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AMERICAN APOCALYPSE

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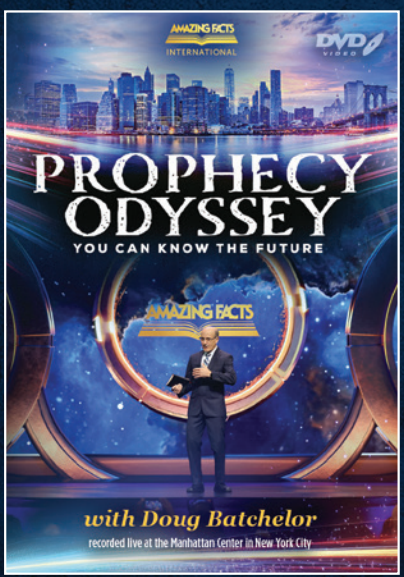


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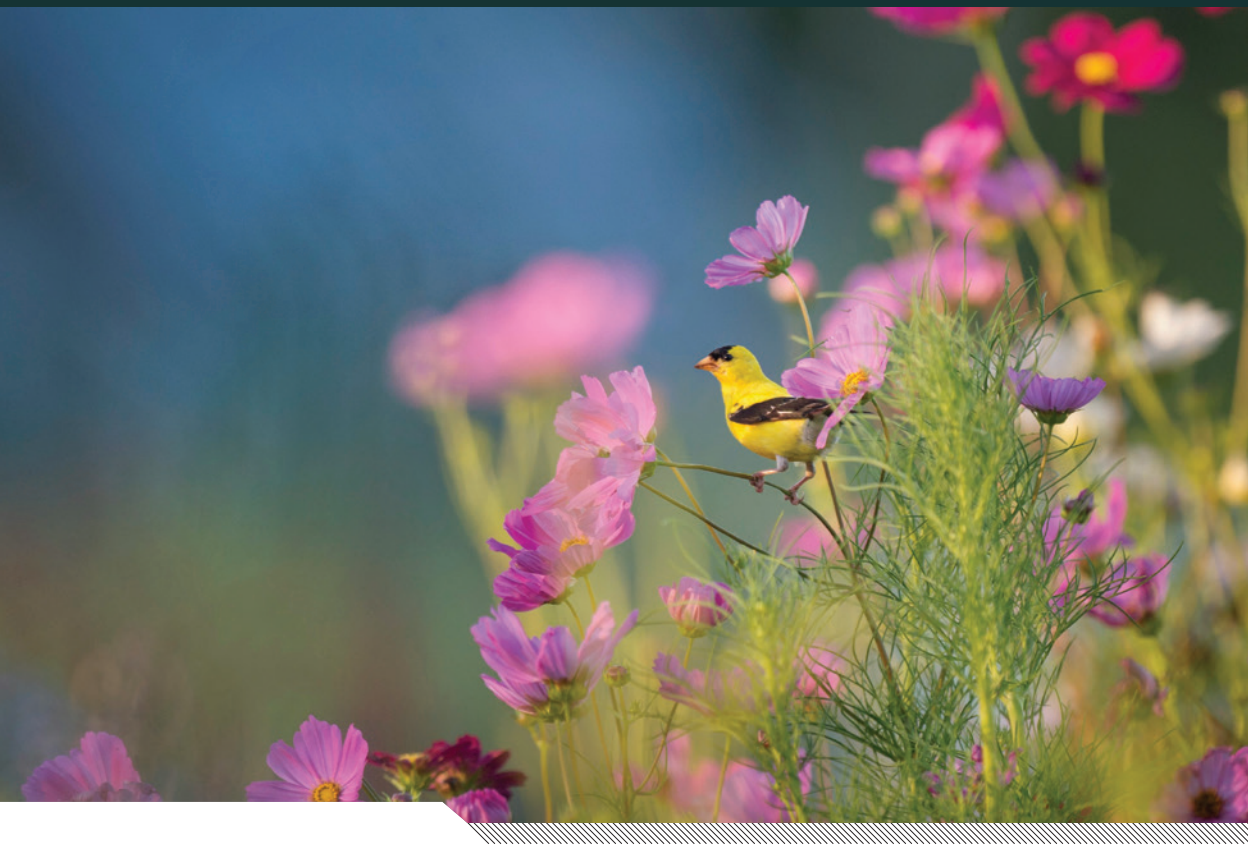
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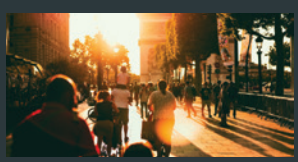
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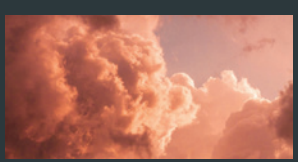
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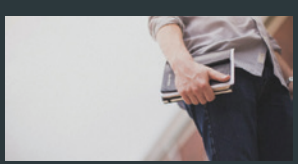
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GO. TEACH. BAPTIZE.

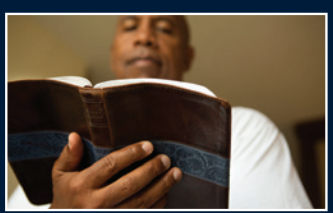
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The convergence of random events under the providence of God is never random.

The Curious Case of the Cyrenian

A random man passes through. All three Synoptic Gospels call attention to this man, by naming him as well as his place of origin. He is from Cyrene, which is in present-day Libya, some 800 miles away from Jerusalem. All three accounts (Matt. 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26) intimate that he was in transit and that his encounter with Jesus was by happenstance.

Mark is the only Gospel that mentions his two sons, possibly already believers that the audience would have been familiar with (maybe linked with the same Rufus of Romans 16:13). Interestingly, Ellen White sheds more light:

"At this time a stranger, Simon a Cyrenian, coming in from the country, meets the throng. He hears the taunts and ribaldry of the crowd; he hears the words contemptuously repeated, Make way for the King of the Jews! He stops in astonishment at the scene; and as he expresses his compassion, they seize him and place the cross upon his shoulders.

"Simon had heard of Jesus. His sons were believers in the Saviour, but he himself was not a disciple. The bearing of the cross to Calvary was a blessing to Simon, and he was ever after grateful for this providence. It led him to take upon himself the cross of Christ from choice, and ever cheerfully stand beneath its burden."[1]

Jesus was physically weak and staggering. The Roman "art" of crucifixion had been mastered by this time to maximize pain and suffering. The whipping and blood loss alone could have killed any man. But the vilest of criminals were made to parade the town while carrying the heavy crucifix.

Jesus fainted multiple times, not being able to carry the cross. This presented a logistical problem for the Roman soldiers, having still quite a distance yet to go. Clearly the prisoner was unable to proceed. With no word from their superiors but humiliated at the perception of their incompetence, they had to furnish a solution. Why not ask a Roman to carry Christ's cross? What occupier would help the occupied, let alone a criminal of the lowest class? Why not ask a Jewish priest? With the Passover coming soon, who would defile themselves?

In the midst of selfish concerns of purity and protocol, humiliation and honor, embarrassment and edict, a random man was chosen. The timing of Simon's appearance, the placing of Simon on that *Via Dolorosa,* the moments of Christ's exhaustion, the impatience of the priests, and the point of Roman anxiety came to a climax. The convergence of random events under the providence of God is never random. This honor of being so close to Jesus, especially near His death, was purposely handed to Simon of Cyrene.

"The cross [Simon] was forced to bear became the means of his conversion. His sympathies were deeply stirred in favor of Jesus; and the events of Calvary, and the words uttered by the Saviour, caused him to acknowledge that He was the Son of God."[2]

Some tolerated Jesus, but Simon served Him. Some were humiliated by Jesus, but Simon was humbled by Him. Some went in front of Jesus, but Simon followed behind Him. Some rushed Jesus, but Simon was in lockstep with Him. Some think of events as arbitrary, but Simon's meeting was providential, for the convergence of random events under the providence of God is never random.

[1] Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898, 1940), p. 742.

[2] Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1955), p. 249.



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INBOX

We can discover our blind spots better if we consider what others have to say.

SMITH HUFFMAN



REJECTING THE EVOLUTIONARY THEORY OF ORIGINS

That was a great article by Gerhard Padderatz in the March edition: "Where Science Can't Go." You'd expect unbelievers to swallow up evolutionary mythology, but how is it that professed Christians buy into it? The author brings out several pertinent points that make theistic evolution untenable. The evidence against evolution is overwhelming. It's hard to get around the concept of "irreducible complexity." Some things could not have evolved by random chance over time. There is no reason to depart from the inspired statement in Psalm 33:6, 9.

Wally Sumner

AN IMPORTANT FIRST STEP

The article "You Belong" (February 2025), by Katie Flores, is an excellent and a much-needed one. The principles shared are an important first step for understanding and beginning a culture of inclusivity.

Larry R. Evans

WHAT A GREAT ESSAY

I found Dawson Stephens' article "How Is Adventism Most Relevant to Society Today?" (February 2025) to be a truly powerful essay!

Ronald Hetland

LESS POLARIZATION, MORE UNDERSTANDING

David Buruchara's "The Reasonable Ones" (February 2025) made my day! I've been making the same observations he mentions, and I have been praying about how to help people awaken to these realities. Buruchara's column greatly encouraged me.

We need to understand that our own opinions are not the truth itself: God's Word is truth. So we never need fear that the truth will be compromised when our understanding is questioned. But we can discover our blind spots better if we consider what others have to say. They may be seeing something important that we're missing. We can trust that the Holy Spirit will guide *all of us* into *all* truth, if we let Him. For that to happen, we must be willing to be led. The world is going nuts with its polarization. My we choose a better course!

E. Smith Huffman

EXCITED ABOUT THE SANCTUARY

What an awesome read! Roy Graf's "The Sanctuary and the Mission of the Church" (February 2025) was inspiring. After reading it, I'm motivated to experience a tour of the sanctuary replica that will be available near my home. Just thinking about walking through a life-size model of God's dwelling place gives me the chills.

Chris del Monte

HELPFUL THOUGHTS

"Sabbath Rest," by Jo Ann Davidson (January 2025), was a wonderful article. It provided helpful considerations about the principle of love for humanity.

La Agencia Adventista Sudamericana de Noticias (ASN)

NOT EASY BUT WORTH IT

It's a joyful thing to live against the grain of social norms, which is what Amanda Walter's article "Embracing the Slow Life" (January 2025) challenged us to do. It's not always easy, but rewarded beyond measure!

Rachel Marie A.

2025 GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION

Official notice is hereby given that the sixty-second session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists will be held July 3-12, 2025, in the America's Center Convention Complex in St. Louis, Missouri, United States. The first meeting will begin at 2:00 pm, July 3, 2025. All duly accredited delegates are urged to be present at that time.

Ted N. C. Wilson, General Conference President
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"Only through tolerance, understanding, and mutual respect can we ensure religious freedom for all."
Nelu Burcea, p. 12

NEWS



High school students at Pine Hill Adventist Academy in Champhai, Mizoram, India, smile through one of their classroom windows in late 2024.

PHOTO: MARCOS PASEGGI, *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

FLOURISHING INDIA SCHOOL READIES FOR MAJOR UPGRADE NEAR THE MYANMAR BORDER

NEW SCHOOL BUILDING IS EXPECTED TO DOUBLE ENROLLMENT, IMPACT THE AREA, LEADERS SAY.

MARCOS PASEGGI, *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

A Seventh-day Adventist school in a northeast corner of India near the Myanmar border is changing young lives and the community for the better, regional church and educational Adventist leaders say. Thanks to a partnership with Maranatha Volunteers International, they now hope that the influence of Pine Hill Adventist Academy may soon be doubled.

IN A FARAWAY CORNER

It was 1988 when Adventist leaders in the state of Mizoram in northeast India requested local officials for a plot of land to build a school around the city of Champhai. The local council obliged, giving the Adventist Church the land on a long-term lease at no cost. Such arrangement, later endorsed and registered at the relevant government offices, is still bearing fruits that have ben-

efited the local and regional Adventist church, Adventist education, and society in general, regional church leaders recently said.

In its beginnings, a vocational training school opened on the grounds, located just 14 miles from the Myanmar border, they shared. That place survived as a facility where the church still manufactures tofu and hot healthy drinks. Eventually a primary and secondary school were also built. Both faculty and students were accommodated in simple wooden houses. And so Pine Hill Adventist Academy was born.

A CRUCIAL MOMENT

Mizoram is a small landlocked state that shares borders with Bangladesh, Myanmar, and other Indian states. About 90 percent of the state is covered by forests, and the mountainous terrain makes access difficult. Most of Mizoram's 1.25 million residents are Christians, belonging to the Mizo ethnic group, with their traditions and language.

The Adventist Church is thriving there, regional church leaders said. And against that background, Pine Hill Adventist Academy has kept steadily growing. Currently, with about 350 K-12 students, its classrooms are at maximum capacity, they reported.

Lately the school's importance and crucial role in the area has increased, as hundreds of families from Myanmar are crossing the border into India as refugees, fleeing instability and uncertainty in their home country.

"Students and their families, some of them Adventist members, are arriving in the area," Pine Hill principal Zothanzauva (Zova) Pachuau explains. "We need to provide them an option so their kids can have access to sound, Christian education." In some cases, families stay in Myanmar but send their older children to Pine Hill. Those boarding students need a place to sleep, mentors, and educational support as they adapt to a new country and often a new language, leaders explained.

The good thing is that everyone involved is doing something to support the education of young people, school leaders reported. "Families send all the money they can afford, and local churches are also supporting their students," Pachuau shared. "Students also have chores and help to cover their costs. Everyone is committed to Adventist education."

THE ROLE OF MARANATHA

Some time ago Maranatha Volunteers International, a supporting ministry of the Adventist Church based in the United States, decided to partner with the regional church to provide Pine Hill Adventist Academy with a new school building.

"This is different from other projects we have done in the past," Maranatha Volunteers International president Don Noble explained during a site visit in December 2024. "The ground is so uneven that securing the foundations of the new building will require a structural framework with an incredible amount of iron and concrete." As a result, costs will be much higher than in a regular Maranatha project, the ministry leaders say, explaining that Maranatha is fully funded by its donors and supporters.

During the December visit Maranatha leaders discussed with regional church leaders and the local construction crew the next steps in the construction process. At the time, Maranatha was hoping to bring teams of volunteers to work on the site, something that has not yet been possible because of government restrictions to visits by foreigners. But despite the isolation, the logistical and financial challenges, and the changing political landscape, the work goes on. As of this February, the foundations had been finished, and the main concrete pillars of the new school were steadily rising.

"What you are doing is so special for us. We are so thankful!" Pachuau told the Maranatha delegation in December.

Mizo Conference executive secretary Rodingliana Chawngthu agreed. "I hope this is just a start; we are all so excited!"



Nelu Burcea, associate director of the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department at the General Conference, speaks during the Religious Liberty Summit in Kingston, Jamaica, on January 30.

PHOTO: PHILLIP CASTELL

"THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, CONSCIENCE, AND RELIGION IS NONNEGOTIABLE"

IN JAMAICA, KEYNOTE SPEAKER DISCUSSES CURRENT STATE AND CHALLENGES OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY.

DYHANN BUDDOO-FLETCHER AND INTER-AMERICAN DIVISION NEWS

Seventh-day Adventist religious liberty leaders plead for the church to uphold and advocate for religious freedom, particularly for those facing persecution, during the Jamaica Union Religious Liberty Summit in Kingston, Jamaica, on January 30.

Nelu Burcea, associate director of the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, warned the attendees that the time for comfort is over. "We cannot turn a blind eye to the suffering of millions of individuals around the world who are persecuted for simply holding a belief. The right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion is nonnegotiable. It is a fundamental human right that must be upheld by all, without exception," Burcea said.

The January 30 event brought together leaders from government, religious institutions, the private and public sectors, the media, and the legal fraternity under the theme "Fostering Unity: Respecting Beliefs."

As the keynote speaker, Burcea urged all sectors of society to protect religious freedom through political advocacy, social engagement, and support for organizations dedicated to this cause.

THE RISING THREAT TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Highlighting the growing threat to religious freedom, Burcea explained that "violent assaults on religious freedom manifest in various forms, including hate speech, intolerance, discrimination, lack of equal opportunities, stereotyping, and outright violence. These injustices impact not only individuals but entire communities and nations."

He pointed out that religious minorities worldwide face escalating threats, especially in areas where they are outnumbered. "In some cases these groups become targets of military operations, forced conversions, destruction of religious sites, and other forms of persecution. Whether Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, Buddhist, or belonging to other faiths, religious minorities frequently encounter restrictions on their rights and freedoms."

RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM, MARGINALIZATION OF MINORITIES, AND SECULARISM

Burcea also warned against the rise of religious nationalism, which fosters exclusion and hostility toward those of different faiths. "Governments may implement laws or encourage practices that privilege one religion over others, undermining the pluralistic traditions of many societies," he said.

He further argued that this marginalization often extends beyond societal prejudice, translating into national policies that discriminate against minority groups, leaving them without the protection or freedom to practice their faith openly.

"The rise of religious nationalism not only threatens the stability of societies but also threatens the ideals of democracy, human dignity, and freedom upon which the modern world is built," he said.

Burcea also addressed concerns about secularism's growing influence. "While secularism aims to protect freedoms, it can create an environment where religious expression is restricted, challenging the fundamental right to religious freedom," he explained, citing bans on religious attire and limitations on religious ceremonies in public spaces.

HATE SPEECH AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

The spread of hate speech, mainly through social media, has worsened religious intolerance. "The absence of effective legal protections against hate speech fuels discrimination and violence," he noted.

Religious intolerance, Burcea warned, leads to discrimination and, in extreme cases, incites violence. "Negative portrayals of religious groups reinforce division and marginalization," he said, add-

ing that such rhetoric can escalate into direct persecution.

AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES, THE DEATH PENALTY, AND RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION

Under authoritarian rule, religious freedom is often suppressed to maintain control. "Any expression of faith that does not align with state ideology is viewed as a threat," Burcea said. "Religious groups that stand against government policies may face arrest, torture, or even execution."

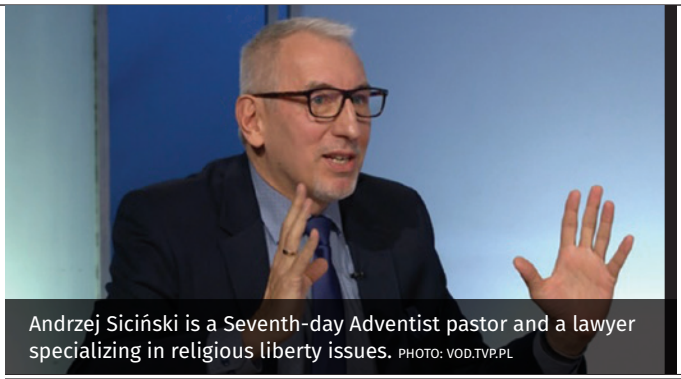
In some nations the death penalty is used to suppress religious beliefs. "Individuals have been sentenced to death for apostasy, blasphemy, or other religious offenses. This is a grave human rights violation that demands global opposition," he said.

Burcea also established that religious persecution has significant economic and social consequences.

"Religious minorities often face barriers to education, employment, and health care, deepening their marginalization. Economic exclusion perpetuates cycles of poverty and social instability, making it difficult for these communities to thrive," he said.

BUILDING A FUTURE OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

In closing, Burcea deepened his call for unity in defending religious freedom. "True peace and stability come not from eliminating differences but from recognizing the dignity and rights of every individual. Societies must work toward fostering environments where people can worship freely, express their beliefs openly, and live without fear of persecution. Only through tolerance, understanding, and mutual respect can we ensure religious freedom for all."



Andrzej Siciński is a Seventh-day Adventist pastor and a lawyer specializing in religious liberty issues. PHOTO: VOD.TVP.PL

ADVENTIST PASTOR BECOMES A REGULAR GUEST ON TV SHOW IN POLAND

HE'S BEEN FEATURED 26 TIMES ON THE POPULAR *A CASE FOR A REPORTER.*

DANIEL KLUSKA, POLISH UNION CONFERENCE

Since August 2023 one of Polish Television's most popular programs, *A Case for a Reporter,* has regularly featured Andrzej Siciński, a pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

For more than four decades the program, hosted by legendary Polish journalist Elzbieta Jaworowicz, has been helping people in difficult life situations, spotlighting experts in various fields. Siciński's presence on the program shows a change in public television's approach to diversity of faiths and opinions, experts said.

After the very first episode featuring Siciński, the program's producers recognized that as a clergyman and religious liberty lawyer, the pastor would be a valuable commentator. Although it was initially intended to be a one-time appearance, further invitations soon came.

Siciński is often the only clergyman in the episode, and if he is accompanied by others, they are usually Catholic priests. The programs are recorded, and experts are given extensive material to analyze beforehand. He said that as a clergyman, he tries to reconcile the feuding parties, comfort the aggrieved, and appeal for help for those in need. His commentaries are usually short and dynamic, adapted on the fly to the course of the discussion in the studio.

The program deals mainly with family conflicts, legal disputes, or people who need expensive medical treatment. One of the most poignant stories was the tragedy of a man who lost his wife during childbirth. The surviving child was born with severe disabilities. Siciński referred to the spiritual significance of the situation, suggesting that it could be a call to holiness by sacrificing himself for his children. His words moved the entire studio.

Another example was the case of the We Are Bethany association, which fought for funds to renovate a building for adults with disabilities. He used the symbolism of the biblical Bethany, which also evoked strong emotions among the program's participants.

Each episode in which Siciński participated in is archived. So far, he has taken part in 26 recordings, but there have been many more invitations. Though he doesn't seek personal recognition, he is keen to ensure that the Adventist Church is viewed positively in Poland. He admits that he prays for wisdom before each recording, since his main goal is to bring spiritual support to the program's participants and leave a good impression. In his own words, he would like the name of his church to be associated with viewers in a positive way: "Just that, and yet so much."



Leaders, dignitaries, and stakeholders of the Adventist University of the Philippines take part in the groundbreaking ceremony of the future medical center on January 31.
PHOTO: ADVENTIST UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES

LEADERS HOLD GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY FOR TEACHING HOSPITAL IN THE PHILIPPINES

IT WILL BE THE FIRST ADVENTIST INSTITUTION OF ITS KIND IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION, THEY SAID.

CHARISSA UY, ADVENTIST UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES, SOUTHERN ASIA-PACIFIC DIVISION, AND *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

"This is a place where faith and vision converge," said Adventist University of the Philippines (AUP) president Arceli Rosario in her commitment message during the groundbreaking ceremony of the AUP medical center on January 31. On that day, AUP marked a significant milestone as it officially broke ground for its long-anticipated teaching hospital, the first for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the region.

In celebration of its 108th founding anniversary under the theme "God Is Limitless," the event gathered university administrators, faculty, and staff; College of Medicine (COM) students; AUP health services personnel; and invited dignitaries, with approximately 200 attendees present to witness the occasion. The project is the culmination of a long-held vision shared by the previous presidents of the university, leaders said.

PURPOSE AND VISION

The event started with words of inspiration and encouragement from the administrators, emphasizing the hospital's significance in strengthening AUP's vision of integrating faith, education, and health care.

AUP health services director Elmer Valenzona referred to the project as "our shared commitment in serving humanity."

Doris Mendoza, dean of the AUP College of Medicine, reflected on the institution's long-standing vision, tracing its roots back to the 1950s, its realization in 2015, and its first operational year in 2016. "AUP is the sixth Adventist medical school, and during the pandemic the seventh was established in Rwanda," she shared. Emphasizing the significance of the project, she stated that the teaching hospital would be "the first and only Adventist teaching hospital in the country," fulfilling the Commission on Higher Education's requirements for medical schools.

Edward Carranza, municipal mayor of Silang, said he admired AUP's progress. "As we break ground, look how far we have come," he stated, adding that "the government of Silang supports AUP," as he lauded the institution for its lasting impact on the community.

Teodoro Herbosa, secretary of the Department of Health and former professor at AUP COM, highlighted the need for more health-care facilities in the country, emphasizing the "need to triple our hospital beds." He recognized the initiative as "a foundation of hope and mission" and assured his support, promising to help fulfill the hospital's mission. "This is constructing not only a building but a sanctuary of mission," he said.

Rosario shared some words of commitment. "I do not speak for myself alone. I speak for the board and all the stakeholders of the university," she said. "And I believe [in this project] with all my heart." Rosario reassured those involved in the project that support strengthens her resolve while challenges "keep me on my knees. . . . We are not able, but God is able."

A BEACON OF HOPE

Establishing the teaching hospital marks a pivotal step in addressing the increasing demand for an integrated medical education and health-care system, leaders behind the project said. "This facility will serve as an excellent training ground not just for future doctors but for physician missionaries, equipping medical students with essential hands-on clinical experience," they explained.

Beyond medical education, the teaching hospital is set to serve as a beacon of hope for the surrounding communities, they added. "Committing to high-quality and accessible health-care services, it aims to bridge gaps in medical care, particularly for underserved populations," they said.



Regional Adventist leaders inaugurate the Ellen G. White Research Center at Asia-Pacific International University in Muak Lek, Thailand, February 21.

PHOTO: ASIA-PACIFIC INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY FACEBOOK

LEADERS INAUGURATE ELLEN G. WHITE RESEARCH CENTER IN THAILAND

NEW RESOURCE IS LOCATED AT ASIA-PACIFIC INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY LIBRARY.

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

Asia-Pacific International University (AIU) in Muak Lek, Thailand, celebrated a significant milestone with the grand opening of its new Ellen G. White Research Center on February 21. Located on the third floor of the AIU Library, the center aims to preserve and promote the extensive writings and historical contributions of Ellen G. White, regional leaders said.

The inauguration ceremony featured a keynote address by Merlin D. Burt, director of the Ellen G. White Estate at the General Conference (GC). Burt emphasized the center's role in enhancing engagement with White's prophetic ministry, particularly within Southeast Asia. He expressed gratitude for the Southern Asia-Pacific Division's (SSD) support. "I commend SSD's deep understanding and appreciation for the Spirit of Prophecy. We fervently pray for God's blessings upon this center as we progress together," he said.

This research center is the result of a collaborative effort between the GC, SSD, the Southeastern Asia Union Mission (SEUM), and AIU. It stands as a testament to six years of planning and prayers, demonstrating the commitment of church leaders to providing greater access to White's writings in this region, leaders said.

One of the highlights of the event was Burt's formal handing over of two original letters written by Ellen G. White and a duplicate edition of the 1822 family Bible, now entrusted to the research center. The occasion also saw the signing of a memorandum of agreement, symbolizing the ongoing collaboration between the participating institutions.

Guests included Tim Poirier, vice director of the Ellen G. White Estate; Roger Caderma, SSD president; Edgar Bryan Tolentino, SSD director of Adventist Heritage and Spirit of Prophecy; Donny Chrissutianto, director of the Ellen G. White Estate Branch at Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIIAS); and others. Numerous special invitees and esteemed guests from neighboring missions and affiliated organizations also attended.

The establishment of this research center marks the nineteenth globally and the third in Asia, underscoring its significance in a region with limited access to such resources, leaders explained. The initiative was first proposed during the 2024 General Conference Spring Meeting, in which the Ellen G. White Estate Board recommended its creation at AIU to make White's extensive works more accessible to churches in Southeast Asia and neighboring areas.

Mahaingam Varah is the founding director of the new center. He was instrumental in the establishment of the first division research center in the SSD territory, playing a key role in advancing the mission of Spirit of Prophecy research in the region. The EGW Research Center in AIU follows in the footsteps of AIIAS in the Philippines, which upgraded its facility to an official Ellen G. White Branch Office in 2014.

In conjunction with the inauguration, a symposium sought to deepen an understanding of Ellen G. White's writings and the heritage of the Adventist Church. Sessions took place on February 21 and 22 at the Church Fellowship Hall, featuring presentations by Burt entitled "The History and Purpose of the Ellen G. White Estate."

The Ellen G. White Research Center at AIU is dedicated to safeguarding and fostering a deeper appreciation of White's contributions, serving as a vital resource for scholars, students, and church members, regional church leaders emphasized. "It stands as a testament to the enduring legacy of Ellen G. White and her impact on the Adventist faith," they said.



On February 2 hundreds hold their certificates during a special ceremony celebrating the completion of literacy courses led by ADRA El Salvador.
PHOTO: ADRA EL SALVADOR

MORE THAN 1,000 ADULTS GRADUATE FROM ADRA'S LITERACY PROGRAM IN EL SALVADOR

INITIATIVE HELPS ADULTS ACQUIRE READING AND WRITING SKILLS, FOSTERING HOPE, LEADERS SAY.

FABRICIO RIVERA AND LIBNA STEVENS, INTER-AMERICAN DIVISION, AND *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

Regional Seventh-day Adventist church and humanitarian leaders recently celebrated the 1,008 adults who completed a literacy program organized by the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) in El Salvador. A special graduation ceremony, held at the Adventist Training School in San Juan Opico, Libertad, saw graduates—mostly older adults—beaming with pride as they received their certificates for mastering reading and writing skills.

Government and church officials attended the February 2 ceremony, along with the graduates' families and local church leaders, who gathered to honor the students' achievement.

"This is a clear example that education has no age," said Oscar Omar Bonilla of the Ministry of Education in El Salvador. "Today we celebrate not only the completion of studies but also the perseverance and determination of each one of you to improve your lives." Bonilla further acknowledged ADRA's unique contribution to education in El Salvador, noting that no other institution provides literacy programs for older adults.

A LONG-STANDING COMMITMENT TO LITERACY

In partnership with the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MINEDUCTYT), ADRA El Salvador has been running literacy programs across 12 departments of the country for more than 15 years. The initiative has grown with support from the Seventh-day Adventist Church, local municipalities, and community organizations, explained Alex Figueroa, ADRA El Salvador's director.

"Our commitment to eliminating illiteracy in El Salvador remains strong," Figueroa said. "We're dedicated to giving both young and old the opportunity to discover their potential through education."

ADDRESSING ILLITERACY

According to the 2024 census, 9.4 percent of El Salvador's population remains illiterate—a decrease from 16 percent in 2007, but still a significant concern. "While the literacy rate is improving, more work remains to be done," said Figueroa, highlighting that more than 400,000 people age 10 and older are still unable to read or write.

The program has proved to be effective, as 144 of this year's graduates reached high school-level reading proficiency, with many others completing the equivalent of first- through sixth-grade levels.

"We will continue to partner with the government and education ministries to extend this program to more communities and empower even more Salvadorans," Figueroa added. This year's goal is to reach an additional 1,000 individuals.

A NEW BEGINNING FOR MANY

For many participants the literacy program has opened new doors. "It's never too late to learn," said Elvira García, one of the graduates. "I always saw others reading the Bible, and I wanted to be able to understand it for myself. Now I can read and study it on my own, and it has given me a whole new perspective on life."

Francisco Ramírez, a volunteer teacher from Texacuangos in the San Salvador department, expressed his deep passion for the program. "Seeing the growth of my students has been the most rewarding experience of my life," he said.

David Poloche, director of ADRA Inter-America, praised the ADRA El Salvador team for their unwavering commitment to improving lives. "This literacy program has left a lasting impact, not just through education but also through the values of excellence, integrity, and the teachings of Jesus," Poloche said. "As you continue on your life journey, think about the legacy you can leave behind by helping others improve."



A Turkana woman is baptized after evangelistic meetings in that area of Kenya. PHOTO: MAUREEN WERE

CHURCH AND AWR PARTNER TO OFFER HOPE IN KENYA'S ARID AREA

THE ADVENTIST-DRIVEN INITIATIVE IS "A LIFELINE IN THE DESERT," LEADERS SAY.

MAUREEN WERE, WEST KENYA UNION CONFERENCE, FOR *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

The West Kenya Union Conference (WKUC), in partnership with Adventist World Radio (AWR) and Hope Channel Kenya, recently concluded its Lipo Tumaini outreach and evangelistic initiative in the region.

It was a transformative initiative aimed at addressing both the physical and spiritual needs of the people in Turkana, regional church leaders said. "This campaign made significant strides, encompassing various efforts, including food distribution, baptisms, and the establishment of a borehole in Napeikar," they shared. "These initiatives have left a lasting impact on the region, bringing immediate relief and long-term hope."

On February 7 Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Kenya, in collaboration with WKUC, organized a food distribution event for the communities of Nabuin and Nawoitorong in Turkana. This initiative provided critical support to families grappling with food insecurity in a region where survival is often a daily challenge. The harsh, arid terrain of Turkana, characterized by dry savannahs and rocky hills, has long made access to basic resources difficult. The food delivered during the campaign brought essential sustenance to many and alleviated some of the hardships faced by local families.

The relief efforts were spearheaded by WKUC president Samuel Misiani. Contributions from conferences and fields within the territory played a vital role in collecting the funds needed.

While addressing physical needs was a key priority, the spiritual impact of the Lipo Tumaini campaign was equally significant. A powerful net evangelism event culminated in the baptism of 484 individuals, regional church leaders reported.

"This mass baptism serves as a powerful testament to the profound spiritual hunger within the community and their unwavering commitment to a renewed life of faith," Misiani said. He added, "At one of the satellite sites where I was preaching, our services would begin at 9:00 in the evening and often stretch past midnight. Despite the long distances they had to travel to graze their goats and search for food, the people would still find time to gather, sitting late into the night to listen to the Word."

North Rift Valley Field (NRVF) leaders were present to celebrate this important occasion, underscoring the significance of addressing both the physical and spiritual well-being of the people. "We are happy with the decision of WKUC to bring this campaign here. Because of the harsh, arid terrain of Turkana, many people fear coming here, but the WKUC president, guest speakers, and the media team braved it. It has been a great harvest, and we still have hope that many people from this region will give their lives to Christ," NRVF president Jackson Soet said.

Another major accomplishment of the campaign was the launch of a borehole in Napeikar, addressing the chronic water scarcity that has long plagued the Turkana people. The borehole will provide a reliable source of water, reducing the burdensome and time-consuming task of fetching water, leaders explained.

In addition to these activities, Misiani visited Lokichogio Adventist School, currently hosted by the Lokichogio Seventh-day Adventist Church. The school is in the process of relocating to a new site, with the construction of the new facility nearing completion, thanks to the generous support of a benefactor.

"Our focus is on ensuring sustainable growth, identifying opportunities for further community engagement, and laying the foundation for continued progress in this crucial area of ministry," Misiani said.



WEB RADIO TRAINING EQUIPS MEDIA LEADERS IN SEVEN AFRICAN LANGUAGES. A training program aimed at equipping web radio station managers and producers, held February 4-6, concluded in Accra, Ghana. The initiative, organized by the West-Central Africa Division, brought together 18 participants from seven African nations to prepare for the launch of internet radio stations in their respective languages. Gideon Pelser, a digital media expert of Adventist World Radio from South Africa, led the training, focused on the future of radio in the digital age.



FIRST WOMEN'S CONGRESS IN NEPAL UNITES ADVENTIST WOMEN. More than 215 women from 44 churches across Nepal attended the first-ever women's congress, which took place in Banepa City, near Kathmandu, Nepal, February 7-9. The theme, "Reflecting Beauty: We Are Daughters of God," resonated deeply with the women. The event emphasized key aspects of a fulfilling Christian life, including putting God first, daily Bible study and prayer, healthy living, positive thinking, trust in God, building strong relationships, and soul-winning efforts.



CUBAN RESIDENTS IN RUSSIA BECOME SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS. The Fakel congregation of the Moscow Conference celebrated the baptism of four Cuban residents on February 8. Two years ago the first Cuban family appeared in that congregation. As more countrymen followed, a Cuban Bible study class was organized. The firstfruit of this ministry was the baptism of a young woman, Marbelize, in December 2024. After her baptism Vladimir Kotov, the local church pastor, made a call to study Scripture and prepare for baptism. Five people responded to the appeal.



IN BELARUS, YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENT LAUNCHES "ONE TEAM." More than 150 participants from different communities in Belarus were able to apply knowledge to their current experience and be inspired to serve in a circle of like-minded people February 13-16. Seminars covered such topics as spiritual growth, digital evangelism, Christian leadership, and others. Speakers challenged youth leaders to help other young people not to live by emotional impulses and feelings, but rather to build their faith on the solid foundation of God's Word.

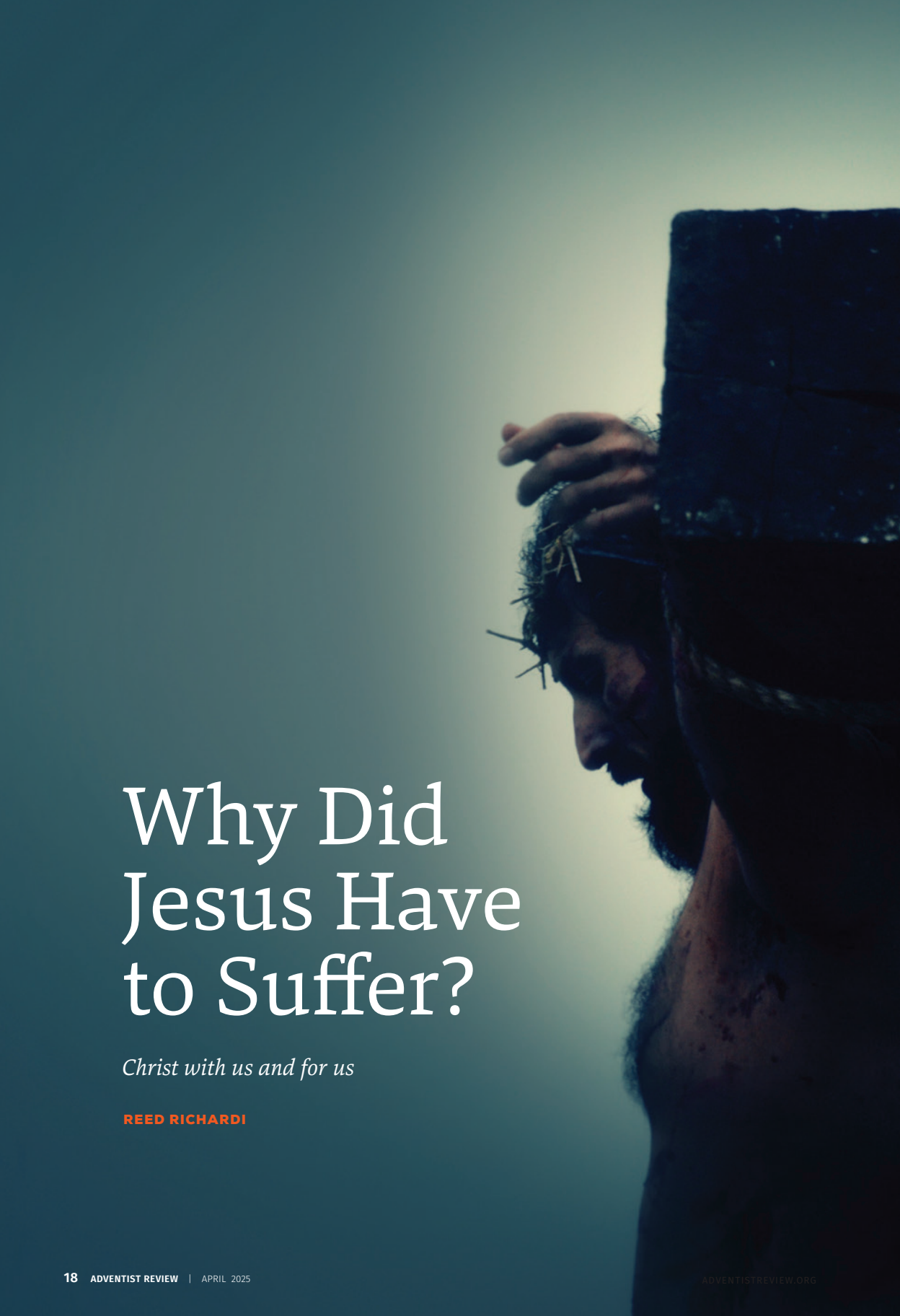


ADVENTISTS EXPAND PRESENCE IN THE METAVERSE. During the 10 Days of Prayer the Adventist Church in Brazil expanded its presence in the digital world by reaching out to people on different platforms. The event took place from February 13 to 22, and the metaverse became an important platform to share biblical topics during the daily digital evening meetings. Using the Meta platform allowed participants from around the world to connect and participate in online meetings, content exhibitions, exchanges, and gamification, all within an immersive experience.



TEN THOUSAND PATHFINDERS ACROSS THE SOUTHERN ASIA-PACIFIC DIVISION GATHER FOR THE CAMPOREE. On February 23, thousands of Pathfinders gathered at Mountain View College in the Philippines for the Pathfinder Camporee. The event aimed to deepen the spiritual commitment of young Adventists by encouraging regular communion with God. Pathfinder delegations from 11 countries—the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia—marched in uniforms, carrying their national flags as they assembled for the opening program.

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Why Did Jesus Have to Suffer?

Christ with us and for us

REED RICHARDI



I have never cried so much in my life. I was a junior in college, and I was eating breakfast before heading out the door to class. That's when my mom called. Right away I felt a sense of dread; lately she seemed to call only with bad news. She told me that the night before, my 17-year-old stepbrother John[1] had waited until his coworkers were gone from the restaurant, then stabbed his boss to death. He was being held in the county jail on capital murder charges.

I didn't cry right then. I was in shock and still had a test to take. But later that day after the busyness was over, and I was sitting on the couch in my apartment, my emotions caught up with me. That's when I sobbed. First, I cried for John and for his boss's family, then for my family, and then for me. And for the first time in my life I found myself asking the question Why me? I looked back on my life—on a string of problems—and my self-pity told me it wasn't fair. I didn't deserve this. I thought of my roommate: Why did he have it so good? Why me?

WHY JESUS?

I now realize that I was asking the wrong question.

Many times in our lives when we face suffering, we are tempted to ask the question Why me? But I don't think that's the right question. It is a question filled with doubt and self-pity.

I want to challenge us to ask a better question—a question that should change the way we think about suffering. *Why Jesus?* Why did Jesus have to suffer? Now, I am not asking, "Why did Jesus have to die?" That's a different sort of question. I know that Jesus had to die to pay the penalty for my sins. But why did He have to suffer? Why couldn't He have lived a comfortable life, then died peacefully in His sleep at the end?

POOR AND HOMELESS

Why was Jesus a poor man? Why did the One who dwelt in the courts of heaven have to be homeless? Why wasn't He given the privilege that even foxes and birds have? Why did He have to be dependent upon the charity of others simply so He could eat?

Was it for the 700 million people who live in extreme poverty, earning less than $2.15 a day?[2] Was it for the 108 million people (including approximately 43 million children) who have been forcibly displaced from their homes and are living as refugees?[3]

HEARTBROKEN AND ALONE

Why was Jesus left alone? When His heart was breaking, when He longed for sympathy from His friends, why was He left alone in the garden? Why after pleading with them three times did they still not understand His sorrow?

Was it for the sake of those who endure dark loneliness? Was it for those who long for a friend to understand their pain? Was it for the sake of those lives that are filled with unnoticed tears?

PHOTO: LIGHTSTOCK / JOURNEY BOX MEDIA

BETRAYED

Why was Jesus handed over by someone so close? Why was He sold for 30 pieces of silver? Weren't His years of friendship worth so much more than that? Why did Judas have to use a kiss to announce his betrayal? Why did they run? Why was Jesus left by Himself to face the hatred and cruelty?

Was it for the sake of those who know the stinging truth that the closer someone is, the more they have the ability to hurt you? Was it for those hearts that have been broken, who can no longer trust? Was He betrayed for the sake of those who can no longer let someone close, because they are certain they will be hurt again?

ABUSED

Why did He suffer abuse by religious leaders? Was it for the tens of thousands who have been violated by a priest, pastor, elder, or deacon? Why did they hurl their words at Him like weapons? Why was the One whose name causes angels to bow in awesome reverence called a demon and a liar? Why was His face spit upon with laughter? Why was He blindfolded and slapped, robed and crowned? Why did they have to bow down with such cruelty? Why did they yell for Him to come down from the cross? Why was the thief so vulgar?

Did He do it for the outcasts? Was it for the ones whose names are used as punch lines? Was it for the nearly half of all women and men who have experienced psychological aggression from an intimate partner?[4] Did He endure their cruelty for the sake of those who are daily made to feel worthless? Did He suffer for those who must walk on eggshells so that they won't be belittled, degraded, rejected, isolated, or exploited? Was it for those who bear the heartache of living with someone who makes no attempt to understand them and refuses to take responsibility for how they hurt others? Was it for these that Jesus faced the abuse?

TORTURED

Why was Jesus tortured? Why was He deprived of food, water, and sleep in His most trying hour? Why was His face unrecognizable after so many fists? Why were the thorns pushed down so hard? Why did the metal teeth of the flagrum have to dig so deep into His flesh only to be ripped out so violently? Why couldn't the callous Roman stop after His back was already shredded? Why did it have to be crucifixion? Why did the nails have to smash through the nerves in His wrists? Why did every agony-filled breath have to tear His wrists and feet even more?

Was His body wracked with pain for the sake of those who are afflicted with arthritis or bone cancer? Was it for the ones whose pain is a daily reminder of accident or sickness? Was it for the ones who can't even escape their chronic pain through sleep? for those who are kept awake at night by each wincing throb? Was it for these that Jesus felt the nails?

TEMPTED

Why was Jesus, at the height of His agony, tempted to numb His pain with an intoxicating drink?

Was it for those who just can't handle reality any longer, who are desperate to find even temporary relief from the pain of this world? Was it for the sake of every alcoholic, every meth and opioid addict, sex addict, food addict, or every workaholic? Was He tempted for the sake of those who, though seeking refuge from the world, are enslaved by it?

HUMILIATED

Why was the incarnate God humiliated? Why was He stripped naked in public, exposed and vulnerable in front of those cold, laughing eyes?

Was it for the one in three women[5] and one in six men[6] who have felt the confusing betrayal and guilt of sexual abuse? Was it for the more than 1 billion survivors of sexual abuse who feel trapped in a world of helpless shame and vulnerability? Was it for these that He hung naked?

CUT OFF

"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46). Why? Why was heaven silent? Why was He, at the time of His greatest need, cut off by the One He loved the most?

Was it for those who cry out with prayers and are answered in silence? Was it for the guilty sinner who feels that they have gone too far? Was it for the sinner who feels God is cold and distant but longs for reconciliation?

GRIEVED

Why did God have to feel the aching separation that death brings?

Was it for those who have lost someone to cancer? Was it for the ones who watched helplessly as the last ounce of strength and life slowly drained out of their beloved? Was it for them that God felt the separation? Was it for the families of the ones who never made it to the hospital or for parents who outlive their children? Was it for them?

Was it for those who are facing death, afraid to let go, as their life is slipping out of their fingers?

In that cup that made Christ tremble, not a single ingredient that has ever made humanity's cup bitter was left out.

WHY DID JESUS SUFFER SO?

"Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren" (Heb. 2:17).

"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are" (Heb. 4:15).

In all things made like His brethren.

In all points tempted.

In that cup that made Christ tremble, not a single ingredient that has ever made humanity's cup bitter was left out. Not one kind of misery or distress, not one kind of burden, no amount of anguish that can weigh down and wear out a human heart, was missing. He tasted it all.

Whether quiet tears or screaming agony, He drank it all. You and I have to taste only our own suffering, our nerves feel only our own pain. We have only a single drop given to us, but Christ drank the whole cup of human suffering.

"Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17).

He had to be made like His brethren.

JESUS CHOSE TO SUFFER WITH AND FOR US

Jesus was made to suffer in a very different sense from how we are made to suffer. We are made to suffer because we don't have any choice in the matter. But when Jesus was made to suffer, He was not compelled by force or circumstance, but was compelled by love. It was a necessity of mercy.

Christ suffered willingly. He was innocent. He did not deserve suffering, but as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.

Yet we, guilty sinners, cry out, "Why me?"

Unlike us, Christ's temptation was voluntary. Unlike us, Christ was continually tempted to abandon His suffering. Each and every time He suffered, it was an act of His free will. He could have turned the stones into bread, but He chose hunger. He could have called 10,000 angels in the garden, but He chose to be handed over to the mob. He could have come down off the cross, but He chose the agony.

WHY DID HE SUBJECT HIMSELF TO SUFFERING?

Why? Why did He do it?

"For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted" (Heb. 2:18).

"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Heb. 4:15).

A literal translation of sympathize would be "suffer together with."

God has suffered together with us. He has chosen to step into our pain. Because of this, we can find mercy, healing, strength to fight temptation, and much more.

In Hebrews the ideas of suffering and temptation are closely connected. Often when our suffering is the greatest, our temptation is as well. Consider Job. Consider Jesus on the cross. But when we are in the midst of suffering, what is it that we are tempted to?

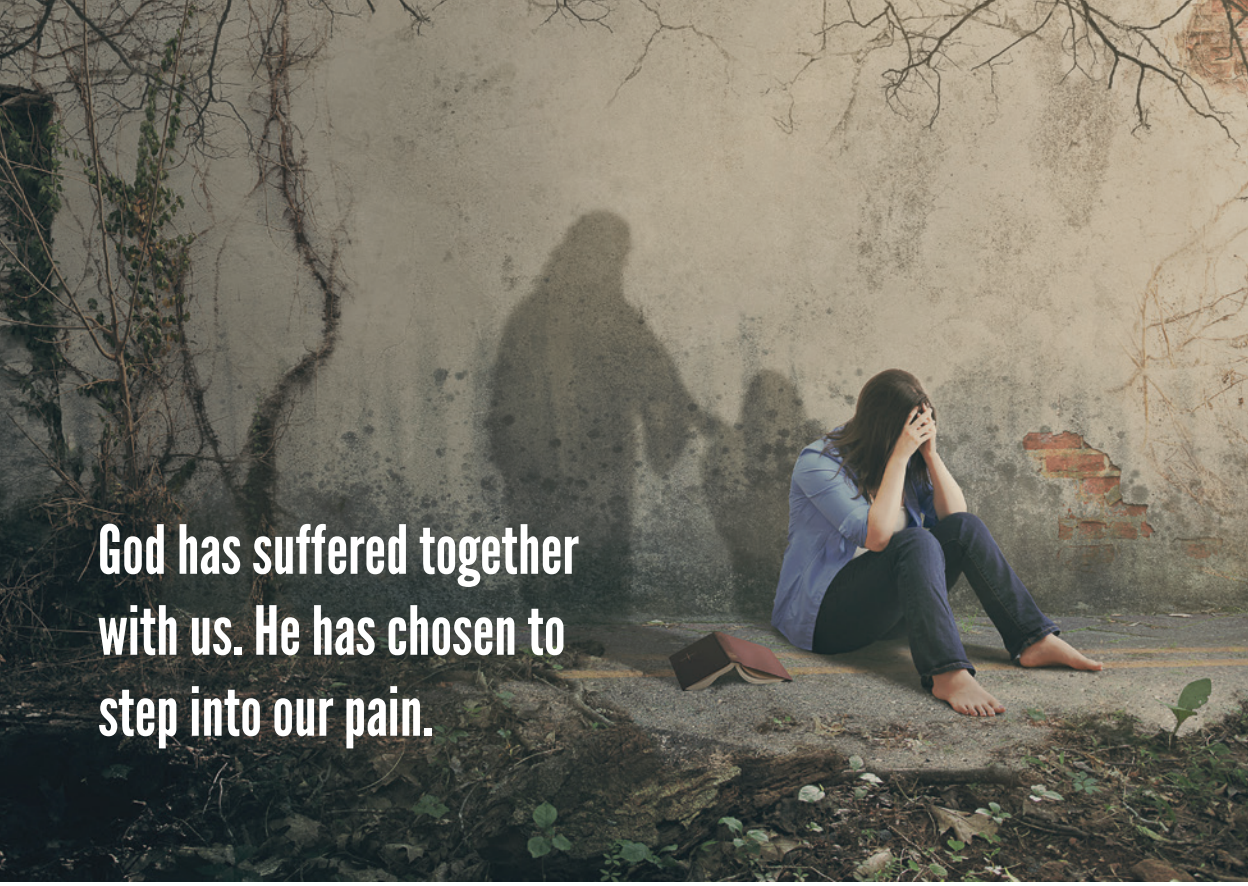
We are tempted to self-pity.

We are tempted to bitterness.

And we are tempted to distrust God.

BECAUSE OF HIM

Because God has suffered together with us, we can be freed from self-pity, which asks, "Why me?" We can understand that the better question is: Why Jesus?



Because God has suffered together with us, we can be freed from the silent bitterness that eats away at our hearts. We can let go of the need to blame others, recognizing that it is actually God who has been the most unfairly treated.

Because God has suffered together with us, we can learn to trust Him. No longer do we blame or question God for hurting us, but now we praise God for hurting *with* us.

Because God has suffered together with us, we can trust Him to give us mercy and healing. We can trust that because He knows our pain, He will not turn us away. We can trust that we will find in Him one who truly understands. In His stripes we can find healing.

"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

When we hurt, when our hearts are in anguish and our bodies are broken, we long to be comforted by those who understand, by those who have felt their own pain and can sympathize with ours. In fact, we are often reluctant to talk to someone whose life has been sheltered and protected from the storms we face.

But Jesus has felt not only pain, He has felt *our* pain. So the Scripture tells us to come boldly to the throne of grace in our time of need, and there we will find mercy from a God who is not only all-loving but also all-feeling.

So the next time you are lied to or laughed at, the next time the pain seems unbearable or your heart is weighed down, go to the throne of grace. Tell God how you feel and ask Him if He has ever felt that way. Then listen, and find grace to help in your time of need.

[1] Not his real name.

[2] World Bank, "Poverty Overview," last modified Oct.15, 2024, https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview.

[3] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Global Trends Report 2022, https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2022.

[4] Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey*, https://www.cdc.gov/nisvs/documentation/NISVSReportonIPV_2022.pdf.

[5] World Health Organization (WHO), "Child Maltreatment," https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/child-maltreatment.

[6] "The 1 in 6 Statistic," https://1in6.org/statistic/.

Reed Richardi is a pastor and church planter currently serving as the lead pastor of the New Market Seventh-day Adventist Church on the campus of Shenandoah Valley Academy. He recently authored the book *The Way of Jesus: A Guide for Disciples.*

PHOTO: LIGHTSTOCK / KEVINCARDEN

UŠMOR NFŠKĀ M'OD

Keep your soul

Just before the children of Israel were, after some delay (40 years), to enter into the Promised Land, Moses gave a series of speeches that, in essence, told them to remember God's grace in their lives and to live faithfully and obediently under the covenant that God had "cut" (Hebrew *kārat*) with them.

In Deuteronomy 4, Moses reminds the Hebrews of the "statutes and judgments" (Deut. 4:5) that the Lord had given them, and that their obedience to these would be their "wisdom and . . . understanding in the sight of the nations" (verse 6, KJV). Notice, it wasn't their possession of these statutes and judgments that made the difference, but their obedience to them.

Moses then says, "For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?" (verses 7, 8, KJV).

I can't help it, and make no apologies for not being able to, but how can we not see the principle here applying to us, today, as Seventh-day Adventists? Look at what we have been given as a people. I'm not judging anyone, but come on! The seventh-day Sabbath, established in Eden (Gen. 2:2, 3), is rejected for Sunday, a day grounded in paganism and in Roman Catholicism, and not in the Word of God. And the idea of the immortal soul, also pagan and unbiblical (Matt. 10:28), has overflowed into Christianity like a broken sewer line saturating the faith with the foolish belief that at death the righteous soul goes immediately to Jesus in heaven and, even worse, the lost are tortured for eternity in hell for whatever number of temporal sins they committed here.

And where do we even begin with all that we have been given through the Spirit of Prophecy?

Right after the Lord reminded them of what they had been privileged with, however, He cautioned them to "take heed to thyself, and *ušmor nfškā m'od,*" which means—"keep thy soul diligently" (Deut. 4:9, KJV).

Keep your soul diligently? In other words, *Yeah, sure, you have been granted special privileges, but you* [the pronoun is singular] *better, personally, make sure you guard your faith and your relationship with Me.* Ancient Israel was given light far in advance of anyone else. Wonderful. But in the end, unless that light guided them into salvation, it would condemn them instead. Which, with exceptions, is what happened (read Jesus' lament in Matthew 23:37).

Don't worry about someone else in the pew. Or what the conference might or might not have done. What about *nfška* (your soul)? How diligently do you keep your own soul, your own being, your mind? (The Hebrew word for "keep" also means "guard.") Are you feeding yourself on the Word of God, and on His truths, and applying them in your life, or are you feeding yourself on Facebook, TikTok, or all the grievances that you might, even justly, have?

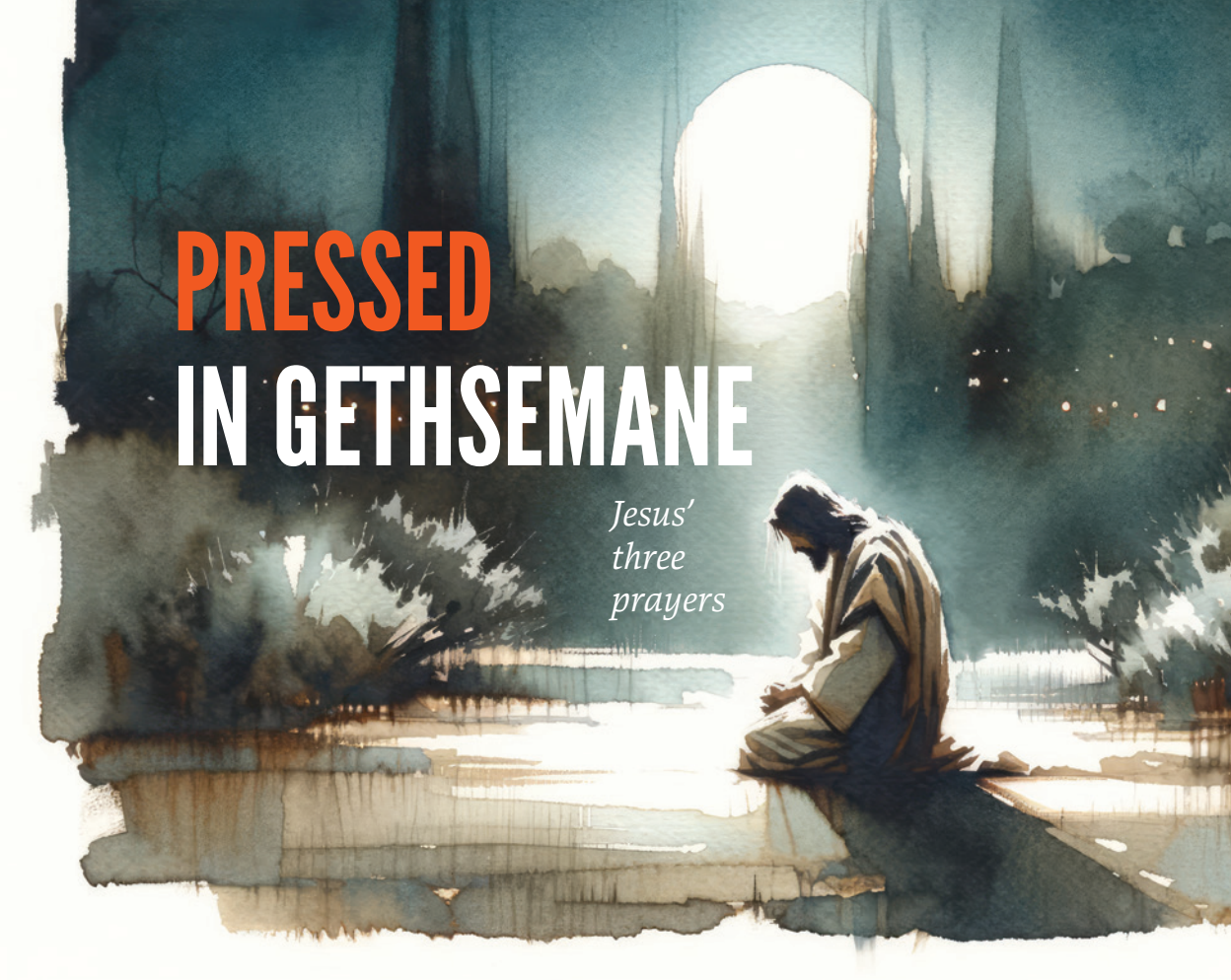
Only you know. You, and the Lord who has given you, like each ancient Israelite, so much.

CLIFF'S EDGE
CLIFFORD GOLDSTEIN



HOW DILIGENTLY DO YOU KEEP YOUR OWN SOUL, YOUR OWN BEING, YOUR MIND?

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



PRESSED IN GETHSEMANE

Jesus' three prayers

HENSLEY M. MOOROOVEN

Two years ago, along with some colleagues, I had the privilege of visiting the Holy Land. Among the many sites, we stopped at Nazareth village—a place that brings to life what daily existence in Galilee would have been like during the time of Jesus. As we walked through the village, we witnessed villagers living and working with the same clothing, pottery, tools, and methods that Mary and Jesus would have used.

Guided by a knowledgeable staff member, we were led through scenes of daily life in Galilee. We saw a shepherd carefully tending his sheep, a potter artfully shaping the wet clay on his treadle wheel, and a vineyard producing fruit, just as it did in Jesus' day. But what stood out to me most, leaving an indelible mark on my heart, was not the opportunity we were offered to seal the experience with an authentic biblical meal, but the olive press—a simple yet profound reminder of life in those days.

LESSONS FROM THE OLIVE PRESS

In this small room we saw the large mill used to crush the olives during the first phase of making olive oil. We learned that if we had visited during the harvest season, we might have witnessed a donkey walking in circles, pulling the heavy millstone to crush the olives.

After the olives are crushed, they are gathered and moved to the oil press, where their juice is extracted. The guide explained that the process involved *three* pressings, adding more weight each time to ensure all the oil was drawn out.

The first pressing yields the purest oil, which, in biblical times, was reserved for sacred purposes—lighting temple lamps, anointing priests and kings, and meal offerings.

The second pressing produced oil with medicinal virtues, used for healing and treating wounds, and alleviating pain.

The third pressing gave oil used for making soap, cleansing, and everyday purposes.



Even the pulp left after the final pressing was not wasted. It was often used for common oil lamps or making soap. Every part of the olive served a purpose.

GETHSEMANE: THE OIL PRESS OF THE SOUL

In the Garden of Gethsemane, a place whose very name means "oil press" (*gath,* meaning *pressure*; and *shemānim,* meaning *oil*), Jesus experienced the weight of crushing sorrow, much like olives pressed to release their precious oil.

The *three* pressings of the olives in the ancient process can be seen as a powerful spiritual parallel to the *three* times Jesus prayed in the garden, experiencing the crushing weight of humanity's sin, sorrow, and suffering, and the *three* times He returned to find His disciples asleep.

THE FIRST PRAYER: THE WEIGHT OF SIN

The first pressing produced the purest oil, set apart for the holiest purposes—fuel for the temple lamps and anointing oil. In the same way, Jesus, our high priest, carried the burden of our sins. As Isaiah 53:5, 6 declares: "He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."*

Jesus' first prayer reflects the agony of bearing the weight of humanity's sin, as He cried, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me" (Matt. 26:38).

THE SECOND PRAYER: THE WEIGHT OF HEALING

The second pressing produced medicinal oil, symbolizing healing and restoration. In His second prayer Jesus bore the weight of our brokenness and pain. Isaiah 53:5 reminds us: "By his wounds we are healed."

There is dual meaning here—to heal and to save. In the second crushing Jesus took upon Himself the weight of our brokenness, not only to save us from sin but also to heal us, restoring us to wholeness. Jesus' perseverance in prayer showed His determination to bear every wound, every hurt, and every broken piece of humanity.

Jesus was pressed so that we could be blessed.

THE THIRD PRAYER: THE WEIGHT OF CLEANSING

The third and final pressing produced oil used for cleansing and soapmaking. Likewise, we can look to Christ's sacrifice for our spiritual cleansing. As David prayed in Psalm 51:7: "Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow." Jesus' third prayer in Gethsemane echoes this, as He accepted the ultimate weight of the cross, ensuring that we could be made clean and pure before God through His ultimate sacrifice.

NOTHING WASTED IN GOD'S PLAN

Just as no part of the olive was wasted in the ancient pressing process, no part of Jesus' suffering was in vain. Every tear, every drop of blood, and every moment of anguish served a divine purpose. Through His suffering He provided for our redemption, healing, and cleansing.

His crushing brought forth life-giving oil that lights our spiritual lamps, heals our deepest wounds, and cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

THE BLESSING FROM THE CRUSHING

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus faced the crushing weight of sin, sorrow, and separation from the Father. Yet, through His obedience and surrender, He turned the crushing into an eternal blessing for humanity.

The apostle Paul captures this beautifully in 2 Corinthians 4:8, 9: "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."

Jesus was pressed so that we could be blessed. His crushing produced the oil of salvation, healing, and cleansing for all who believe.

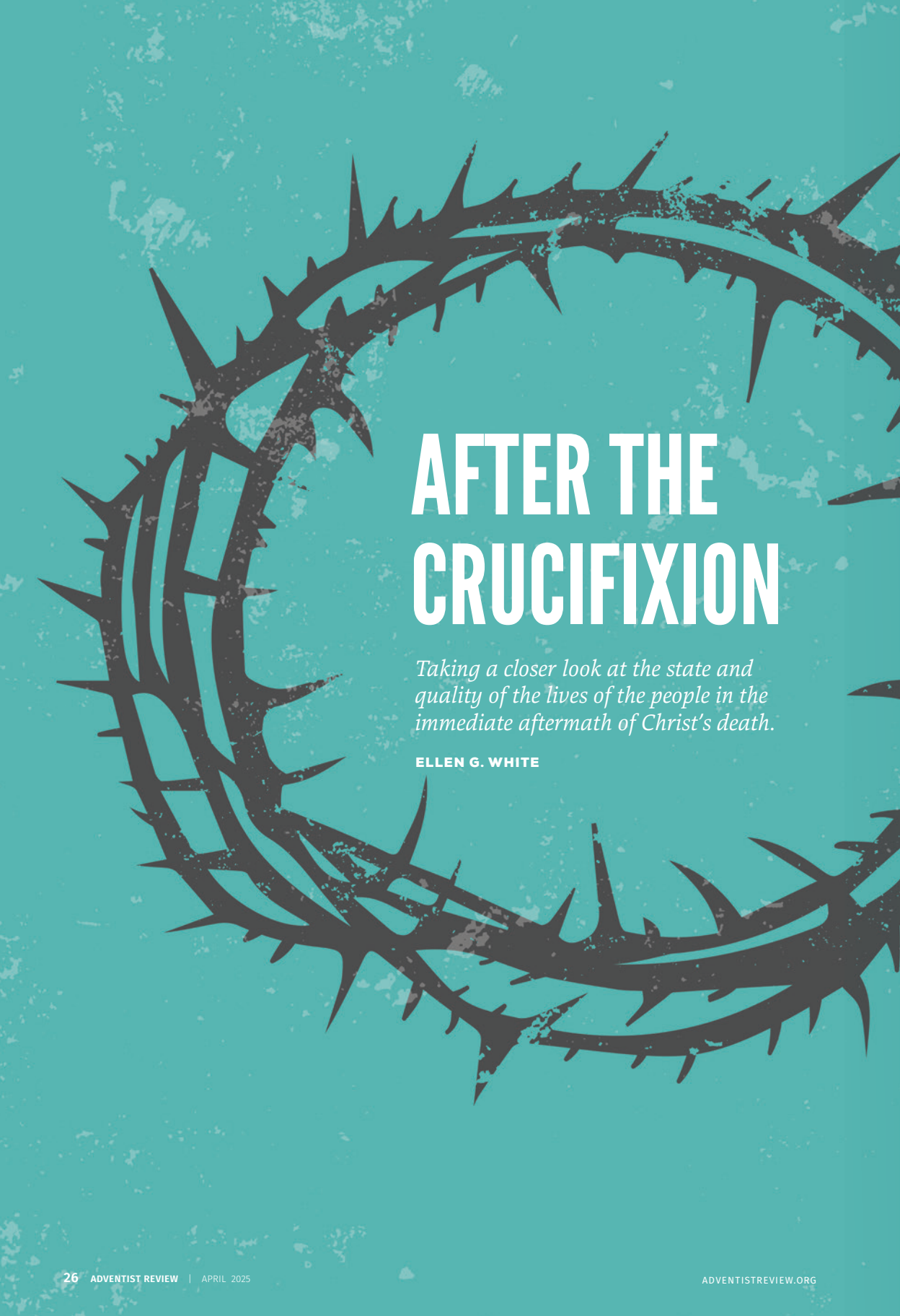
May we never forget the lesson of Gethsemane—that the most valuable oil flows only through the crushing. The olive is good, but the oil is better. The Savior was crushed, but the blessing He produced is eternal.

He was pressed so that we can be blessed. By His pressing, we receive His blessings. Amen!

* Biblical quotations are from the New International Version.

Hensley M. Moorooven is undersecretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

PHOTO: LIGHTSTOCK / ONTHEROAD



AFTER THE CRUCIFIXION

Taking a closer look at the state and quality of the lives of the people in the immediate aftermath of Christ's death.

ELLEN G. WHITE



LO, IN THE GRAVE HE LAY!

Christ was crucified. The Prince of life had been taken by wicked hands and slain. In His spotless purity He has been killed as a disturber of the peace. He was lying in Joseph's new tomb. Christ descended into the grave as our sin-bearer, opening a grave for the sins of all who will accept Him as their personal Saviour.

The night following the crucifixion was the darkest night the church had ever known. But the redemption price for a fallen world had been paid; the sacrifice for sin had been offered. All heaven was triumphant.

At the setting of the sun on the evening of the preparation day, trumpets sounded, signifying that the Sabbath had begun. The next day the courts of the temple were filled with worshipers. The high priest for Golgotha was there, splendidly robed in his sacerdotal garments. White-turbaned priests, full of busy activity, were preparing to perform their duties. The ceremonies of the Passover moved on with the usual routine. But the imposing dress of the high priest covered a heart that needed the molding of the Spirit of God. The ostentatious and ceremonious rites of the Jewish religion were mingled with selfishness, fraud, discontent, and unholy passions. The priests had chosen Barabbas, and Barabbas they would have as long as life should last. They had cried out against Christ. "Crucify Him, crucify Him." "His blood be on us, and on our children." The blood they had invoked upon themselves would indeed rest upon them. The characters they had chosen would forever be their characters. By their lives they contradicted the meaning of their ceremonies. Jesus never spurned the true penitent, but He hated hypocrisy cloaked by a garment of religion.

CONFUSION, UNEASE, AND DISARRAY

Some of the worshipers of the temple were not at rest as the blood of bulls and goats was offered for the sin of Israel. They were not conscious that type had met antitype, that an infinite sacrifice had been made for the sin of the world. But never before had the ritual service been witnessed with such conflicting feelings. The musical instruments and the voices of the singers were as loud and clear as usual. But a sense of strangeness pervaded everything. One after another inquired about the strange event that had taken place. Hitherto the most holy place had always been sacredly guarded from intrusion. Only once a year had it been entered, and then by the high priest. But now horror was seen on all countenances; for this apartment was open to all eyes. At the very moment when Christ had expired, the heavy veil of tapestry, made of pure linen and beautifully wrought with gold and scarlet and purple, had been rent from top to bottom. The place where Jehovah had met with the priest, to communicate His glory, the place which had been God's sacred audience-chamber, lay open to every eye, no longer recognized by the Lord.

PHOTO: LIGHTSTOCK / CREATIVE WEARHOUSE

In the cross of Christ, God gave the world a mighty pledge of His justice and love.

Many who at this time united in the services of the Passover never took part in them again. Light was to shine into their hearts. The disciples were to communicate to them the knowledge that the Messiah had come.

NUMEROUS UNTOLD CHALLENGES

According to their custom, the people brought their sick and suffering to the temple courts, inquiring, Who can tell us of Jesus of Nazareth, the Healer? Some had come from far to see and hear Him who had healed the sick and raised the dead to life. With persistent earnestness they asked for Him. They would not be turned away. But they were driven from the temple courts, and the people of Jerusalem could not fail to see the difference between this scene and the scenes of Christ's life.

On every side was heard the cry, "We want Christ, the Healer!" A world without a Christ was blackness and darkness, not only to the disciples, but to the sick and suffering, to the priests and rulers. The Jewish leaders and even the Roman authorities found it harder to deal with a dead Christ than with a living Christ.

The people learned that Jesus had been put to death. Inquiries were made regarding His death. The particulars of His trial were kept as private as possible, but during the time when He was in the grave, His name was on thousands of lips, and the report of His mock trial and of the cruelty of the priests and rulers was circulated everywhere.

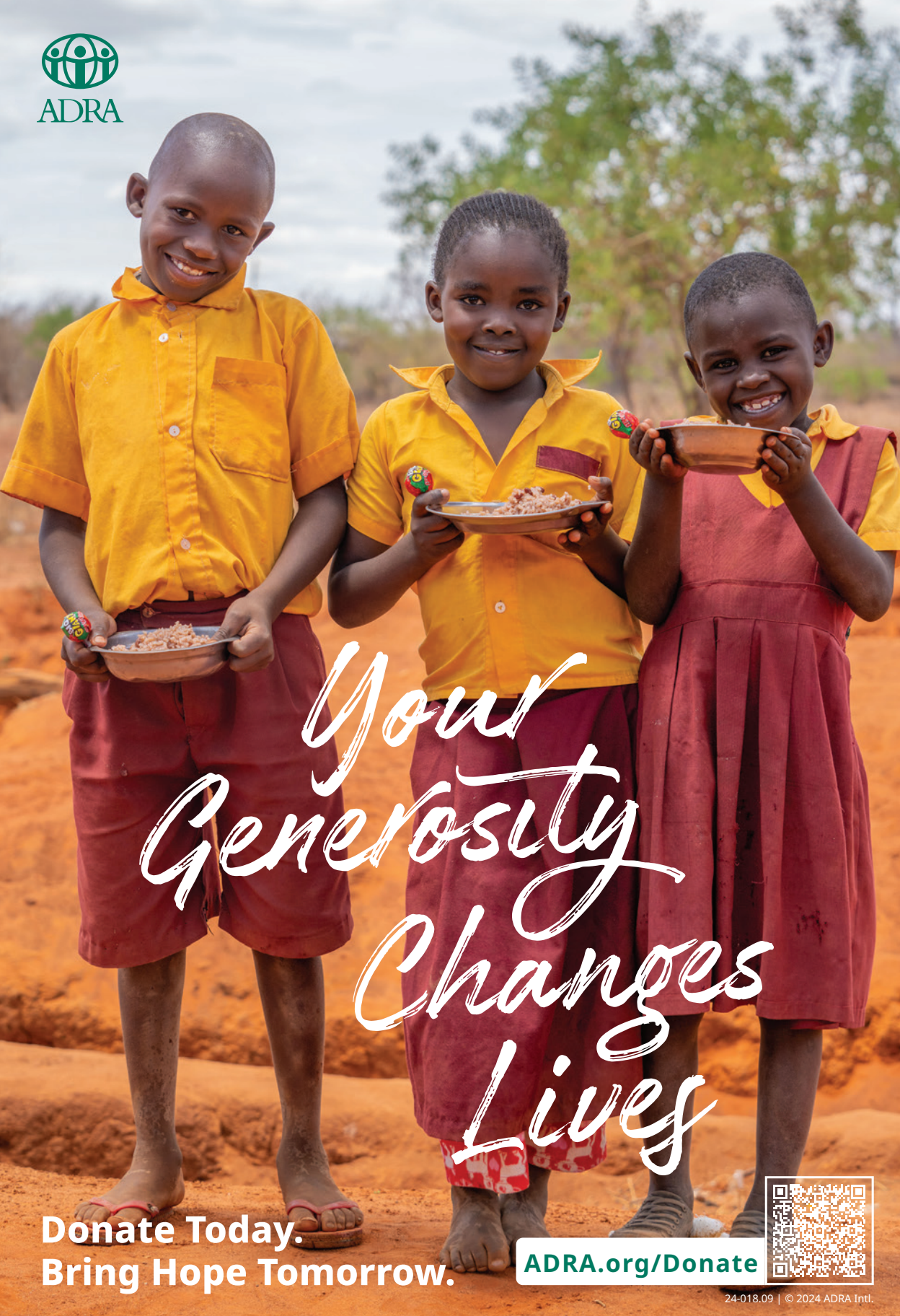
By men of intellect the priests were called upon to explain the prophecies concerning the Messiah, and while trying to frame some falsehood in reply, the priests became like men insane. Upon many minds rested the conviction that the Scriptures had been fulfilled.

GOD'S CHARACTER REVEALED

Entire justice was done in the atonement. In the place of the sinner, the spotless Son of God received the penalty, and the sinner goes free as long as he receives and holds Christ as his personal Saviour. Though guilty, he is looked upon as innocent. Christ fulfilled every requirement demanded by justice. God's character as a God of holiness, a God of goodness, compassion, and love combined, was revealed in His Son. In the cross of Christ, God gave the world a mighty pledge of His justice and love. "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

When Christ bowed His head and died, He bore the pillars of Satan's kingdom with Him to the earth. He vanquished Satan in the same nature over which in Eden Satan obtained the victory. The enemy was overcome by Christ in His human nature. The power of the Saviour's Godhead was hidden. He overcame in human nature, relying upon God for power. This is the privilege of all. In proportion to our faith will be our victory.

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 Youth's Instructor*, Apr. 25, 1901.



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ARt

ARt, a new, regular section of the *Adventist Review*, features various original art created, written, and/or performed by Adventist artists.

AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

"But he was wounded for our transgressions,
he was bruised for our iniquities;
the chastisement for our peace
was upon Him; and by His stripes
we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit. If we would be saved at last, we must learn the lesson of penitence and humiliation at the foot of the cross."—Ellen G. White.*

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

DIGITAL PAINTING

THE DARKEST BLUE

BY IFEANYICHUKWU DANIEL UFOMBA

The painting powerfully depicts Jesus kneeling and bleeding under the weight of the cross, symbolizing His immense physical and spiritual suffering. His expression of anguish, combined with the crown of thorns, reflects the heavy burden of humanity's sins. Exhausted figures draped over the cross signify the disciples' failure to support Him, emphasizing humanity's spiritual fatigue. The dark-blue palette evokes feelings of sorrow, loneliness, and emotional distance, deepening the scene's impact. The barren branches, ominous birds, and dark sky contribute to the foreboding atmosphere, while a distant, bright moon represents a fragile hope amid the despair. The light within the cross signifies His divine presence in this most significant event leading to humanity's salvation. The artwork aims to capture profound emotional and spiritual themes, reflecting Jesus' agony before and during His crucifixion.

Ifeanyichukwu Daniel Ufomba is a visual artist from Nigeria whose work challenges conventions, seamlessly blending creativity with storytelling mainly in digital mediums. | Instagram: @ifuf_001

POEM

WHOSE WOUNDS THESE ARE

BY ELISE HARBOLDT

Style inspired by Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"

Whose wounds these are, I think I know.
His home is in the heavens, though;
I know He sees me stopping here
To watch His wounds and see them flow.

My finite mind must think it odd
That the beloved Son of God,
So innocent, so pure, and good,
Would give His life for one so flawed.

He gives me healing by His stripes,
Extends to me eternal life.
No condemnation now I fear,
For by these wounds, He's paid the price.

The wounds are lovely, dark, and deep,
Proof of the promises He keeps.
So death is really just a sleep—
So death is really just a sleep.

Elise Harboldt is pursuing a Ph.D. in Theology and Religious Studies at Cambridge University.



Art featured in the **ARt** section is curated by Jonathan Walter, assistant editor of the *Adventist Review*. Creative works showcased do not imply an endorsement of all works by featured artists. To submit any type of Adventist original art, please contact **art@adventistreview.org**. Submission does not guarantee publication.

CONNECTORS FOR CHRIST

Simple ways to make church and Sabbath School more inviting

MIKE AND DIANE JONES

I watched her walk into our church alone. Sabbath School was in progress, and the young woman with short dark hair and dressed in a pantsuit took a seat by herself midway between the front and back of the sanctuary. She didn't seem to know anyone—and no one spoke to her.

Toward the end of the service she went out through a side door. *Perhaps she's going to the bathroom,* I thought. But then after a few more moments I thought, *Maybe not.* I slipped out to try to find her. She wasn't in the lobby, so I asked two of our male members who were chatting there, "Did you fellows see a dark-haired woman in a pantsuit come through here in the last few minutes?"

"Oh, yeah," one of them said. "Someone like that just left."

I raced out into the parking lot, but I was too late. She was gone. Sadly I returned to the lobby.

"Did you guys talk to that woman?"

"No."

"Just to let you know, she was a visitor," I said to them, "and nobody else talked with her either."

"Oh, sorry," they said.

Who was this young woman? What was she looking for? Why did she arrive late and leave early? What was going on in her life that caused her to visit our Sabbath School? I never found out the answers to those questions. I watched for her for months, but never saw her again. As far as I know, she never returned.

WHY IT MATTERS

Why do I feel so strongly about the fact that she was able to visit our Sabbath School and leave with no one speaking to her? Perhaps because during my 16 years out of the church, when I would occasionally visit a local church, not much connectedness happened for me either once I got past the greeters. Most of the time I was lost in church.

The majority of those who visit our Sabbath Schools are experiencing some kind of crisis in their lives. And if they don't experience some warm connectedness with members when they drop in, they simply won't come back. They may be dressed extremely well and look as if they're doing fine, but most are dealing with some form of pain.

If you'd like to enhance the environment of your Sabbath School so that your visitors will experience what I call a foretaste of heaven, consider becoming a "connector for Christ." Unlike the greeters who usually have time for only brief encounters, a connector can be anyone in Sabbath School who is willing to encounter people on behalf of Jesus Christ.



THE ART OF CONNECTING

The following points will help anyone who wants to be a connector to get started.

1. Make eye contact with your visitors. Walk down a sidewalk or a grocery store aisle, and you'll observe that most people don't make eye contact with you. So when you and I do make eye contact with someone, this is an unusual experience for them. It is even more significant if we smile at the same time.

Proverbs 15:30 underscores the point: "Light in a messenger's eyes brings joy to the heart" (NIV). Do you want your visitors to feel love and connectedness when they visit? Make eye contact with them.

2. Smile. A smile communicates warmth, acceptance, and love. The combination of a smile and eye contact is a powerful emotional connector. Smile at a stranger, and a relationship begins as he or she smiles back. Smiling offers another benefit, too. Smile at someone when you're feeling lousy, and you'll start feeling better also. Behavior modifies feelings. It's a psychological law.

3. Ask a few questions. You don't want to grill your visitors, but a few pertinent questions can provide you with valuable information. Some examples: "Have you been here before, or is this your first time? How did you happen to visit today? Do you live in the area? Where did you hear about our church?" Asking a few well-chosen questions demonstrates our interest in someone and gives us an excellent tool for connecting with them.

4. Practice listening. After asking questions, suture your mouth, and you will learn an unbelievable amount about your visitors: why they came and what they are looking for. Listening is hard work, but it pays great dividends in relationship building. Listen to your visitors, and they will begin to bond with you. If more of us practiced our listening skills at home, we'd have stronger relationships there as well.

5. Talk to your visitors with enthusiasm. Your warm tone of voice can actually enhance someone else's mood. And, of course, word choice is important—and you don't have to have a postgraduate degree! Rejoice over good news someone shares with you ("We're backsliders who decided to come back to church"). Sympathize when hearing negative information ("We had a death in the family").

Proverbs 16:24 tells us, "Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones" (NIV). Before you leave for church, ask God to give you the right words for your encounters. In Isaiah 50:4 He promises to give us "the tongue of the learned" (KJV), that you will "know how to speak a word in season to [him or her] that is weary" (KJV).

6. Feed your visitors! Food is a powerful social component. "Any chance you can join us at our fellowship meal afterward?" is one way to extend the invitation. Jesus gave us the example. He often fed people when He was here, right? "Breaking bread together" is a powerful means of forming an emotional connection.

7. Simplify your life if you want to connect with people. Connecting takes time. If you're always on the run, you'll never have time to connect with people. My wife and I pray before leaving for church that the Lord will help us connect with the people He wants us to meet, and in just the right way. We try to arrive at Sabbath School a half hour early so we can connect with as many visitors as possible after they have gotten past the greeters.

Also, if you position yourself near the back of the sanctuary, you can connect with others who arrive after the service has begun. Your connection may of necessity be brief; but even that fleeting encounter will be meaningful to a person who's feeling lonely or isolated.

A PLACE FOR EVERYONE

Sanguines, if you work at it, you will soon find yourselves connecting with five, 10, or even more people you don't know on any given Sabbath. Keep in mind, however, that this isn't a numbers game. Even one or two deeper connections can be just as valuable as a dozen.

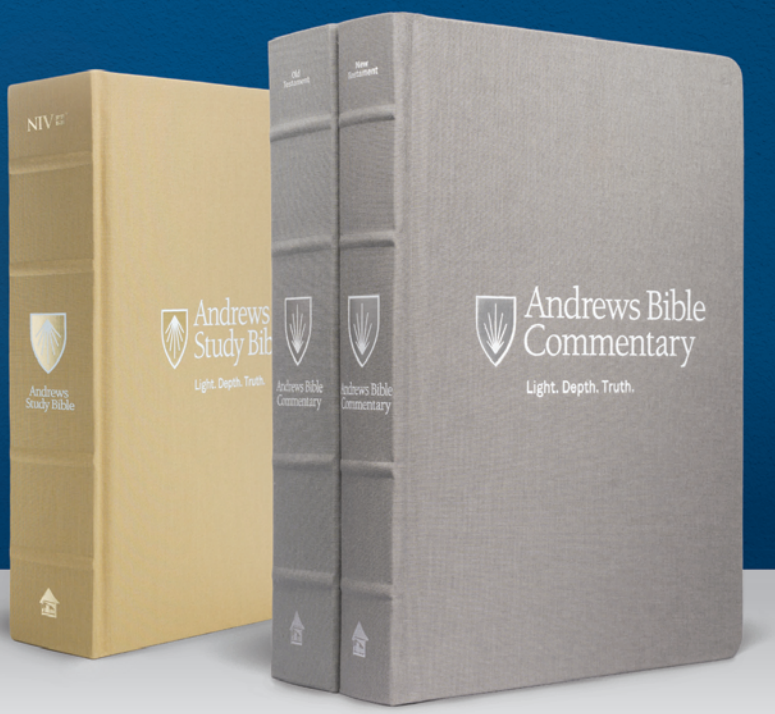
For those of you who are shy and it's all you can do to connect with one person per week, know that over the course of a year God will have used you to touch at least 50 lives. And with each encounter, the subculture of your Sabbath School will become a little more heavenly, and you'll have an added measure of joy in your own heart.

Mike Jones served the Seventh-day Adventist Church in a variety of ways as pastor, editor, and temperance leader. After retiring, he and his wife, Diane, started Operation Reconnect, a Voice of Prophecy ministry for reclaiming missing and inactive Adventist members. Mike passed away in 2020. You can read his original article at https://www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org/page-115.

PHOTO: ZAMRZNUTITONOVI / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS / GETTY IMAGES

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WOULD YOUR NEIGHBORS MISS YOU?

Reflecting Christ in the neighborhood—or on the slopes

REIMAGINING FAITH
SHAWN BRACE



I recently found myself in a challenging dilemma: potentially shelling out $115 for three hours of downhill skiing. Don't get me wrong—I absolutely love skiing. It's probably my favorite outdoor activity. But to the tune of nearly $40 an hour?

The reason it was even a question, though, is simple: my neighbor, who has a season pass, had invited me—and spending three hours on the slopes with him, as well as three or four hours in the car to and from the mountain, was far more valuable to me than $115.

As it turns out, I was able to get a free pass at the last minute from another friend who works at the resort. But I would have forked over the money if necessary. That's because I take Jesus' admonition—that the second greatest commandment is to love your *neighbor* as yourself—very seriously (and literally).

Not that I'm perfect at this *at all.* I fail at it quite frequently. But since moving into our neighborhood in Portland, Maine, nearly eight months ago, my family and I have been doing all we can to love our neighbors as best we can, learning their stories, serving them in mutually edifying ways, and seeking to embody the love of God to them. We don't view this as a "side" part of ministry—an optional tack-on if we have time. We view it as the foundational aspect of life and ministry, stepping into life with people and showing and sharing the gospel with them.

As an added bonus, it's often quite exhilarating and fun—sometimes taking you down ski slopes.

This is also all the more relevant in contexts in which there's high skepticism toward Christianity—such as my state of Maine, where people are *very* unlikely to ever set foot in a church building, and they have no intention of going to a traditional series of evangelistic meetings. But they will gladly accept your offer to help them shovel their driveway, or join you for a meal at your table, or go for a jog on a Sunday morning.

And this is where the real stuff of life takes place anyway, helping us learn how to apply present truth to all of life in ways that nudge people toward the "sealing" we've historically thought is necessary before Christ's return.

So we follow Christ into the neighborhood—and sometimes onto the ski slopes.

I'VE HEARD THE QUESTION ASKED A THOUSAND TIMES.

I've heard it asked a thousand times whether people in your town or city would notice if your church suddenly shut down and disappeared. I think that's a great question, implicitly pointing to the need to be a positive presence in our communities and highlighting the reality that many of our churches are doing little more than turning the lights on for a couple of hours each Saturday morning.

I like to make the question even more personal, though, underscoring the contextual nature of our missional calling: If you moved out of your neighborhood, would your neighbors miss you? Would they even notice? Or would they perhaps be relieved that you are finally gone? Do you even *have* neighbors to love?

We are called to love our neighbors as ourselves. Let's get on with this important, timely, and invigorating work.

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



AMERICAN APOCALYPSE

Counting down

DWIGHT K. NELSON



I hold three red-hot convictions:

1. We are living on the edge of eternity.
2. Jesus is coming soon.
3. America is in trouble. *Big* trouble!

The truth is that America was in trouble *before* the recent election, and it is in trouble *after* the election. Which is why it is critical we revisit the apocalyptic canvas of Revelation 13 for a vision whose time has come.

But we must do so hanging on to the Apocalypse's opening salvo: "The revelation from Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:1).[1] Whatever we discover in chapter 13 has the fingerprints of Jesus all over it.

REVELATION 13

"Then I saw a second beast, coming out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon" (Rev. 13:11).

Welcome to the apocalyptic world of scary, weird beasts—dramatic prophetic symbols of ancient "global influencers," kingdoms and empires, world-changing powers, some still writing history today. Embedded in this terse apocalyptic depiction are six clues to this beast's identity.

PHOTO: NIK_MERKULOV / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS / GETTY IMAGES

CLUE 1

It *rises up* out of the earth. The Greek verb (*anabainō*) is the same one Matthew uses in Jesus' parable of the sower to describe the thorny weeds that sprang up overnight (Matt. 13:7). Whatever this power is, it sprang up seemingly out of nowhere.

CLUE 2

It springs up from the *earth*. This is in contradistinction to the first beast of this chapter, which emerges, dripping and roaring, from the briny sea: "The dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each head a blasphemous name" (Rev. 13:1).

Whatever this seven-headed sea beast is, Revelation identifies the sea as symbolic: "Then the angel said to me, 'The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages' " (Rev. 17:15). "Water" in apocalyptic prophecy represents the masses, the peopled thoroughfares of earth, from which the sea beast emerges. The earth beast, however, rises up from quite the opposite, from barren wilderness land far away from the masses.

CLUE 3

"Then I saw a second beast, coming out of the earth" (Rev. 13:11). "Then" means there is some sort of sequence transpiring. First, there is a sea beast, "then" there springs up an earth beast. So what has happened in Revelation 13 just before the "then"?

"One of the heads of the [sea] beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the [sea] beast. People worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the [sea] beast, and they also worshiped the [sea] beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?" (verses 3, 4).

Clearly this sea beast must be a religious power, since it receives worship. But then divine doom is pronounced over it! "If anyone has an ear, let him hear. He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints" (verses 9, 10, NKJV).

Whoever or whatever this sea beast power is, while it has been causing others to go into captivity, it is now taken into captivity. While it has been killing others with the sword, it is now itself fatally wounded with the sword.

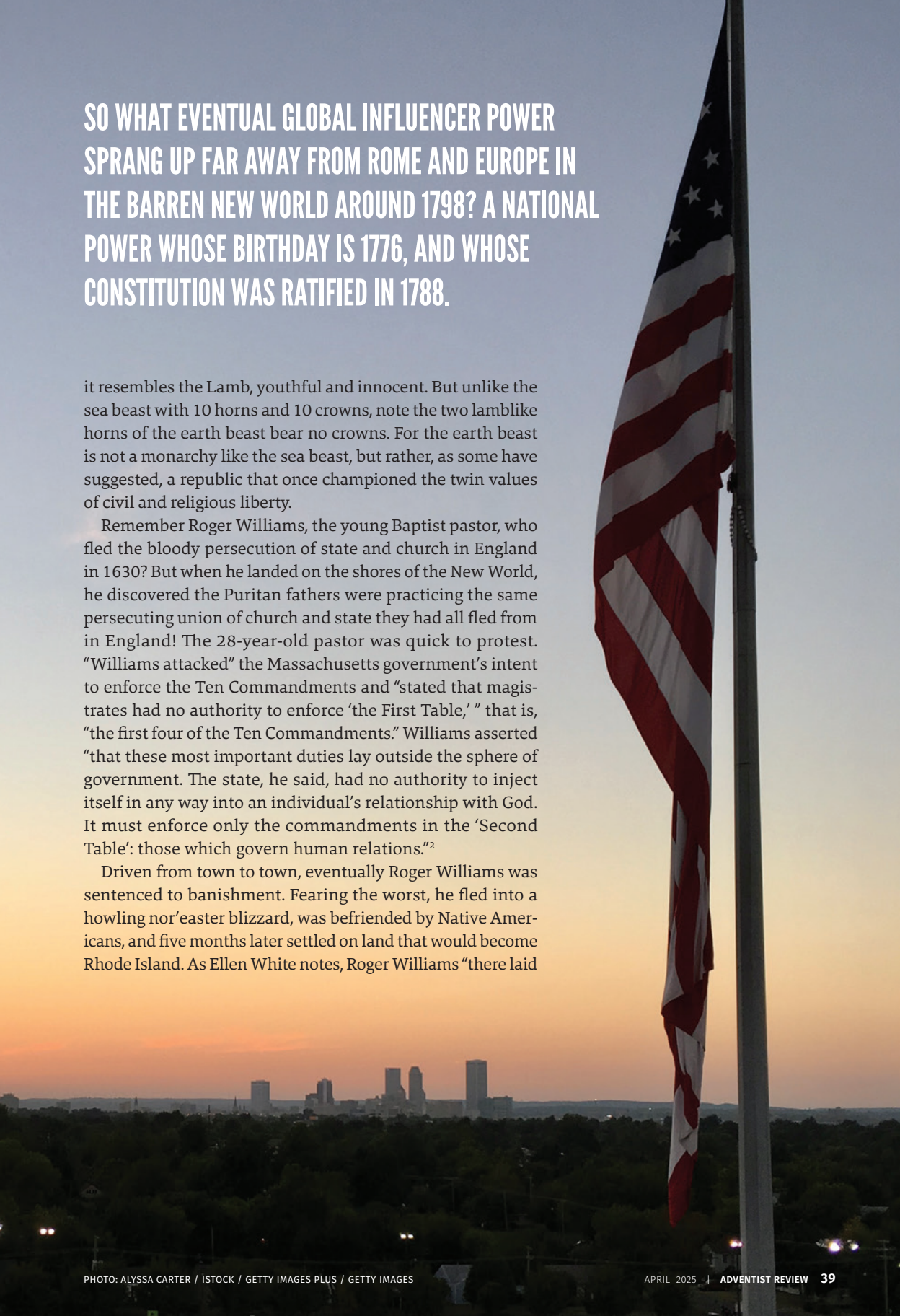
The apocalyptic prophecies of both Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 led the Protestant Reformers to identify this sea beast as the antichrist power that ruthlessly ruled during the dark and bloody Middle Ages from Rome. It clearly is a religious power, since it receives worship from the masses. But it becomes wounded. As a matter of historical fact, in 1798, on the heels of the French Revolution, Napoleon's General Berthier took Pope Pius VI captive and shut the Vatican down. Wounded! Which is precisely what happens to this sea beast power.

And "then [at the very time of the sea beast's wounding] I saw a second beast, coming out of the [desolate] earth" (Rev. 13:11). So what eventual global influencer power sprang up far away from Rome and Europe in the barren New World around 1798? A national power whose birthday is 1776, and whose Constitution was ratified in 1788.

CLUE 4

"It had two horns *like a lamb*" (verse 11). The Lamb, mentioned nearly 30 times in Revelation, is the undisputed Hero of heaven and Savior of earth. Whatever this earth beast is, to onlookers





SO WHAT EVENTUAL GLOBAL INFLUENCER POWER SPRANG UP FAR AWAY FROM ROME AND EUROPE IN THE BARREN NEW WORLD AROUND 1798? A NATIONAL POWER WHOSE BIRTHDAY IS 1776, AND WHOSE CONSTITUTION WAS RATIFIED IN 1788.

it resembles the Lamb, youthful and innocent. But unlike the sea beast with 10 horns and 10 crowns, note the two lamblike horns of the earth beast bear no crowns. For the earth beast is not a monarchy like the sea beast, but rather, as some have suggested, a republic that once championed the twin values of civil and religious liberty.

Remember Roger Williams, the young Baptist pastor, who fled the bloody persecution of state and church in England in 1630? But when he landed on the shores of the New World, he discovered the Puritan fathers were practicing the same persecuting union of church and state they had all fled from in England! The 28-year-old pastor was quick to protest. "Williams attacked" the Massachusetts government's intent to enforce the Ten Commandments and "stated that magistrates had no authority to enforce 'the First Table,' " that is, "the first four of the Ten Commandments." Williams asserted "that these most important duties lay outside the sphere of government. The state, he said, had no authority to inject itself in any way into an individual's relationship with God. It must enforce only the commandments in the 'Second Table': those which govern human relations."[2]

Driven from town to town, eventually Roger Williams was sentenced to banishment. Fearing the worst, he fled into a howling nor'easter blizzard, was befriended by Native Americans, and five months later settled on land that would become Rhode Island. As Ellen White notes, Roger Williams "there laid

PHOTO: ALYSSA CARTER / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS / GETTY IMAGES

the foundation of the first state of modern times that in the fullest sense recognized the right of religious freedom. The fundamental principle of Roger Williams' colony was 'that every man should have liberty to worship God according to the light of his own conscience.' His little state, Rhode Island, became the asylum of the oppressed, and it increased and prospered until *its foundation principles—civil and religious liberty—became the cornerstones of the American Republic*."[3]

Thus for two and a half centuries America has championed the separation of church and state, as Roger Williams taught—favoring neither religion over government nor government over religion.[4] But there is something ominous about this apocalyptic global influencer.

CLUE 5

"It spoke *like a dragon*" (Rev. 13:11). The evil nemesis of the Lamb, the apocalyptic dragon, is the fallen angel Lucifer. And sad to admit, dragon speech has been heard in the New World from the beginning in two diabolical ways: (1) through the colonists' slow but eventual decimation of Native American Indians from their own land, and (2) through the evils of the slave trade brought by immigrants to America, leading to this country's becoming one of the largest slave-trading nations on earth, with a racism that continues to reap its baleful harvest today.

Who or what is this earth beast global influencer? Ranko Stefanovic is clear: "It appears that no single religious or political entity in modern history matches the description of the earth beast as does the United States of America. The United States emerged on the historical arena after the Medieval ecclesiastical system had received its 'mortal wound.' This nation has become a major dominant power in the world." Further, Stefanovic explains, "As the leading democratic world power," the United States "has been admired for its political and religious tolerance and freedoms." And "today, the United States exercises a major role in world affairs." Thus, "this power clearly resembles the two-horned beast," and Revelation 13 "seems to foretell a key religious political role for the United States in the final crisis."[5]

And what will be America's endgame religious political role? Consider this final clue.



CLUE 6

The earth beast has an *apocalyptic nickname*. Notice how it behaves like a religious power: "It [the earth beast] exercised all the authority of the first [sea] beast on its behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. And it performed great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to the earth in full view of the people" (Rev. 13:12, 13).

What a stunning prediction! This freedom-loving land, where church and state have been intentionally separated for centuries, will one day spurn that separation and channel its global influencer power into enforcing the worship of Rome, not only in America but throughout the planet.

To affirm that radical role change, both Revelation 16:13 and 19:20 tag the earth beast with the nickname "false prophet," thus defining the global influencer as a religious wannabe performing supernatural signs "on [the sea beast's] behalf" (Rev. 19:20).

Remember the Mount Carmel showdown where God's lone prophet Elijah challenged the 850 false prophets? "The god who answers by fire—he is God" (1 Kings 18:24). Who doesn't thrill to that divine fire flash that nukes the true prophet's sacrifice, exalting the worship of the Creator and exposing the perfidy of those false prophets who worship the sun! But in a wicked endgame twist, it is the anti-Creator, sun-worshipping earth beast (aka "false prophet") that through supernatural deception calls "fire to come down from heaven in full view of the people" (Rev. 13:13).

Is America already the "false prophet"? Consider the outsized religious and political influence the Christian nationalism movement is now gaining "from sea to shining sea."



CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

What is Christian nationalism? *Christianity Today* succinctly defines it as "the belief that the American nation is defined by Christianity, *and that the government should take active steps to keep it that way*. Popularly, Christian nationalists assert that America is and must remain a 'Christian nation'—not merely as an observation about American history, but as a prescriptive program for what America must continue to be in the future."[6]

And what is that future Christian nationalists envision? Tim Alberta, in his book *The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory: American Evangelicals in an Age of Extremism*, explains: "In February 2023, a landmark national survey conducted by the Public Research Institute and Brookings Institution found that roughly two-thirds of white evangelicals either explicitly supported the notion of Christian nationalism or were sympathetic to it. The share of white evangelicals who expressed support for certain ideas—[1] that the government should declare Christianity the state religion; [2] that being Christian is an important part of being an American; [3] that God has called on Christians to exercise dominion over all areas of society—dwarfed that of white mainline Protestants, white Catholics, and Protestants of color." In fact, "nearly 90 percent of white adherents to Christian nationalism agreed that 'God intended America to be a new promised land' run by 'European Christians.' The broader sample of respondents rejected that statement by a two-to-one margin."[7]

God's "new promised land" run by "European Christians"—are they serious?

Truth is, the false core of Christian nationalism is the mistaken notion that America was founded

TRUTH IS, THE FALSE CORE OF CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM IS THE MISTAKEN NOTION THAT AMERICA WAS FOUNDED TO BE A CHRISTIAN NATION FROM THE BEGINNING.

to be a Christian nation from the beginning. That assertion is patently false. Roger Williams' successful experiment with the separation of church and state became the template for the vision America's Founders shaped for this nation, evidenced by the "godless Constitution" they carefully crafted: "God and Christianity are nowhere to be found in the American Constitution, a reality that infuriated many at the time." The "controversy of 1787-88 over the godless Constitution was *one of the most important public debates ever held in America over the place of religion in politics.* The advocates of a secular state won, and it is their Constitution we revere today."[8]

Do I believe God raised up America? Absolutely. Do I believe our Founders intended to create a Christian nation? Absolutely *not*. "In a treaty with the Muslim nation Tripoli initiated by [President] Washington, completed by John Adams, and ratified by the Senate in 1797, the Founders declared that 'the government of the United States is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion.' "[9] Church and state must remain separated.

But please note: separation of church and state does not mean separation of God and country. Ellen White in no uncertain terms declared: "The Lord has done more for the United States than for any other country upon which the sun shines."[10] God *has* blessed America. But a few sentences later comes this sad prediction: "In our land of boasted freedom, religious liberty will come to an end."[11]

And that is the somber warning of Revelation 13:12: "[The earth beast] exercised all the authority of the [sea] beast on its behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast." But how could that constitutionally even be possible—government-mandated worship in a freedom-loving, church-and-state-separating land like America?

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THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

We must not underestimate the influence of Christian nationalism. Already in 2024 two states have legislated actions enforcing Christian values for the public. "Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry on Wednesday [June 19, 2024] signed into law a bill that makes the state the only one in the country to require displaying the Ten Commandments in every public school classroom [from kindergarten to university]."[12] And a few days later "Oklahoma's top education official ordered public schools Thursday [June 27, 2024] to incorporate the Bible into lessons for grades 5 through 12, the latest effort by conservatives to incorporate religion into classrooms."[13] Both states' actions are the fruit of Christian nationalist lobbying, and both are being challenged in the courts.

On the national level, consider the proposal the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 has made to the recently inaugurated president of America.[14] In this 887-page *Manual for Leadership: The Conservative Promise* (ostensibly to serve as governmental playbook for the president) is a proposal that begins with these words:

"**Sabbath Rest.**[15] God ordained the Sabbath as a day of rest, and until very recently the Judeo-Christian tradition sought to honor that mandate by moral and legal regulation of work on that day."[16]

Irrespective of the specifics of this recommendation for the Department of Labor, the very notion of a labor law proposal beginning with the words "Sabbath rest" and "God ordained the Sabbath as a day of rest" ought to give every reader pause. Of course the biblical facts are correct. But the compelling question is: Since when is it the task of government to advocate for God, the Bible, or the Sabbath? Obviously the unspecified writers of this proposal are not advocating for the seventh-day Sabbath of the Bible—they quickly note "that day would default to Sunday"—but are rather concerned that employers not compel their workers to "work on the Sabbath" (be that "Friday sundown to Saturday sundown" or Sunday); and if such "Sabbath" labor is required, the employer must pay time and a half "for hours worked on the Sabbath."[17]

Revelation 13's divine warning that this global influencer will one day command worship not only for its own citizens but for the world ought to flag a concern for Project 2025's innocuous extra-pay provision by the government for religious observances. It is not the place of government to advocate for or against religion or worship. The First Amendment of the United States Constitution declares: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."[18] And that includes the Sabbath, no matter which day is designated.

CRISIS IN AMERICA'S FUTURE

But along with Christian nationalism, another plausible catalyst for Revelation 13's dire prediction is the possibility of a crippling crisis in America's future. One debilitating disaster (political, economic, military, terrorist, ecological, even international), one massive crisis event that strikes the continent, the planet—and all security and certainty for the future vanish! Remember the lockdowns, the mask and vaccine mandates, of the recent pandemic? What we never would have considered doing, we compliantly accepted given the crisis.

Clearly here in Revelation 13 something has gone terribly awry for such draconian actions to be taken. We are not told the crisis; we are simply given the outcome. But remember how Daniel described the end of the world: "There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then" (Dan. 12:1). Jesus Himself depicted earth's final

chapter: "For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened" (Matt. 24:21, 22).

Whatever happens in America's future threatens the existence of the entire planet—including God's people. Social scientist Michael Barkun studied the effects of disasters and crises on the human psyche: "Disaster produces the questioning, the anxiety, and the suggestibility that are required [for rapid alteration of a belief system]; only in its wake are people moved to abandon old values of the past."[19]

How long would constitutional freedoms last were the nation struck by a crippling crisis and Christian leaders demanded a "back to God" national law mandating worship? "Rapid alteration of belief system" means rapid.

In the panic of an unnamed crisis, Revelation 13's America takes a terrible radical turn. "Because of the signs it was given power to perform on behalf of the [sea] beast, [the earth beast] deceived the inhabitants of the earth. It ordered them to set up an image in honor of the [sea] beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. The [earth] beast was given power to give breath to the image of the [sea] beast, so that the image could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed" (Rev. 13:14, 15).

Consider this prescient commentary on Revelation 13 from *The Great Controversy*: "In order for the United States to form an image of the beast, the religious power [Christian nationalism] must so control the civil government that the authority of the state will also be employed by the church to accomplish her own ends."[20]

Revelation 13 warns that the uniting of church and state—Rome's dark modus operandi during the bloody Middle Ages—will recur just before the return of Christ. And America, through its own hybrid union of church and state (Christian nationalism), will lead the world to worship Rome and its image. But just like the three young Hebrew exiles in Daniel 3, who refused to bow down to Babylon's towering image, there will be a generation of Christ followers who will "not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" (Rev. 12:11).

Just like Jesus. In fact, our Savior knows all too well what it is like to suffer at the hands of the confederacy of church and state. All the players were there at Calvary:

The Pharisee leaders were the conservatives—they wanted Him dead.

The Sadducee leaders were the liberals—they wanted Him dead.

The Herodians were the "nationalists"—they wanted Him dead.

The governor was a pagan—he wanted Him dead.

The crowd, feckless and fickle—they, too, wanted Him dead.

Jesus was crucified by the uniting of church and state. And in the end it will be so for those who radically, boldly, humbly follow Him.

Shall we be afraid? Never! How did Jesus put it on the eve of His own execution? "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

[1] Unless otherwise noted, biblical references are from the New International Version.

[2] John M. Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul* (New York: Penguin, 2012), p. 151.

[3] Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 295. (Emphasis added.)

[4] Ron Capshaw, in *Liberty*, September-October 2020, p. 6.

[5] Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2002), pp. 423, 424.

[6] https://www.christianitytoday.com/2021/02/what-is-christian-nationalism/, accessed Nov. 14, 2024. (Emphasis added.)

[7] Tim Alberta, *The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory: American Evangelicals in an Age of Extremism* (New York: HarperCollins, 2023), pp. 433, 434.

[8] Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore, *The Godless Constitution* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1996), pp. 27, 28. (Emphasis added.)

[9] Jon Meacham, *American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation* (New York: Random House, 2006), p. 19.

[10] Ellen G. White, *Maranatha* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1976), p. 193.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] https://www.reuters.com/world/us/louisiana-requires-display-ten-commandments-all-classrooms-2024-06-19/, accessed Nov. 18, 2024.

[13] https://apnews.com/article/oklahoma-bible-schools-religion-ryan-walters-d15be2f74df2ffbbdfdc549569d06c4e, accessed Nov. 18, 2024.

[14] The Heritage Foundation, *Manual for Leadership: The Conservative Promise* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 2023), p. 589 (downloaded from www.project2025.org).

[15] Bolded in the original.

[16] Heritage Foundation.

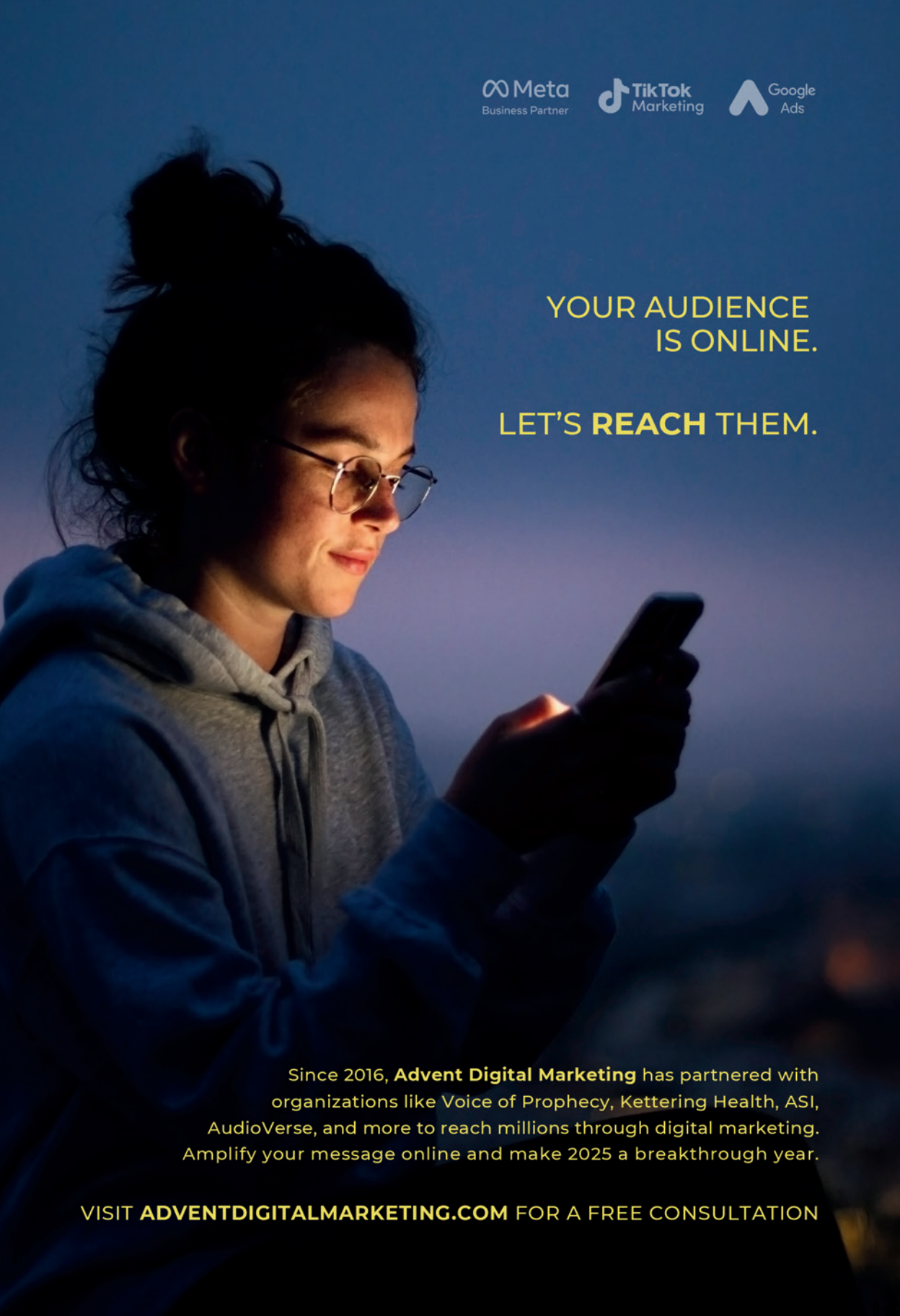
[17] *Ibid.*

[18] https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-1/#:~:text=Congress%20shall%20make%20no%20law,for%20a%20redress%20of%20grievances.

[19] Quoted in Marvin Moore, *The Coming Great Calamity* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1997), p. 81.

[20] E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 443.

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NUMBING OR NOURISHING?

Choosing the right escape

You stare at your phone, finger ready to start scrolling. The semester's final assignments loom, your toddler's been testing limits all day, you're exhausted from your 9:00 to 5:00, and the evening ahead feels heavy. That familiar anxiety creeps in, pushing you to Instagram's endless feed, Netflix's next episode, or Facebook's theater of other people's lives.

You're not alone—the average American spends seven hours a day consuming digital media, often running from a life that feels too overwhelming, too demanding.[1] Yet part of us knows there must be a better way than numbing ourselves with distraction. What if our desperate need to escape isn't wrong, but simply misplaced?

C. S. Lewis puts it this way: "If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world."[2] Our longing for escape points to something legitimate: we're made for more than this world offers. The question is how to honor this holy discontent rather than dull it.

Jesus shows us the way. When life pressed in, He withdrew from crowds and demands. But notice the difference: His withdrawals deepened His relationship with His Father and disciples rather than distanced from them, clarified truth rather than numbed it, and renewed His purpose rather than avoided it. We mistake withdrawal as running from reality when true escape means stepping from the shallows into deeper waters.

The key is not whether we escape, but how. Healthy withdrawal:

1. Connects us, instead of isolating us. Whether through communion with God, meaningful time and conversation with loved ones, experiences in nature, or even *intentional regulated* use of social media, healthy escape should strengthen our bonds with God and others. Compare this to forms of escapism that may increase our sense of loneliness (see Heb. 10:24, 25).

2. Illuminates truth, instead of numbing it. Whether through Scripture, books, or films, seek engaging media that reveals wisdom for living and draws us to God's larger story of love and grace. Unlike mindless entertainment that numbs our pain and gradually dulls our moral sensibilities, healthy withdrawal helps us face life with clearer eyes and an awakened heart (see Phil. 4:8).

3. Renews our engagement with reality. Real rest doesn't just relieve; it restores. We are reminded of why life is worth living. When we escape well, we return to our daily lives with renewed inspiration, seeing beauty and significance in the everyday moments we usually take for granted. True escape doesn't just help us endure life's challenges; it helps us embrace them with renewed purpose (see Matt. 11:28, 29).

Next time you feel the urge to escape, pause and ask: Will this form of withdrawal deepen or distance my relationships? Will it fill me or just help me forget? Will it renew my engagement with life or just postpone it? Our desire to escape isn't wrong—it's heaven's echo in our hearts. The choice is whether we'll dull that sacred longing or let it guide us to what our souls truly seek.

BETWEEN WORLDS DAVID BURUCHARA



WE MISTAKE WITHDRAWAL AS RUNNING FROM REALITY WHEN TRUE ESCAPE MEANS STEPPING FROM THE SHALLOWS INTO DEEPER WATERS.

[1] Insider Intelligence/eMarketer. (2024). Digital media makes up nearly two thirds of consumers' total time spent with media. eMarketer, retrieved Feb. 4, 2025, from https://www.emarketer.com/content/digital-media-makes-up-nearly-two-thirds-of-consumers-total-time-spent-with-media.

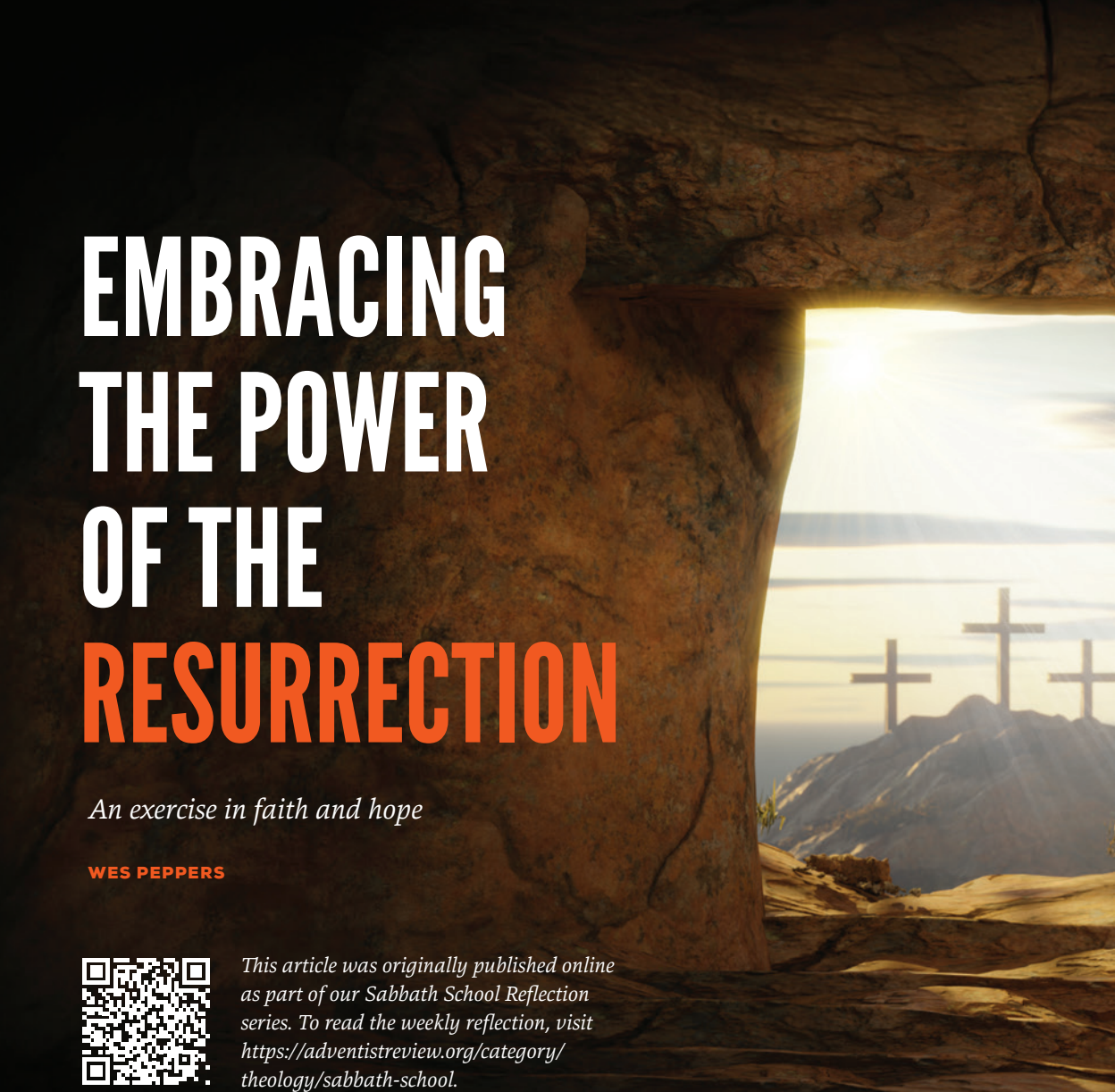
[2] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (HarperOne, 1952), pp. 134, 135.

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EMBRACING THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION

An exercise in faith and hope

WES PEPPERS



This article was originally published online as part of our Sabbath School Reflection series. To read the weekly reflection, visit https://adventistreview.org/category/theology/sabbath-school.

No other story in the Bible grips the senses like the crucifixion of Christ. The cross reveals a love more profound than human imagination can comprehend. It opens before us the most transforming power in the universe—the self-sacrificing lovingkindness of God. Knowing that the all-powerful Creator would choose our life over His own is incomprehensible, yet it is the epitome of truth. No greater concept can be focused on or engaged in. We are encouraged to spend a thoughtful hour daily meditating on the topic.[1] Yet eternity will not be enough time to comprehend it.

DIGEST SLOWLY

Nevertheless, I have often flown hastily through these passages that should have been food for my soul. I needed to absorb the lessons Christ desired to teach, but frequently failed in the rush. One topic that we too often brush over is the resurrection. Whether we take it for granted, view it as elementary, or neglect it for some other reason, it is the foundation of everything else we believe. Without it, we are still in our sins, and our hope is in vain (1 Cor. 15:17). With it, our hope is secure (Rom. 1:3, 4; 1 Peter 1:3-5).



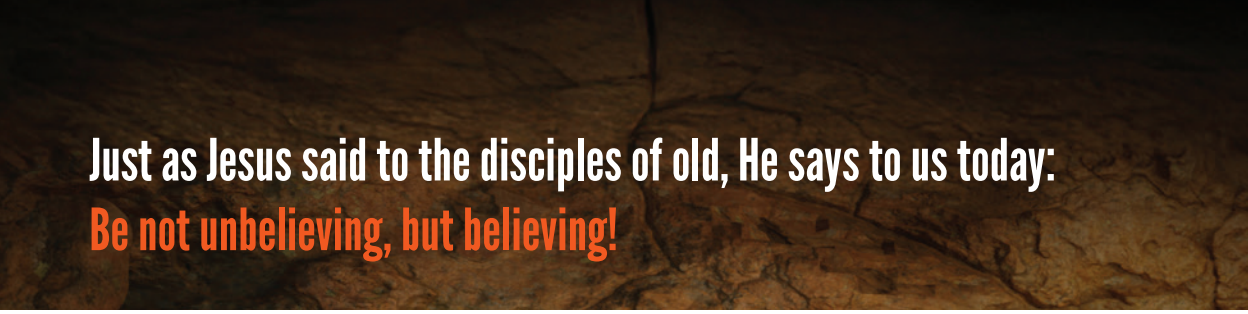
The following are personal insights from Mark 15 and 16:

It is better to celebrate the resurrection of Christ for what it is than to ignore it with concern that we are honoring a false Sabbath.

Some have shied away from the resurrection because it happened on the first day of the week, and fear they would be honoring a historically pagan day of worship. The resurrection of Christ, however, is a divine revelation of the power of God, and that should be celebrated! The fact of the resurrection itself is much more important than the day of the week it happened. The actual day has no major significance. Yet we often downplay the resurrection because of the day it happened.

Honoring the resurrection provides significant reasons to keep the seventh-day Sabbath. In the phase of redemption that Christ completed on earth, Friday and Sunday were "workdays" for Him. Jesus rested in the tomb on Sabbath while conducting the "work" of salvation for humanity on Friday and Sunday. Also the women came to the tomb on Friday to preserve Jesus' body and rested on the Sabbath, planning to return after the Sab-

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bath to carry out their plan. They viewed obedience to God's commandments as more indispensable than anointing the body of the Messiah. Clearly the Sabbath matters to Jesus and mattered to His disciples.

A remarkable sacredness is attached to it. Sunday was simply the day Jesus "worked" to rise from the dead. The *resurrection* is sacred and holy; the *day* of the resurrection isn't. The Bible teaches that the Sabbath is holy. The commandments are more important than sentimental acts of human effort, or even well-intended devotion, when they infringe on God's truth.

We can rejoice in the resurrection *and* keep the Sabbath holy as complementary to one another rather than conflicting with each other, recognizing the resurrection in no way gives any sacredness to Sunday. Do not dismiss or demean this beautiful account crucial to our faith because erroneous theology was constructed around the truth. Embrace the biblical and leave out the unbiblical!

The resurrection assures us that no matter our sins, they can be forgiven if we confess them.

Many are struggling with forgiveness. Not in forgiving each other, but in forgiveness for themselves. They believe God forgives others, but are not confident in His generosity toward themselves. As I preach in many places, one of the top fears of church members is a lack of assurance of salvation. When asked if they think they would go to heaven, common answers are:

"I'd like to."

"I hope I'm good enough."

"It's OK if I don't as long as my family does."

"Not sure."

"I've got a long way to go."

None of these answers are biblical or hopeful. The provision for every sin to be forgiven was made at Calvary. Yet we must confess and surrender that sin to God before it can be forgiven. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life (Rom. 6:23). The ultimate penalty of sin is eternal death, when those who are lost will be eternally separated from God.

There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth because of the realization that they are being cut off from God, the life source who sustains them. This is the death that Jesus experienced on the cross, when He cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Mark 15:34). He experienced the sense of eternal separation from God in those frightful moments and was made sin for us.

In this understanding we find our assurance! If the wages of sin is eternal death, then this is a death that one never comes back to life from. As Christ hung on the cross, the sins of humanity were laid upon Him, and it crushed out His life. So, technically speaking, Christ should have never risen from the dead, because the consequence of sin is eternal death.

So how did He resurrect? The answer is found in John 1:4: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." The power and life found in Christ were greater than the sin in the hearts of all humanity. Christ's righteousness was mightier than any sin that put Him in the grave, including yours. Because of this, despite being killed because of sin, He could be raised because of His complete righteousness. If your sin was too great for Him to forgive and cleanse, He would have remained in the grave, for it would be greater than His righteousness. Yet He lives! You can be completely assured that no matter what your past or present is, He is willing and able to make you whole again. He is willing to give you His righteousness, which you desperately need. The resurrection teaches us that His victory over death is essential to our victory over sin. Thank God for the resurrection!

The resurrection reminds us that God has the power to raise us from spiritual death.

Even after the resurrection, the disciples doubted. Jesus had to snap them out of their stupor when He said, "Be not unbelieving but believing. Look at my hands and feet to see that

it is truly me!" (see Luke 24:39). Even when the evidence is right in front of us, we tend to doubt. Yet God is merciful and works to build our faith and confidence in Him.

One of the struggles we face today is believing that God's promises can actually be true for us *personally*. That's where many get trapped. They accept it for others but not for themselves, as if their sin is worse than their brother's. Yet it is not enough merely to believe the evidence of the resurrection; we must also *experience* the *effect* of the resurrection in our lives. We must not just desire resurrection from physical death at the Second Coming, but exercise faith for resurrection from spiritual death today! The resurrection is overwhelmingly relevant for us now as much as it was when Jesus first appeared to the disciples. Doubt regarding the power and promises working in our lives is just as deceptive and deadly as it was to them. More than the evidence, we need an experience. A person who shows me 100 people cleansed with soap is convincing. However, until I use the soap on myself, I do not understand its ability to cleanse. It is the same with Christ in the life. I must not be merely convinced but also convicted and converted. Having our own experience with His transforming, resurrection power (Phil. 3:8-10)!

Just as Jesus said to the disciples of old, He says to us today: Be not unbelieving, but believing! The resurrection is for you, and the same power that rose Jesus from the dead is at work in you! Creative power is redemptive power. Therefore, just as God created the world from nothing by the power of His word, that same word can create in you a new heart the moment you ask, believe, and accept it by faith to be so.

The resurrection reminds us that little things matter.

There was no Christ to behold when John entered the tomb. He was no longer a limp body but a living Savior! However, where was the evidence? As John looked with the eye of faith, he noticed the gravecloth neatly folded (John 20:5-8). This was all he needed. Knowing the pattern of Christ's life and seeing the cloth folded neatly, he and Peter believed. No grave robber would have bothered to fold that cloth. Jesus had left it as a token to increase their faith. How incredible little things are in the life of faith! Every small act of devotion, obedience, kindness, thoughtfulness, love, and self-denial is a testimony of faith that can influence someone's life toward Christ.

A personal resurrection experience reminds us that there is still something to tell the world.

Every person who witnessed the resurrection went and told someone else. The women told the disciples. The two disciples on the road told them again. Eventually the disciples told the world. Every person in history who truly believed in the resurrection told someone else. One cannot help sharing the joy of salvation, forgiveness, and peace that comes from receiving Christ. It is impossible to keep quiet. In the world today, there is still something to tell. Every person on the globe is waiting to hear the everlasting gospel, and we have a story worth telling. Not only Christ's story but also our story of what He's done for us. Go tell, and tell others to tell!

OUR BEST CHAPTER BEGINS NOW

The resurrection power of Christ is as potent now as it was when He opened His eyes and took His first breath that Sunday morning. It's still as potent as when it restored Peter after denying Him. It's still as mighty as when it delivered Mary Magdalene from spiritual darkness and when it delivered the man possessed by a legion of demons. It's still more powerful than any sin we might cling to now. Christ died once for all, and now He intercedes for all. Hebrews 7:14-19 declares one of the greatest truths of the resurrection, that Christ lives and ministers "according to the power of an endless life" (verse 16). Because His life is endless, ours will be also. There is nothing more exciting than this. It is our vitality, our hope, and our reality. Let's realize it today and let Him live His life through ours.

Because He lives I can face tomorrow,
Because He lives all fear is gone;
Because I know He holds the future.
And life is worth the living
Just because He lives.[2]

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

[2] "Because He Lives," *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1985), hymn 526.

Wes Peppers, a former atheist, is a pastor and serves as the evangelism and missions director at It Is Written.

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BODY LANGUAGE

When there just aren't words . . .

CURTIS J. WRIGHT WITH CAROLYN SUTTON



I couldn't wrap my brain around the fact that Dalaiah, a woman of solid faith and my beautiful wife of 48 years, was dying. Two years prior I had retired after 43 years of pastoral and education ministries to become her 24/7 full-time caregiver. I had supported her as she wrestled with breast cancer—and won. Yet things had not gone so well when encroaching eye disease rendered her legally blind. Nor had she been able to ward off other disabilities from a series of strokes. Her multiple hospitalizations in various facilities necessitated long daily drives so I could provide in-person support and encouragement. The house now, for our young adult son and me, felt so empty every time she was hospitalized. Over the months she became completely bedridden and totally blind, and suffered from stroke-reduced mental acuity. All this took an unforeseen and debilitating toll on my own health. Yet, one happy day, I was able to bring her back home again.

Though her verbal communication was now inadequate, Dalaiah still managed to communicate her affection and care for me. This she did through body language.[1] A turn of the head when I called her name affirmed our soul-to-soul connection. Appreciative expressions in her sightless eyes "thanked" me when I hand-fed her or cared for her personal needs. A squeeze from her delicate yet strong hands warmed mine when I touched hers. Body language. How I leaned on her body language for encouragement and hope! Of course, I longed to converse again, face to face and eye to eye, as we'd done throughout our years together. Yet my many questions for her must now go unanswered. I fought against sadness controlling my emotions—and exhaustion, my body. Yet seeing Dalaiah's expressions of connection and love through her body language gave me a sense of peace—as if things would someday be all right again.

Seeing Dalaiah's expressions of connection and love through her body language gave me a sense of peace—as if things would someday be all right again.

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UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

Dalaiah's condition occasionally led me to reflect on a similar relationship from my childhood. Our family of four sometimes traveled from the bustling urban town of Compton, California, to visit family in the rural Greater Ozark Region near the Missouri River. There, with some of my 30-plus first cousins, I'd explore every corner of Grandpa and Grandma Hill's property. Their "farm" consisted of several adjoining rural lots. What adventures! In my mind's eye, I can still see the livestock, the hog pen, the rough-hewn outhouse. In memory I still taste their garden-fresh vegetables along with the pecans and black walnuts from their orchards. At various seasons in his life Grandpa Hill worked on the railroad. Yet he always carved out time to teach his eight children how to maintain a home place, function as a family, and provide for one another—even if it meant bringing home food from forest, lake, or stream.

My grandfather—whose own parents and earlier ancestors had been slaves—was strangely silent. He simply did not speak. In fact, he never, ever had even one conversation with me. Why? I wondered. When I grew older, my mother explained that she suspected centuries-long suppression of Grandpa's forebears had had a lot to do with his silence. Slavery's generational and doleful effects on the African American psyche were profound. "I think," Mother told me, "that slavery's somber legacy was the main contributing factor to my father's near incapability to verbalize his feelings—or much of anything else." Then she added, "I'm sorry, son. But he never had a conversation with me, either. And I was one of his daughters." This plausible but troubling explanation from my mother didn't stop me, though, from always wishing I could have asked Grandpa so many questions.

Yet I found comfort in something else: his body language. Somehow, silently, Grandpa still demonstrated love and care for his family. Anyone who watched could see how hard this big, active, silent man continually worked for the welfare of his loved ones. When I observed his body language (though he sometimes intimidated me), I often experienced a great measure of peace in my little soul. When I knew Grandpa Hill was nearby, I always felt as if someone strong and loving was in charge of the family's welfare, and always would be. Perhaps there is a measure of truth in that old adage: "Silence speaks louder than words." And perhaps that is why my silent grandfather's body language had such a powerful impact on me.

Without warning, on Christmas Day 2023, uncontrollable seizures unexpectedly racked Dalaiah's frail frame. I called for an ambulance. EMS personnel lifted her on a stretcher into the back of the vehicle for a speedy drive to the local hospital emergency room near Twentynine Palms, California. It didn't enter my mind that I would never again be able to look into her open eyes. That very evening the ambulance brought Dalaiah back home. But she was comatose! Only a ventilator was keeping her alive despite failing kidneys and internal bleeding.

"No!" I protested in desperation. "I'm not equipped to care for my wife in this condition." Specialists at the larger hospital, to which she was subsequently transported, determined Dalaiah's



brain activity to be acutely subnormal. The unthinkable happened when, a few interminable days later in early January, my wife of 48 years died. In disbelief I stared down at her still form. In my shock and grief I couldn't help marveling that even after her last breath had been drawn, her body language was still communicating something to me. After a long, painful struggle, she now communicated . . . peace.

As with my unanswered questions for Grandpa Hill and then Dalaiah, I was left with more unanswered questions. This time, for my heavenly Father. Though I understand why there is pain in the world (as we are embroiled in the great controversy between good and evil), I had other questions. Of course I had the Bible in which to search for answers. But I desperately wanted to hear *God's* voice speaking directly to *me*. Yet I heard only silence. Looking back now through the tears and the months that followed, I can dimly see that God has been personalizing my experiences to fit my *needs*, rather than my expectations. Sometimes, though, I nearly suffocate under an unbearable and unrelenting load: financial stressors, emotional roller coaster rides, physical weakness, spiritual valleys, trials, and temptations. I struggle with the loss of Dalaiah's faithful companionship and even her body language. Most of all, I struggle with the pain of living in an empty house, because the heart of my home, with its light and warmth, is gone.

At the same time, I find myself living under a covering of peace. Inexplicable peace. The peace that Jesus promised His followers in John 14:27: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you" (KJV). As one commentator put it: "Peace stands for everything good. Peace stands for reconciliation and love; the peace [Jesus] bequeathed is peace with God.

PHOTO: DRAGANA991 / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS / GETTY IMAGES

More than anything, Jesus wanted us to know that even when we feel lonely, we never truly are alone.

Peace within ourselves . . . "[2] The purpose of this peace, Jesus continued in that same verse, is to keep our hearts from being troubled or fearful. Or too lonely—at least for those in situations similar to mine. For Jesus promised not only to reveal Himself to us (verse 21) but also to make our empty, broken, lonely hearts His very own home (verse 23)! More than anything, Jesus wanted us to know that even when we *feel* lonely, we never truly *are* alone.

WHEN THERE JUST AREN'T WORDS . . .

Perhaps you too have experienced chapters in your life during which grief, loneliness, confusion, and perplexity buffet both soul and faith. Those times you don't understand why God is being silent in response to your questions, prayers, and pleas for relief and understanding. Yet through my own season of loss, God has shown me something. It's related to my lifelong love of nature. Think about this: If Jesus could create reptiles, mammals, fish, foul, and even insect colonies to communicate—through their body language—His love for us, why could not our Creator also communicate His love for us through His *own* body language?

And He has! See it for yourself: In the Garden of Gethsemane, as He pleads with the Father to be a perfect sacrifice for us, sweating, as it were, great drops of blood. Witness His body language throughout the kangaroo-court interrogations and beatings in the judgment hall, for "by His stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). Observe His struggle to remain upright along the Via Dolorosa—lined with desertion, derision, and abandonment. Yes, observe that long way so filled with sorrow, humiliation, and suffering. Resist the temptation to turn your gaze from His naked body roughly stretched out on a cruel Roman cross. Through all of this, Jesus was silent. In the words of that old Black spiritual: "They crucified my Lord, but He never said a mumblin' word." No words—just body language. Body language as He, too, experienced silence: the silence of His Father. Contemplate now His body language on the cross as He bears your sins and mine. With a repentant, broken heart, view His lifeless body in the tomb. Then at last, watch God's Son, in a blaze of glory, emerge from the grave, leaving it empty. Body language that reveals the gospel in its entirety. Body language that assures us of healing throughout eternity. When you can't hear His voice, look at His body language, and trust that healing is possible.

We need healing from wars, genocides, cultural clashes, disease, famines, atrocities, and endless geographic displacements of large people groups! We need healing—you and I—from slavery to sin, addiction, prejudice, abuse, bitterness, broken homes. Some of us need healing from Satan's lie that our grievous sins that put Jesus on the cross can never be forgiven. Friend, I am here to tell you: We *can* be forgiven. We *can* be healed. We *can* experience what Dalaiah's body language said to me: peace. Peace, no matter our current needs, losses, and brokenness. Right now, when we can't hear His voice—as I could not hear the voices of Grandpa Hill or Dalaiah—we can still experience our deepest and most fulfilling peace. All because of His body language.

Someday soon we will look into the heavens as Jesus descends on a cloud to gather home His lonely, grieving children. Not only will we see Him face to face, but we will also unmistakenly hear His exultant shouts of triumph as He reunites us with our loved ones: "Well done, good and faithful servant. . . . Enter into the joy of your Lord" (Matt. 25:21).

But until then, when there just aren't words, Jesus speaks to us in ways only the trusting and redeemed can hear and understand. For the indwelling and risen Savior ever speaks unfathomable and healing love through His precious body language.

[1] Body language is "gestures, unconscious bodily movements, facial expressions, etc., which serve as nonverbal communication or as accompaniments to speech." www.collinsdictionary.com, accessed Feb. 4, 2025.

[2] Matthew Henry, *The New Matthew Henry Commentary*, ed. Martin H. Manser (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2010), p. 1824.

Curtis J. Wright is retired after 43 years of Seventh-day Adventist educational and pastoral ministry in California and Pacific Northwest conferences, and now resides in Twentynine Palms, California. **Carolyn Sutton**, a retired teacher, missionary, and a former editor of both *Guide* and the Women's Ministries devotional books, is living in northwest Georgia.

Sherry and Gary

are ready to retire next year.

They need some advice on tax implications and ways to navigate this next stage in life. They are prepared to get more involved at church but want to ensure their bills are taken care of before they retire and give a significant donation to the children's programs.

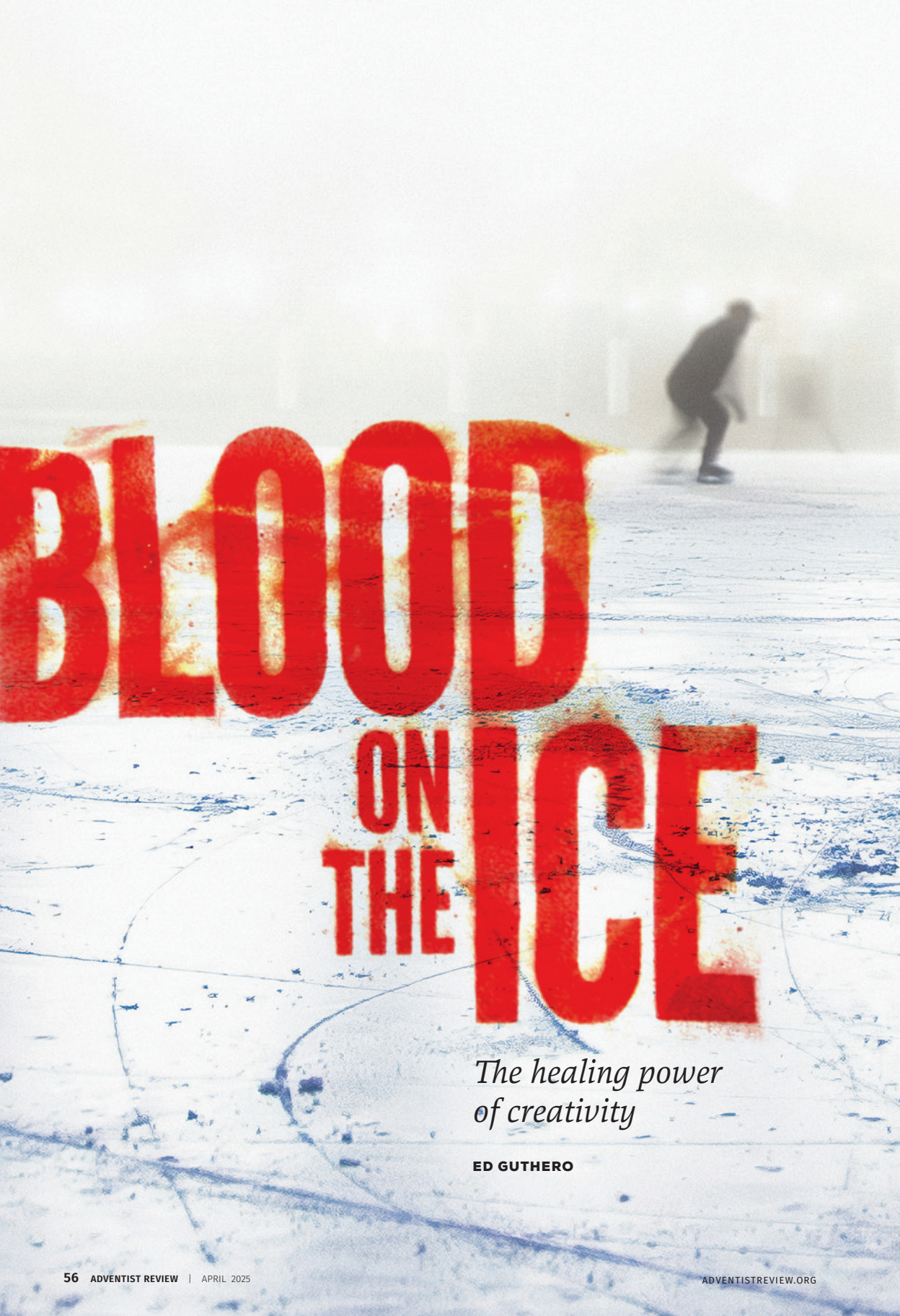
To learn more about Sherry and Gary's next steps—scan the QR code or visit **willplan.org/SherryandGary**



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BLOOD ON THE ICE

The healing power of creativity

ED GUTHERO

I don't remember a time I didn't want to be an artist. As a kid I was constantly drawing. It was part of my identity, and I never really considered doing anything else for a living.

Of course, later, when you decide to seriously pursue art as a career, you realize other people also do art and are very talented. The creative business is highly competitive and demanding. Making this point, my graphic design hero, the late Milton Glaser, authored an excellent book called *Art Is Work*.

To do any art for a living takes focus, commitment, and obsession. I mean obsession in a good way, but obsession nonetheless. You can't fake it or do the minimum in the art business. This goes for all creative fields at a professional level. As it's been said many times: "If it were easy, everybody would be doing it." It also means *being ready* when opportunity knocks. To me, creativity has always been a beloved obsession, a gift, an adventure, and a way of life—the only life I have ever known.

My dad initially sparked my interest when he would draw cartoons and entertain my sister and me with his stylized sketches. Though he never worked as an artist, his doodles, amusing little drawings, and imagination had a big impact on me. I learned early that art was an outlet and that it was fun.

To my young mind, art was a way to communicate—getting what's in your head onto paper. My childhood drawings often involved people, pop culture, history, or animals, but rarely scenery. There was always a storytelling aspect, and there were no hard-and-fast rules. Although I've always been somewhat quiet and shy, I could retreat into creativity and gain confidence. That has been a constant on my journey.

I also realized early that if people liked what you drew, you could be rewarded for doing something you enjoyed. Kellogg's cereal company in Canada had a national "Draw the Package" contest, so I drew Tony the Tiger and won an electric racing car set. A Manitoba gas company held a coloring book contest, and I won a stylish metallic green bicycle with chrome fenders and whitewall tires on the set of an Old Dutch Foods television show.

At age 5 I entered the big Shrine Circus poster contest, which annually featured a TV Western star personality as the special guest. That year *The Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp,* starring Hugh O'Brian, was a popular television series. I dreamed up a scene of Earp on horseback being chased by Comanche warriors. It won the city primary division, and I found myself having dinner in a classy uptown restaurant with O'Brian and three other division winners.



COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

That afternoon we appeared on stage at Winnipeg's landmark Hudson's Bay department store in front of a big crowd. Wyatt Earp presented me with a complete marshal outfit: black flat-brimmed cowboy hat, black jacket, gray pinstripe pants, and holstered, white-handled six-shooters (the cap variety). The next day the Winnipeg *Tribune* featured a photo of a tall, smiling O'Brian standing behind me, his hands on my shoulders, as I struggled not to drop the big, red-ribboned box containing the cowboy clothes.

I tell those childhood stories to show how integral art has been in my life. As a shy kid, it was a ticket to identity, and I was always drawing. Hours would pass, but I'd hardly notice. It was so enjoyable, and to everyone else, that's who I was—the kid who draws.

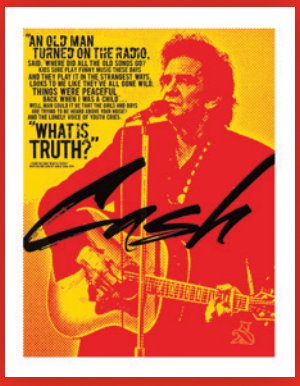
Putting the observations, feelings, and stories that passed through my mind onto paper or film wasn't a casual choice—it just had to be done. This has remained a need in my adult life.

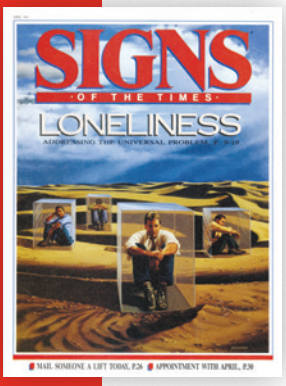
Fortunately, I have been able to make my living, covering decades, entirely from creative art: graphic design, illustration, photography, conceptual design, art direction, idea generation, magazine design, visual identities, teaching at the university level, and writing. Primarily, as an art director and creative director in advertising and publishing, I've been blessed to work in the creative realm. It's all based on sketch-





Ed's work spans religious publication art direction/design, music, corporate communications, and American West photography.







ing and drawing: getting thoughts out of your head and onto paper, telling stories, communicating ideas—those treasured right-brain functions. In recent years that all was soon hanging by a literal thread in the balance—not to mention life itself.

A DULL, PULVERIZING SENSATION

Not too long ago (it seems like yesterday yet still surreal) I felt a sickening thud as my head smashed full force against rock-solid ice in a freak public skating accident. Blood dripped everywhere, yet I didn't pass out. I skated off the ice, got towels and ice cubes from the alarmed rink workers, and headed for the bathroom to stop the bleeding. But I had been taking a blood thinner and couldn't stop the profuse flow. When I peered into the mirror, it looked like someone had shot me in the face. Horrified, the rink attendant called an ambulance.

He didn't know at the time that his decision to call 9-1-1 and the paramedics' quick diagnosis to alert neurosurgeons would save my life. What had been a two-week Western summer vacation trip had taken a dark turn.

Preoccupied with stopping the external bleeding, I didn't realize a massive blood clot was quickly forming inside my brain. Thinned blood was flowing into the organ at such a pressured rate that it was pushing my brain off-center.

As I paced around the arena bathroom in my bloodstained skates, my mind was locked in a compressed freeze-frame mode when the paramedics arrived. Alerted to the blood thinner, they feared the worst and insisted I go with them immediately.

Within minutes I was in an ambulance en route to Boise's St.

IMAGES COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR



Am I right with God? I had less than 40 seconds to pray silently before the neurosurgeon resumed. Then the lights went out.

Alphonsus Regional Medical Center. Everything was happening so fast. Strapped to a gurney, I was rolled through the emergency room doors, where neurosurgeons were ready for action.

Images flashed through my mind: large drops of blood splashing on crisp white ice—usually a treasured surface, now cruel as solid concrete. A dull, pulverizing sensation echoed through my head, unlike anything I had ever felt. It was strangely quiet, except for the murmuring of voices and the gurney's wheels on the tiled floor. Reality was sinking in.

After a brain scan, a few words pierced the silence: "You have a large blood clot on your brain. It's life-threatening. We have to operate right now." I couldn't see the lead neurosurgeon's face, but his tone left no doubt. I was on the edge and could die in the operating room. He paused, allowing me a quick silent prayer. Then everything faded into two hours of intricate neurosurgery.

Dr. Thomas Manning, who'd saved lives in chaotic Afghan war zones, was calm and ready. I'm so thankful he was on call that afternoon.

When death comes knocking, things happen unbelievably fast. Time freezes and speeds like a countdown clock simultaneously. You're a captive audience to your own fate.

REALITY SNAPS INTO FOCUS

Facing death felt like being at an airport as a trip ends. You want to stay longer, but the plane is soon to leave. Is that all there is? You wish certain decisions in life had been different, but there's no time left. Am I right with God? I had less than 40 seconds to pray silently before the neurosurgeon resumed. Then the lights went out.

What does one say to their Creator in 40 seconds? Many people debate salvation in terms of faith and works, but what do you do when the time actually comes? Self-righteous posturing fades in the face of stark reality. I could not save myself that afternoon in the emergency room, and I cannot save myself for future existence when this journey ends. Life is a gift.

Ephesians 2:8, 9 tells us, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (NIV).

Sometimes, when I hear someone heralding salvation by their merits, I want to ask, "How have you done today? Are you perfect yet?"

The gifts of life, grace, the cross, and the resurrection are not a checklist to earn salvation. We follow Christ in gratitude for the gift of grace. That's where peace of mind and assurance lie.

RECOVERY AND REDISCOVERY

As if awakening from a strange dream, I remember the neurosurgeon saying, "I got the clot." His words trailed off as I found myself in the intensive-care ward, complete with tubes and monitoring. Critical but stable, I faced five months of recovery, including 72 rehab sessions and a half dozen therapists and doctors.

The immediate visual impact was unsettling, but being alive brought acute awareness, gratitude, and value to living in the moment. My head was shaved on the right side, where surgeons had removed and replaced part of my skull to access the clot. A horseshoe-shaped incision and staples accentuated the scene. On the left side my shoulder-length hair remained untouched, a testimony to the ER team's urgency.

The kindness, financial support, and encouragement of family, friends, students, and former teammates played a huge role in my recovery. A close friend brought a sketch pad to the hospital, and another brought a magazine featuring bluesman B. B. King on the cover, inspiring me to sketch. Propped up in the hospital bed, I tried drawing, but couldn't. Troubled, I set the sketchbook aside.





The healing benefits of creativity in art and music have played a key role in Ed's journey since his accident, culminating in the release of his new songwriting album.

Therapists kept me busy with tests and tasks, revealing that I couldn't subtract numbers, had trouble walking, and struggled with balance. My sight reflexes were a third of normal. Vocal seizures garbled my words into slow, distorted sounds.

"From playing years of hockey, I know how to train," I told my therapist. "Tell me what I need to do." She encouraged me by telling me that brain neuropathy could be retrained and new pathways formed. I was determined to recover. Yet the failed B. B. King drawing lingered in my mind. What if I couldn't draw again? It was all I'd ever done. I set the sketchbook aside for weeks.

Eventually I confronted the fear. Alone at a picnic table with a sketchbook and the B. B. King magazine, I prayed. I had never been more nervous about drawing. Slowly King began to emerge on the page. It was working! The ability was still there, though it took more focus. A tremendous sense of relief swept over me.

Consistent drawing became vital to rehab, along with sessions of puzzles, speech tests, and life skills. On the hospital's top floor a reconstructed street helped us relearn such tasks as navigating curbs, counting money, etc. Gradually I improved. With the correct medication adjustments, the seizures stopped. I was grateful to God for life and paced myself, rediscovering joy in the moment. Coming right to the edge puts things in perspective.

I also worried about losing the ability to play the guitar. Borrowing one, I found the same struggle as with drawing, but eventually regained confidence. Recovering a song I had written, recorded, and played consistently for years took intense focus and almost an hour. Determined, I wrote down lyrics and chords to every song I could remember, not quitting until they were recovered.

CREATIVITY AS HEALING

God's gifts of grace and creativity became a lifeline. Alyssa Bonagura, a musician friend, told me, "Creativity is God's gift of healing. If I don't feel well or am down, I still 'show up,' and I always feel better." Those words stayed with me.

Later I was invited to speak on graphic design and faith at the *Inspire* conference in California. Nervous but prepared with visual aids, I included her quote: "Creativity is God's gift of healing." The presentation went well, and it was invigorating to be among Christian creatives.

Today I hold on to that mantra. Creativity is a priceless gift, not just for career artists but as a balancing factor in anyone's life. In a pressure-packed, highly technical world, the arts play a vital role in health and healing. Milton Glaser said, "If you like Mozart and I like Mozart, we have something in common. If we have something in common, we're less likely to kill one another."* Yet when budget concerns hit educational facilities, for example, too often the budgets of music and art programs are the first to be cut.

Compelling research on how the arts are essential in daily life has shown their cutting-edge therapeutic benefits, such as reducing stress and extending lifespans, regardless of skill level.

Creativity takes many forms—visual, audio, written word—and appreciating those expressions is essential. For this traveler, I treasure two words in particular: grace and creativity. Both are priceless for healing.

* https://youtu.be/9gePud1wt8g?si=ibqsWMpiG7_-x-jo&t=1110

Ed Guthero has built a critically acclaimed career as a nationally recognized, multi-award-winning art director, book and periodical designer, artist, and photographer. His legacy is enhanced by years spent as a university lecturer and associate professor. He writes from Boise, Idaho.

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

LOOK UP

AI can't, but Jesus can!

Daniel 12:4 says at the end of time, "Knowledge shall increase." While this is primarily speaking of an increase in knowledge concerning Bible prophecy, advances in the world of AI also seem to fit the fulfillment of these prophetic words. Daily, AI is used to generate more than 34 million images and power self-driving cars. Software platforms such as Turnitin estimate that 22 million papers a year are submitted by high school and college students using AI-generated content.[1] This technology assists doctors by analyzing medical scans, patient data, and even genetic information, detecting in seconds subtle anomalies that would otherwise be missed, and saving lives. It's truly amazing, but there are things that AI can never do.

In Jerusalem many years ago, long before AI was a thing, a woman was caught in the act of adultery and dumped at the feet of Jesus by religious leaders who cared nothing for her. They had hoped to use this woman to trap Jesus because they wanted a reason to destroy Him. But Jesus saw through their plot, and He masterfully disarmed His would-be attackers and her condemners so decidedly that the Bible says that they all dropped their stones and left. Amazing.

Then John 8:11 says, "And Jesus said to her, 'Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.' " This was the gospel in 10 powerful words. "Neither do I condemn you." That's justification; Jesus completely pardoned her! What hope these words must've brought to her heart! Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now *no* condemnation to those who are *in Christ Jesus*, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." Like the Japanese art of Kintsugi, in which the artist gathers the shards of a broken jar and mixes together a special lacquer of gold to stick the pieces together, so, too, God picks up the broken pieces of our lives, applying to them the gold of His grace. Jesus didn't condemn this woman, because He knew that soon He would be condemned for her and for us on the cross. He could forgive her because He would pay the penalty for her sin Himself.

But that wasn't all the good news Jesus had for her! He also said, "Go," a command, "and sin no more." That's sanctification. His grace comes first, and that grace empowers obedience. This is why Jesus promised her His power for the present. The book *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* puts it like this: "God's forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness *for* sin, but reclaiming *from* sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart."[2]

AI can do a lot, but only Jesus can transform your heart and life. To all who receive Him as their personal Lord and Savior, Jesus speaks the same words: "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." Have you allowed God's grace to transform your life? Look up in faith to Christ, and you can—right now.

THINK AGAIN
CHARISSA TOROSSIAN



HE COULD FORGIVE HER BECAUSE HE WOULD PAY THE PENALTY FOR HER SIN HIMSELF.

[1] https://www.morningbrew.com/stories/students-wrote-22-million-papers-with-ai

[2] Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), p. 114.

A teaching graduate from Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia, **Charissa Torossian** is passionate about presenting on the Bible and its relevance for our time.





BEN HERSHEY

HENRY

KEVIN WILKINSON

Yep, that's his real name. Nothing in this story was changed to protect the innocent. Besides, Henry was not innocent.

He was one of the "frequent fliers" at our police department. That's cop jargon for someone who has to be dealt with over and over.

I arrested Henry many times. He was usually intoxicated and sometimes mean. The last time I arrested him he was lying on a sidewalk . . . drunk . . . in the middle of the day. He had arrest warrants.

On the way to jail Henry went into mean mode. He screamed profanities at me, ridiculed me, and threatened to kill me and my family. I gladly turned him over to the deputies at the booking desk.

Soon after that, I was appointed chief of police in a smaller city about a half hour away. I was excited to be in my new role, and happy to be away from Henry.

Or so I thought.

THE IMPRESSION

A few months later one of our patrol officers reported that Henry had just moved to town with Kenny, another chronic alcoholic who had once shot and killed a man in a bar fight. Their arrival and misdeeds came to the police department's attention almost immediately. I was, to borrow a biblical expression, "sore displeased."

My role as police chief came with many blessings, though. One of those was being invited to speak to a Christian youth group about alcohol and drugs. I eagerly accepted the invitation.

As I was preparing my message, I felt a strong and very uncomfortable impression. I told my wife I felt God was



Henry taught one very reluctant police chief to trust God's call—even when it seems ridiculous.

calling me to broaden my presentation and to have Henry and Kenny assist me. As I said it aloud it sounded ridiculous.

I was convinced it was a bad idea, but the impression was strong. I prayed about it, hoping I was misinterpreting some divine signal. But the prompting didn't subside.

I decided I would leave for the church a half hour early and stop by Henry and Kenny's place. They probably would not be home. If they were home, they would surely be inebriated. And they certainly would want nothing to do with helping the police chief talk to teens about alcohol and drugs. I figured that with a little luck I'd be arriving at the church alone.

Luck, though, has no role in God's will.

Henry and Kenny were home. They weren't drunk, although they did have alcohol on their breath. Oh, boy. I couldn't believe what I was doing. "You guys want to make 20 bucks?" I asked.

They were every bit as uncomfortable as I was—wary of the man at their door in a police uniform asking for help. But they said yes.

THE IMPACT

We rode together in my unmarked squad car somewhat awkwardly—they asking dozens of questions, and I trying to gain assurances that this wasn't going to get out of hand.

I was welcomed as the speaker, and I introduced Henry and Kenny as my helpers. I did not sugarcoat my affiliation with the pair, even describing my last arrest of Henry. He had no memory of it. Then, still fearing the outcome, I asked them, "Would you say alcohol has had a negative effect on your lives?"

Henry reached for the microphone I had been controlling. I yielded to God and let it go. Henry bowed his head as if in prayer. He spoke slowly in a voice coarsened by years of self-abuse. "I'm a chronic alcoholic. The doctor says if I don't stop drinking I'll be dead in a year." He paused. "And I can't stop."

The room, full of boisterous teens and preteens, went dead silent. Every eye was on Henry. He went on to tell them of the horrible experiences he had had because of his affair with alcohol. He told of passing out under picnic tables in parks and waking up to find his clothes frozen to the ground. He'd been abandoned by friends; a girlfriend died of an overdose. He spoke of losing control of his bowels and how people wouldn't come near him because of his awful stench. He held nothing back.

When it was Kenny's turn, he told of the deadly altercation he had been involved in. With insight and clarity he told his listeners that no part of that awful night would ever have occurred if not for alcohol. He had so many regrets. Henry and Kenny both begged, genuinely, for the young people never to start down alcohol's path. Their raw message was: "Don't be us."

I can't count the number of presentations and articles I have delivered on the topic of temperance. But I never impacted an audience with the surgical effectiveness that those two precious scoundrels achieved.

They earned their $20. They may have spent it on beer—I don't know. But they taught some young people important, gritty lessons about the consequences of life choices. And Henry taught one very reluctant police chief to trust God's call—even when it seems ridiculous.

Kevin Wilkinson is a retired police chief who writes from Wisconsin and wherever volunteer opportunities beckon.

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FORGIVEN PHOTOGRAPHY

BUT THEY HAD BEEN WITH JESUS

Ordinary men, extraordinary power

JUDITH GILLIS

Now when they saw the boldness and unfettered eloquence of Peter and John and perceived that they were unlearned and untrained in the schools [common men with no educational advantages], they marveled; and they recognized that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13, AMPC).*

Here they were, Peter and John, ordinary men filled with the Holy Ghost, telling the learned religious establishment of the day that not only was Jesus risen from the dead, but a man crippled from birth had just been miraculously healed by the power of His name. As if that weren't enough, Peter tops off their defense by telling these Pharisees and Sadducees that Jesus is the Messiah and Savior of the whole world, including them. Bold words indeed, considering that the men to whom they were speaking had the power to stone them to death or turn them over to the Romans to be crucified as disturbers of the peace.

Bold words, bold deeds, bold men empowered by the Holy Spirit who knew their lives had been changed and gloriously transformed by the Holy Spirit of the risen Christ. These were ordinary people, nobodies really, in the sight of the world, but they had been with Jesus, and their Spirit-filled words and actions turned the world upside down.

In our politically correct, anything goes, feel-good philosophy of modern life, this same Holy Spirit will embolden us to go speak good news to a lost world. Our message is the same one preached by Peter and John and believers all over the world. Jesus is risen, Jesus loves them, and He wants to give them a life worth living. All it takes is ordinary folks living ordinary lives, who have been with Jesus.

"And He said to them, Go into all the world and preach and publish openly the good news (the Gospel) to every creature [of the whole human race]. . . . And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord kept working with them and confirming the message by the attesting signs and miracles that closely accompanied [it]. Amen (so be it)" (Mark 16:15-20, AMPC).

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Judith Gillis is retired and writes from Kernersville, North Carolina, where she is an enthusiastic member of the Kernersville Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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ZENO L. CHARLES-MARCEL PETER N. LANDLESS

IT TAKES GUTS

. . . to have good health!

Q: I've developed a queasy, finicky digestive system and think this is affecting my overall health. Is it because of bacteria in my intestines? What can I do?

A: Living with a queasy gut can be challenging. The digestive system is a serious contender for the body system that causes the most day-to-day discomfort, influencing everything from immunity to mental health. If you suspect your digestive issues are affecting your overall health, you are likely correct. But the words "queasy" and "finicky" can mean different things, so it is important to consult with your doctor to uncover any underlying medical conditions.

The human digestive tract, the largest immune organ in humans, is home to a complex ecosystem of bacteria, yeasts, and other microbes known as the gut microbiome. When balanced, this microbiome supports digestion, strengthens the immune system, and even regulates mood. The gut and brain communicate extensively, so anxiety, sleep quality, and physical activity can all impact digestion. Chronic stress alters gut bacterial balance, increasing the risk of digestive distress; relaxation helps restore balance. A consistent sleep schedule maintains microbial equilibrium, whereas sleep deprivation can disrupt gut function. Regular moderate exercise supports a healthy microbiome, but excessive strenuous activity can increase gut permeability and discomfort.

Obviously diet plays a crucial role in gut health. A diverse, whole-food, plant-based diet free from unhealthy additives fosters a balanced microbiome. Fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains support good digestion and regulate bowel movements, though some individuals may experience discomfort when combining certain fruits and vegetables. Paying attention to your body's response can help identify any dietary triggers. If bloating is a concern, a low-FODMAP diet—one that limits certain fermentable foods—might offer relief.

Beyond general nutrition, probiotics and prebiotics support gut health. Probiotic-rich foods, such as yogurt, kefir, and lactic-acid fermented vegetables, introduce beneficial bacteria to the gut. Prebiotics, found in onions, garlic, bananas, flaxseeds, and asparagus, nourish the good bacteria, helping them flourish. Herbal teas such as ginger, peppermint, and chamomile can soothe digestion, while overuse of antibiotics may disrupt the delicate balance of gut microbes, leading to yeast overgrowth. Additionally, some pain medications (NSAIDs) and anti-heartburn drugs can alter stomach acid levels, contributing to digestive distress. Environmental factors, including pesticides and pollutants, may also negatively impact gut bacteria.

There is a common saying: "Good health starts in the mouth." Proper oral care ensures adequate mastication, which is essential for effective digestion. The digestive system, designed by God, processes ingested materials by extracting essential nutrients, breaking them down with the help of microbes, and eliminating waste. This intricate system plays a fundamental role in overall well-being.

To keep the digestive system functioning optimally, it is essential to manage stress, prioritize sleep, engage in regular physical activity, and maintain a wholesome diet. Avoiding the overuse of medications, reducing exposure to environmental toxins, and incorporating probiotic and prebiotic foods can further enhance gut health.

A well-functioning gut is essential for optimal health. By making healthy lifestyle choices and honoring the intricacies of God's design, we can promote digestive well-being and overall vitality.

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



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TONY LITVYAK

ADVENTIST REVIEW MAGAZINE

History Repeats Itself

After 11 issues of *The Present Truth* and five issues of *The Advent Review* in 1849 and 1850, James White created a new publication containing the best of both. The new journal, *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, eventually became what we know today as *Adventist Review*.

History will now repeat itself in August 2025. The almost 20-year-old *Adventist World* international magazine and the 175-year-old *Adventist Review* will come together as one brand continuing the best of both publications under one title. What should you expect?

One Magazine for the World Church. Adventism is a worldwide movement, and our magazine will reflect that mission. The new format will make it easier to share, print, and distribute globally—delivering inspiring, Christ-centered content across cultures and continents.

Concise and Curated With More Clarity and Less Clutter. Quality over quantity! Each issue will deliver the same great Bible-based features and news stories in a format that respects time. We're streamlining the magazine for a sharper, more focused reading experience.

Refined for Revival. We're simplifying the magazine to bring the most inspiring Christ-centered content to revive and inspire Seventh-day Adventists to become more focused on purpose, mission, and passion for Jesus. Less distraction, more devotion.

Echoing the Legacy of the Printed Word. Since the days of the early Adventist presses, the mission has been to share truth in the most impactful way. We embrace that mission by creating a magazine that is more concise, utilizes more digital platforms, and ensures each page is filled with Christ-centered, Bible-based, and absolutely Adventist content.

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Reaching the World One Page and Screen at a Time. The Advent message is for all nations, and we seek to make it even more accessible. This magazine evolves—more global and different formats—to adapt to Adventists on every continent. Designed for an international movement, we hope the new format will travel further and inspire deeper.

Inspired by the Past, Focused on the Future. James White's first Adventist paper, The Present Truth, was small but powerful. We hope to follow that tradition, signified by a new logo that is inspired by the past to push the message of Jesus' return in the soon future.

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counseled and guided me through the process. I have learned a lot. Throughout this process I have clearly seen God leading so that I can say with certainty that this is *His* dental clinic, not *mine*. God opened doors when He saw it best, helping the project to move forward, even when I felt helpless and "in over my head." He connected me with donors and expert advisors to make the dental clinic a reality. The fact that the building and dental equipment are here now, in Malamulo, installed and ready for use, is a huge testament to God's power at work in answer to prayers.

My prayer is that this new dental clinic can be a center of dental excellence, challenging the status quo for oral health care in Malawi. Access to quality dental care is limited, with lack of oral health education being a huge barrier as well. This year will see the very first graduating class of Malawian dental students at the government dental school. Change is on the horizon, but it will take some time. These young graduates have the potential to really improve dental care in Malawi, but they still need mentorship, jobs, and improved access to resources.

Missionary dentists are still needed today.

MORE WORK YET

My husband, Brent, is a general surgeon and likes to operate, fixing problems requiring surgery. In September 2023 he also assumed the role of program director for a surgical training program for African doctors called Pan-African Academy of Christian Surgeons (PAACS). It is a five-year program that combines a Christian-based curriculum with surgical training for African medical doctors seeking specialist training. He has somehow balanced all the demands of teaching nine surgical residents and caring for surgical patients, and, up until recently, doing it as the only general surgeon at Malamulo. Although it has been an incredibly challenging time for him and our family, his passion to train these surgical residents to think bigger than themselves, to push themselves to learn new skills, and to trust in God has kept him going. To be able to train, guide, and equip African doctors to become not just general surgeons but *Christian* general surgeons who make sharing Christ with their patients a priority is thoroughly rewarding.

Reflecting on what God has done for us in the past and knowing that He is our ever-present guide, we confidently move forward with each task given to us.

Missionary surgeons are still needed today.

Dentists and surgeons, medical doctors and nurses, are most definitely needed. For any of us to be able to do our medical work, however, functioning equipment, working buildings, dependable vehicles, teachers for training the next generation, hospital administrators, and many other roles are also needed. Plumbers, mechanics, engineers, teachers, accountants, electricians, construction experts, and administrators are all viable missionary positions. Even long-distance advisors and short-term repairers and trainers have their place. *You* are needed for mission.

In our time here at Malamulo, God has gently been working in our hearts and refining our characters. We may not always feel qualified for what He asks of us, but we know that God has called us to Malamulo. Reflecting on what God has done for us in the past and knowing that He is our ever-present guide, we confidently move forward with each task given to us.

Please consider how God can use *you* for His honor and glory. Let's not put limits on what God can do through each of us when we allow Him to work in our hearts!

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



LAURA SHERWIN

WANTED: MISSIONARIES

You are looking big these days!"

The cashier meant it as a compliment, but I was speechless for a moment. Taking a moment to phrase my response, I smiled and said something about how I had been eating some really good food recently. The woman laughed and handed me my bag of purchased items.

Being a missionary here at Malamulo Adventist Hospital is certainly not boring. I think part of the unpredictability and excitement is from living in a different culture. After more than three years of being here, my husband and I have figured out some aspects of life in Malawi. Being called fat, for one, is generally considered complimentary. It represents wealth, which is what a lot of people desire. But we also realize that other cultural nuances are complex.

LET'S NOT PUT LIMITS ON WHAT GOD CAN DO THROUGH EACH OF US WHEN WE ALLOW HIM TO WORK IN OUR HEARTS!

BEING CHALLENGED

Cross-cultural work is not easy. It challenges me and my husband to the core. Misunderstandings and frustrations occur. Moments of self-doubt are more frequent than I would like to admit.

Reflecting back to the time before we came, I think we had pretty realistic expectations of what life in Malawi would be like. We had prayed about moving overseas as medical missionaries for more than 12 years. We had visited Malamulo and had talked to those who lived here.

We anticipated that things would be different and that we would have a huge adjustment to make when we arrived. We were right. During the past few years we have adjusted to, and accepted, our new normal: power is unstable; water is unreliable; people frequently come to our gate asking for work, money, or food; and it is normal, even expected, for people to work for us in our home.



ABRAHAN ECHEVERRIA

With the passing of time, we have taken on a wide variety of responsibilities that seem well beyond our job descriptions of "general dentist" and "general surgeon." As most missionaries can attest, our respective positions at the hospital and other initiatives we have started provide us "many hats" to wear.

As a general dentist, I had no experience building a new dental office prior to coming to Malawi. Yet in the first few months here I was assigned an informal advisory position that strongly influences the construction of a new dental clinic here. While I was excited about the new dental clinic, being the dental advisor for such a project, especially in a country foreign to me, was overwhelming! But God has provided individuals who have

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The only place in the United States to view the oldest complete alphabetic sentence ever found is at Southern Adventist University!

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THE IVORY COMB





Discovered by archaeologists from Southern Adventist University and Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the ivory comb dating to 1700 BC is temporarily on display at the Lynn H. Wood Archaeological Museum on Southern's Tennessee campus. The rare object features the oldest deciphered complete alphabetic sentence that has been uncovered to date:

"May this ivory (tusk) root out the lice of the hair and the beard."

Featured by *The New York Times, Smithsonian,* CNN, and BBC, the small comb featured within Southern's "Lice and Literacy" exhibit will be the only viewing in the United States of the linguistically significant artifact, courtesy of Israel Antiquities Authority and The Israel Museum.

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