions and how they hold up to Scripture.

How many Adventists are praying, not to the God of the Bible, but rather to the God of Plato? Because of presuppositions in other evangelical prayer books, the principles of prayer are fundamentally in a different framework. Based on Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies, it is impossible that God could be affected by human petitions. Rather, chapter two paints a biblical picture of what God must be like in light of the covenant and illustrated through various prayers in the Psalms. Peckham concludes that Scripture points to a God that indeed answers our prayers (just not always in the way or when we think), that He welcomes honest pleas and dialogue, and that He works to save us beyond what we deserve.

Chapter three looks at where the cosmic conflict motifs are clearly alluded to in the Lord's Prayer. One profound discussion in the book is on remedial will

differentiated from ideal will. Whereas God's ideal will is for complete goodness and the eradication of evil and suffering, God's remedial will kicks in, especially in light of the cosmic conflict, where God demonstrates His character while under self-imposed legal scrutiny. These conditions, which are unseen yet hinted at through Scripture, are parsed out in chapter four.

Peckham writes, "These 'rules' do not limit God's sheer power, but they *morally* limit the ways God exercises His power" (p. 87). Biblical examples are given in which Christ's power is able to do some things under some parameters, but morally not able because of other conditions. God's ideal will may desire one result, but God's remedial will, under the self-imposed limitations in the wider context of the cosmic conflict, results in another. While God is not really limited, what is amazing is that He limits Himself by committing to these "rules of engagement" to cause a larger, perhaps even the largest, good. Additionally profound is "the adversary is restricted to operate only within those specified boundaries, which is good news."

Why We Pray takes terms of theology proper and sets them in a daily, practical, and real spiritual level. "Petitionary prayer might provide God moral jurisdiction within the rules of engagement for God to bring about some good and thus might influence whether God brings about that good in a way that is entirely consistent with divine omniscience, omnipotent, and omnibenevolence" (p. 91). An Adventist view is that prayer gives God the legal permission to work, act, intervene, even interrupt, in light of the cosmic forces and the rules by which they interact with themselves.

Chapter five deals with how these rules of engagement are reconciled with seemingly unanswered prayers. Peckham implies that we need to pray according to these rules of engagement. What he offers is not esoteric, but biblical: praying in right relationship with God, with deep (not presumptuous) faith, with unselfish motivations, persevering with hope and gratitude (even when it seems that prayers are unheard), and in accordance with God's will. Like a rope with all five strands, this is the key to prayer in the cosmic conflict.

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Last, chapter six addresses the problem of divine hiddenness and injustice in the world, providing encouragement to those who might have lost endurance while waiting for divine answers. The book ends with hope and possibly the most detailed discussion on the great controversy. It is written to elucidate the role of prayer within the cosmic interplay of good and evil.

Why We Pray is recommended to all who take the presuppositions as well as the principles of Scripture to be true. It can be used for prayer meeting, sermon series, but also personal devotions. It offers answers to questions about theodicy, suffering, and God's will. But what is uniquely refreshing is the solid, biblical support, and theologically rigorous Seventh-day Adventist theology, yet with a pastorally pragmatic angle, all while creatively and freshly written.



ANDREW MCCHESNEY

"I DON'T KNOW JESUS"

Simple acts can open doors to faith.

Seven-year-old Karuuparerue looked with curious eyes at the visitor who had traveled many hours by plane and then car to reach her homestead of four huts in the desert of northern Namibia.

She shyly told me about her love for macaroni, a rare treat that occasionally breaks her usual meal routine of maize porridge. She described the joy of playing dodgeball with a ball of old rags.

Then I posed the big question. It was why I'd traveled so far.

"Do you know Jesus?" I asked.

Karuuparerue was silent. She looked away. Then her black eyes met mine.

"I don't know Jesus," she said, softly.

Her reply made me sad, but it wasn't unexpected. If anyone in the world didn't know Jesus, it would be this little girl in the Himba tribe, a seminomadic people in Namibia.

Karuuparerue represents what many people see as the mission field. But the twenty-first-century mission field isn't only a remote people group. It's no longer simply a place inhabited largely by people from a non-Christian religion. The mission field is also in such developed countries as Switzerland. Exactly 150 years ago J. N. Andrews sailed to Switzerland as the Adventist Church's first official missionary.

But today's Switzerland is post-Christian and increasingly secular. In September the Office of Adventist Mission organized a Mission Week at the General Conference world church headquarters to raise US$20,000 for Switzerland. The Adventist Church has been offered a unique opportunity to teach the principles of healthy living to affluent Geneva residents through health expos. The goal is to give fewer people there the ability to say, "I don't know Jesus."

But how can we do that as we seek to fulfill Jesus' Great Commission to "go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:19)?

In Namibia I asked Pastor Sabyn K. Ndjamba, president of the Namibia South Conference, how



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Karuuparerue could know Jesus. I learned that he had begun to study the Bible with her grandmother several years earlier. But the grandmother lives on a different homestead, so she hasn't been able to share Jesus with her granddaughter.

The pastor said he passed the Bible studies over to a Bible worker after he was elected conference president. The Bible worker, he said, would add Karuuparerue's homestead to his rounds for Bible studies.

I accompanied the Bible worker on several trips to Himba homesteads. I saw that he took not only his Bible but also gifts of bread and macaroni, Karuuparerue's favorite.

Then I understood. This is the way to reach Namibia. This is the way to reach Switzerland. This is the way to reach the world. Ellen G. White said, "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with [people] as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'"*

Jesus' way to Karuuparerue's heart is to mingle with her, desiring her good, showing sympathy, ministering to her needs, winning her confidence, and inviting her to follow Him. Then she will know Jesus.

* Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), p. 143.

Andrew McChesney is the editor of the youth and adult *Mission* quarterly, the *Children's Mission* quarterly, and the weekly Inside Story mission feature in the *Adult Bible Study Guide* at the Office of Adventist Mission (adventistmission.org).

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